

## **REVOLT OF THE DISDAINED: AMERICA'S 2016 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The 2016 presidential election hinged on the return of overlooked or marginalised middle-class and working-class Democrats and independents – some of whom had earlier supported Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan – to reinvigorate traditional patriotism and help form a new ‘populist-conservative fusion in rural and industrial areas’ within the Republican party. Donald Trump’s political fortunes rest to a considerable degree on his ability to secure broad public support while maintaining the loyalty of his original coalition of the disdained.*

Most Americans live in ‘flyover country’. This is not a pejorative phrase – though usually meant ironically – but it expresses several things at once: the country’s vast interior landscape, its unfamiliarity to many who reside on the coasts, its own residents’ remoteness from the major centers of commerce and politics, and perhaps a sense of resignation at being overlooked, ignored, or taken for granted.

Places in the upper Midwest manufacturing belt, such as Detroit, Gary, and Youngstown, were once hives of industrial activity – automobile assembly, aircraft parts, steel production – that were pressed into additional service in the lead-up to and during the Second World War as essential parts of Franklin Roosevelt’s ‘arsenal of democracy’. Yet by the 1960s these cities and many other industrial towns were falling on hard times and by the early the 1980s the term ‘Rust Belt’ entered the vernacular as these places descended into precipitous demographic decline and industrial decay.

## I THE GREAT DISRUPTION

In *The Great Disruption*, Francis Fukuyama summarised what had by then become an international problem:

People associate the information age with the advent of the Internet in the 1990s, but the shift away from the Industrial era started more than a generation earlier with the deindustrialization of the Rust Belt in the United States and comparable moves away from manufacturing in other industrialized countries.<sup>1</sup>

This period ‘from roughly the mid-1960s to the early 1990s’ was marked by ‘seriously deteriorating social conditions’, which included rising crime and social disorder, ‘the decline of kinship as a social institution’, a drop in fertility, and soaring rates of divorce and out-of-wedlock childbearing.

Finally, trust and confidence in institutions went into a deep, forty-year decline. A majority of people in the United States and Europe expressed confidence in their governments and fellow citizens during the late 1950s; only a small minority did so by the early 1990s. The nature of people’s involvement with one another has changed. Although there is no evidence that people associated with each other less, their mutual ties tended to be less permanent, less engaged, and with smaller groups of people.<sup>2</sup>

These conditions continued to deteriorate in many places. Detroit’s population, for example, was 1,849,568 in 1950 when it was the hub of the American automotive industry. By the year 2000 it had declined to 951,270 and then to 672,955 in 2016. Although a political culture of corruption contributed to these woes, the human costs of urban decay were not confined to the industrial heartland. Many other factors have also been at work, including the interdependent decisions made by industrialists and labor unions, a growing web of national entitlement programs, and shifting political priorities.

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The Great Disruption: Human Nature and the Reconstitution of Social Order* (Simon & Schuster, 1999) 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid 4-5. See also Robert D Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Simon & Schuster, 2001).

In 2012 Charles Murray published a study, *Coming Apart*, that pictured the country splitting not so much along racial and ethnic lines but even more along lines of economic and social class:

The American project ... consists of the continuing effort, begun with the founding, to demonstrate that human beings can be left free as individuals and families to live their lives as they see fit, coming together voluntarily to solve their joint problems. The polity based on that idea led to a civic culture that was seen as exceptional by all the world. That culture was so widely shared among Americans that it amounted to a civil religion. To be an American was to be different from other nationalities, in ways that Americans treasured. That culture is unraveling.<sup>3</sup>

This ‘unraveling’ has become a widespread perception. Yet, somehow, conditions may have been ripe in 2016 to inspire greater resistance and perhaps a rededication to the American project through Donald Trump’s appeal to ‘Make America Great Again’.<sup>4</sup> Whatever may account for the results of the presidential election of 2016, it must be measured in terms of largely unforeseen political shifts which, along with strategic miscalculations, led to the greatest electoral upset in living memory.

## II THE GREAT REVOLT

The unexpected outcome of the 2016 presidential election initially sent journalists, pollsters, and political strategists – many in shock – to fall back on stock answers rather than take a hard look at the data. ‘The postmortems from the 2016 campaign painted a simple picture of the coalition that elected Donald Trump – it was economically distressed, uneducated, and angry.’<sup>5</sup> Yet this conclusion diminishes the range of Trump’s appeal, shortchanges his ability to communicate with traditional Democratic audiences, and depreciates the media savvy of both the messenger and his audience. In his announcement speech,

Trump homed in on themes that would animate his seventeen-month campaign: infrastructure spending, immigration reform and a wall on the southern border, protection of Medicare and Social Security benefits, a proactive and ruthless approach to the Islamic State terrorists, an unyielding

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Murray, *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010* (Crown Forum, 2012) 12.

<sup>4</sup> For a fascinating, sympathetic, but unsparing study of the life and career of Donald Trump, see Conrad Black, *Donald J. Trump: A President Like No Other* (Regnery, 2018). The foreword is by Victor David Hanson, a California farmer, military historian, and classics scholar.

<sup>5</sup> Salena Zito and Brad Todd, *The Great Revolt: Inside the Populist Coalition Reshaping American Politics* (Crown Forum, 2018) 19.

support for the Second Amendment gun rights, and a pledge to use the White House's bully pulpit to shame American corporations into on-shoring future manufacturing jobs.<sup>6</sup>

Among those that chose to reexamine and challenge the prevailing electoral models, Salena Zito and Bradley Todd, who wrote *The Great Revolt*, took the further step of developing the Great Revolt Survey, which was then conducted by an opinion research firm 'among a group of 2,000 self-reporting 2016 Trump voters, with 400 each coming from Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Iowa, and Wisconsin.'<sup>7</sup> These five states, along with Florida, had cast their electoral votes for Obama in 2008 and 2012 but switched from Democrat to Republican in 2016. Only the first three states are regarded as part of the Rust Belt – the other two are part of the rural Midwestern farm belt – but all had been suffering economic stagnation and dwindling opportunity.

The Great Revolt Survey, which was conducted in August 2017, asked voters from ten counties in the five states that were surveyed to rank-order four campaign promises made by Donald Trump from the most to the least important. Their priorities were to bring back manufacturing jobs to America (34%), protect Medicare and Social Security (30%), put conservative justices on the US Supreme Court (28%), and build a wall on the border of Mexico (7%). Other findings are also noteworthy: 87% of all those surveyed were optimistic about the future, 85% expressed a preference that the United States make its own decisions on major issues rather than challenge other nations to follow its example, and 86% believed that Trump stands up for the working people against powerful corporate interests.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, the authors identified seven categories or 'archetypes' of voters that are part of the new Trump coalition and profiled three representatives of each through longer interviews. More than two-thirds of the text is devoted to these profiles.<sup>9</sup>

As a result, the book offers a richer, more complex picture than that conveyed through the media, reflecting more sorrow than anger over such changes as 'the twin forces of automation and importation,' but also resonating a sense of empowerment gained by supporting a bold political

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid 11.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid 18.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid 239, 276-82.

<sup>9</sup> The seven archetypes are Red-Blooded and Blue-Collared, Perot-istas (infrequent voters and older first-time registrants), Rough Rebounders (those who had suffered major setbacks), Girl Gun Power (women who take a

maverick. As a Republican campaign operative put it: ‘The guy has been around construction sites all his life, and he has respected the work those guys did ... The blunt way he talks connected with them.’<sup>10</sup> Said a resident of a township north of Detroit:

“We are tired of these disturbances marginalizing American workers that have scraped out of their hometowns and either scattered away from families or left trying to re-create something that is gone. No one has guided us through this ruthless transition. Trump identified what we already knew.”<sup>11</sup>

If one grievance stands out among these voters in these working-class strongholds it is the loss of voice and a perceived lack of respect for their ways of life. It is an age-old complaint – one that has accompanied earlier outbreaks of populist fervor dating back to the late nineteenth century – but it may have been sufficient to turn the election.<sup>12</sup>

### III COMING APART

A careful scrutiny of the last three general elections – 2008, 2012, and 2016 – supports Murray’s observations about a growing social and economic class divide.<sup>13</sup> As Zito and Todd note: ‘Murray’s thesis from 2012, that the American economy and education system has become a great sorting engine that drives the cultural divide, virtually anticipated the 2016 election returns four years later.’<sup>14</sup> Yet the unexpected electoral outcome should put us on guard against

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strong self-defense position), Rotary Reliables (civic leaders), King Cyrus Christians (evangelicals and conservative Catholics), and Silent Suburban Moms (quiet about their support for fear of disapproval).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid 210.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid 214. The candidate seemed to embody Marshall McLuhan’s slogan: ‘The medium is the message.’ One gets a sense that he was drafted because of his willingness to publicly acknowledge and address the hard issues, despite a scattershot lack of precision: see Salena Zito, ‘Taking Trump Seriously, Not Literally’, *The Atlantic* (online), September 2016 <<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/09/trump-makes-his-case-in-pittsburgh/501335/>>.

<sup>12</sup> The populist movement consisted of farmers alliances, Grangers, and Greenback supporters who expressed opposition to monopolies and trusts, a demand for free and fair elections, an eight-hour workday, and adoption of the initial and referendum system. The movement was patriotic, supportive of the Constitution, positive in tone, and exhibited much of the spirit of Christian revivalism. Later Progressives are said to have ‘stolen their clothes’: see Norman Pollock (ed), *The Populist Mind* (Bobbs Merrill, 1967).

<sup>13</sup> Detailed electoral maps for each of these elections, including county-level maps, are easily found on-line, eg: <<https://brilliantmaps.com/2016-county-election-map/>>.

<sup>14</sup> Zito and Todd, above n 5, 231.

unwarranted conclusions, especially since the most recent three elections were more personality-driven than is the norm.<sup>15</sup>

This idea of the economy and education as a sorting engine, whether a matter of national priorities or personal lifestyle choices, contributes to a growing sense of political polarisation.<sup>16</sup> The geographer Joel Kotkin underscores the power of this idea by describing the role of Silicon Valley in producing a new-style oligarchy that has not only reshaped California politics but is also doing so in the country at large. In *The New Class Conflict*, Kotkin describes a feudal symbiosis between an Oligarchy of high-tech billionaires and a New Clerisy based in the media, academia, and government which, together, are pursuing a fundamental transformation of America that has left no tradition or institution unscathed.<sup>17</sup> But is this impetus sustainable?

Setting to one side the growing influence of a radical social and cultural agenda, Kotkin singles out as the most critical factor an ideology of sustainable sources of energy that squeezes out economic growth. ‘To “save the planet,”’ Kotkin claims, ‘the Clerisy and most of their tech Oligarch allies seek to limit consumption by eliminating cheaper energy sources in favor of expensive, highly subsidized renewables, or the chance to profit from various mitigation matters. This strategy works well for all partners of the new ruling synergy, although not for the majority,’<sup>18</sup> which includes what he calls the ‘yeomanry’ and the ‘new serfs.’<sup>19</sup>

The rise of Oligarchic politics in both major parties threatens the very viability of the democratic system. It allows specific interests – developers, Wall Street, Silicon Valley, renewable or fossil fuel producers – enormous range to make or break candidates. As the powerful battle, the middle classes increasingly become spectators.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Thus dissatisfaction with political circumstances also tends to be personality-driven, as illustrated by growing disaffection with the Obama Administration. See Bryan Preston, ‘Rasmussen: The Ground Under Obama’s Feet Is Starting to Shift’, *PJ Media* (online), 24 May 2013 <<https://pjmedia.com/blog/rasmussen-the-ground-under-obama-is-starting-to-shift/>>.

<sup>16</sup> See Joel Spring, *The Sorting Machine: National Educational Policy Since 1945* (David McKay, 1976) for an example of the first; and Bill Bishop, *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America Is Tearing Us Apart* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008) for the second.

<sup>17</sup> The idea of a new feudalism was also an early populist theme. See Pollock, above n 12, 17.

<sup>18</sup> Joel Kotkin, *The New Class Conflict* (Telos Press, 2014) 137-38.

<sup>19</sup> See Joel Kotkin, ‘California’s New Feudalism Benefits the Few at the Expense of the Multitude’, *New Geography* (online), 5 October 2013 <<http://www.newgeography.com/content/003973-california-s-new-feudalism-benefits-a-few-expense-multitude>>.

<sup>20</sup> Kotkin, above n 18, 151.

In a section entitled ‘The Culture War Worth Having’, Kotkin contends: ‘The real issue revolves around the future of the American family. The family has long been marked for extinction among political radicals, and its demise is also now widely celebrated by both progressive pundits and some business interests.’<sup>21</sup> Broken families are a leading cause of downward economic mobility. Church affiliation is also trending downward, especially among the working classes. Yet ‘the current fashions in urbanism not only disdain religiosity but often give short shrift to issues involving families.’<sup>22</sup>

Zito and Todd make a similar observation about the change of tone between Bill Clinton’s successful presidential campaign in 1992 and Hillary Clinton’s failed campaign in 2016:

Within a generation, the religiosity that was once honored by both parties became mocked by one as merely a basis of bigotry. Angst about financial insecurity was derided by coastal elites in both parties as the last wheezing of an outmoded appendage on the global economic animal. Even in the wake of their decisive role in the elections, Rust Belt voters watched on cable television as the Left and journalists pigeonholed their rebellion as an ugly bout of white nationalism, doubling down on all the elitist snobbery those voters sought to rebuke.<sup>23</sup>

It is very revealing to contrast the ‘home style’ the two spouses displayed on the campaign trail.<sup>24</sup> One had been elected governor of Arkansas several times. The other had won a Senate seat in New York in 2000 and was subsequently reelected. When Bill Clinton ran for president, he identified himself with the moderate wing of the Democratic Party and was able to attract so-called Reagan Democrats – whom George H W Bush had estranged – back to the fold. By

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid 149. This thesis is boldly illustrated in Darel E Paul, ‘Culture War as Class War’, *First Things* (online), August/September 2018 <<https://www.firstthings.com/article/2018/08/culture-war-as-class-war>>.

<sup>22</sup> Kotkin, above n 18, 149. These observations comport very well with Murray’s assessment, which focuses on the formation of a new upper class and a new lower class, represented by two fictional, ideal-type neighborhoods that are based on the upscale neighborhood of Belmont, a Boston suburb, and the working-class neighborhood of Fishtown in Philadelphia. The first preserves a fairly stable family structure compared to the other. Murray, above n 3, 144-45.

<sup>23</sup> Zito and Todd, above n 5, 230.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Fenno’s book by that title is about the relationship between members of Congress and their home constituencies: Richard F Fenno Jr, *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts* (Longman Classics, 2002). It is a classic of the political science literature. Bill Clinton was widely regarded at the time as the most talented politician of his generation.

contrast, Hillary Clinton has identified herself with the Progressive wing of the party and, in effect, shoved aside its more conservative working-class constituency.<sup>25</sup>

In 1992 Bill Clinton's standard stump speech was premised on 'nationalism and a critique of the economic and political elites who had taken actions contrary to the best interests of middle-class America.'<sup>26</sup> He generally closed his speeches 'with a clarion call to a cause instead of a call to a candidacy.'<sup>27</sup> In 2016 Hillary Clinton's speeches were 'not a paean to the middle-class work ethic' but a checklist of 'social wedges and cultural grievances.' Indeed, her kickoff speech concluded with 'an extended riff about gender politics and her own potential to break the glass ceiling.'<sup>28</sup>

#### IV CROSSING THE GREAT DIVIDE

These differences testify to a deep cultural divide that, for decades, has kept the defenders of traditional values – national, cultural, moral – on the defensive. Kotkin describes the attitude of the leadership of both the Democratic and Republican parties toward family and religious issues in terms that are not very flattering to either:

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<sup>25</sup> The New Left pursued a Gramscian 'long march through the institutions. through a step-by-step takeover of the Democratic Party that began in 1968 and culminated in the McGovern reforms that were implemented during the 1972 Democratic National Convention. See Arthur L Herman, 'Chicago 1968: The Night the Democratic Party Died', *National Review* (online), 28 August 2018 <<https://www.nationalreview.com/2018/08/1968-democratic-convention-riots-modern-party-established/>>. The Soixante-Huitard uprising in May 1968 was one of many manifestations of a growing institutional crisis in the West. See Helmut Schelsky, 'The New Strategy of Revolution: The "Long March" through the Institutions' (1974) 18(4) *Modern Age* 345. (A PDF may be found at <<https://home.isi.org/journal-issue/fall-1974>>). A study guide is available at <[https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/gov\\_fac\\_pubs/439/](https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/gov_fac_pubs/439/)>.

<sup>26</sup> Zito and Todd, above n 5, 228-29. These elites bear a strong resemblance to what Samuel P Huntington called the 'Davos Culture' a generation ago: 'Each year about a thousand businessmen, bankers, government officials, intellectuals, and journalists from scores of countries meet in the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. ... Davos people control virtually all international institutions, many of the world's governments, and the bulk of the world's economic and military capabilities. ... It is far from a universal culture, and the leaders who share in the Davos Culture do not necessarily have a secure grip on power in their own societies.' Samuel P Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (Touchstone, 1997) 57-58.

<sup>27</sup> Zito and Todd, above n 5, 228-29. A revived emphasis on perceived national self-interest became a focal point of the Trump campaign and inspired renewed interest in the nation-state form. See Micah Meadowcroft, 'The Nations of the Earth', *Washington Free Beacon* (online), 8 September 2018 <<https://freebeacon.com/culture/yoram-hazon-yudson-institute-the-virtue-of-nationalism/>>. It is also important to distinguish patriotism and liberal nationalism (as opposed to an ideology of global governance) from a 'blood and soil', nativist form of nationalism or chauvinism with which it is often deliberately misidentified. While Yoram Hazony acknowledges that 'hatred may be endemic to political movements in general,' including nationalism, he emphasises 'that liberal-imperialist political ideals have become among the most powerful agents fomenting intolerance and hate in the Western world today.': Yoram Hazony, *The Virtue of Nationalism* (Basic Books, 2018) 11.

<sup>28</sup> Zito and Todd, above n 5, 229-30.



Sadly, neither of the rising political tendencies – what might be seen as Clerical liberalism [Democratic Party] and its libertarian counterpoint [Republican Party] – addresses such fundamental social deficits. The Clerisy tends to supplant the family with the state and informal arrangements among individuals. Economically focused libertarianism, rapidly becoming the intellectual foundation of modern conservatism, is almost psychologically incapable of addressing such social issues. ‘The libertarian priority is meeting market needs,’ observed one commentator. Other issues are secondary or they are seen as curable simply through market mechanisms.<sup>29</sup>

In the 2016 election the most striking predictors of electoral support for the two major party candidates – Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump – were demographic: the population density and average education level within voters’ home county. According to Zito and Todd: ‘Counties with rates of educational-attainment density higher than the national average performed better for Hillary in defeat than they had for Obama in victory, and counties with rates of bachelor’s degrees below the national average of 29.8 percent moved toward the Republicans.’ The apparent diversity of the latter offers opportunities to cross the educational divide:

The driver of this [educational-attainment] split is not the college education itself, but the social pressure that comes with living exclusively among other college graduates – and the political liberation that comes for college graduates who have a more educationally diverse orbit.<sup>30</sup>

The specter of such a rift would have troubled the Framers of the American Constitution.<sup>31</sup> The premise behind their provision for an electoral college was to filter and help cool the political passions of the moment by selecting distinguished citizens from local electoral districts, who

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<sup>29</sup> Kotkin, above n 18, 150. Libertarianism and Clerical liberalism roughly correspond to what Walter Russell Mead calls Liberalism 3.0, the Red Social Model, and Liberalism 4.0, the Blue Social Model. He contends that both are finished and cannot be salvaged. Walter Russell Mead, ‘The Once and Future Liberalism’, *American Interest* (online), 24 January 2012 <<https://www.the-american-interest.com/2012/01/24/the-once-and-future-liberalism/>>.

<sup>30</sup> Zito and Todd, above n 5, 232. While Seymour Martin Lipset noted in 1960 that so-called cross-cutting cleavages, including religion, region, gender, and the urban/rural divide, may moderate the traditional left-right political spectrum, he still supported Robert MacIver’s contention that ‘[t]he right is always the party sector associated with the interests of the upper or dominant classes, the left the sector expressive of the lower economic or social classes, and the center that of the middle classes.’ Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (Doubleday and Company, 1960) 222. Clearly the alienation of much of the working class from the left-wing party is the very opposite of historical expectation. Something more powerful seems to be at work, something Hazony identifies as collective self-determination: ‘a concern for the lives and property of members of the collective to which we are loyal ... the need to maintain the internal cohesiveness of the family, tribe, or nation, and the need to strengthen its unique cultural inheritance and pass it on to the next generation.’ Hazony, above n 27, 9.

<sup>31</sup> The Framers of the American Constitution sought to achieve a ‘more perfect Union’. By contrast, Samuel P Huntington notes a sharp divide between Americans in two adjacent sections of *Who Are We?* Entitled ‘Dead Souls:

were not simply delegates but were also free to vote their conscience, to meet in the state capital of each state to cast their votes for president and vice-president. Just as importantly, the system favored candidates who could win broad political support throughout the country, which is also the reason why the president and vice president may not be inhabitants of the same state.<sup>32</sup>

The comparative diversity of the two candidates' appeal in the 2016 election is readily illustrated by electoral maps which show the level of popular support on a county-by-county basis. In 2016 Donald Trump carried approximately 2600 counties compared with Hillary Clinton's 489.<sup>33</sup> Trump was elected with 304 electoral votes from 30 states compared with Clinton's 227 electoral votes from 20 states even though Clinton won approximately 48% of the popular vote and Trump won just under 46%. Libertarian Party candidate, Gary Johnson, won approximately 3.3% and the Green Party candidate, Jill Stein, won approximately 1.1%. There had not been such a large so-called third-party result since billionaire Ross Perot's two bids in 1992 (19% of the popular vote) and 1996 (8% of the popular vote). Each time he failed to win any electoral votes.

The bitterness of the divide within and between the two major parties is indicated by an unusually high number of seven electors pledged to the major party candidates – two for Trump and five for Clinton – who cast or attempted to cast protest votes instead. These results suggest a softening of traditional party support and may point toward an eventual party realignment.

## V THE BIG SORT

In part, these results seem to corroborate an even earlier study, *The Big Sort*, which identifies newer demographic patterns – ‘the clustering of like-minded individuals’ – that fracture along ever-narrower lines of identity and lifestyle. Bill Bishop writes:

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The Denationalization of Elites' and 'The Patriotic Public': Samuel P Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (Simon & Schuster, 2004) 264-76.

<sup>32</sup> This is enforced by denying the electoral votes of that state to the second candidate. The original system awarded the presidency to the first-place candidate and the vice presidency to the second-place candidate. George Washington was elected president unanimously in 1788 and 1792. John Adams won the vice-presidency both times but with fewer votes since there were other candidates. The advent of political party slates in the 1796 election disrupted the system, leading to John Adams winning the presidency but Thomas Jefferson, his rival for president, winning the vice presidency. Then in 1800, Aaron Burr, the Republican vice-presidential candidate, tied with Thomas Jefferson, who ran at the head of the Republican ticket. This threw the election into the House of Representatives where, after dozens of ballots, Alexander Hamilton, a Federalist, used his influence to support Jefferson's election. The Twelfth Amendment to the Constitution modified the Electoral College to reflect the new custom of party-line voting.

<sup>33</sup> Zito and Todd, above n 5, 263. See, eg, <<https://brilliantmaps.com/2016-county-election-map/>>.

The old systems of order – around land, family, class, tradition, and religious denomination – gave way. They were replaced over the next thirty years with a new order based on individual choice. Today we seek our own kind in like-minded churches, like-minded neighborhoods, and like-minded sources of news and entertainment. ... [L]ike-minded, homogeneous groups squelch dissent, grow more extreme in their thinking, and ignore evidence that their positions are wrong. As a result, we now live in a giant feedback loop, hearing our own thoughts about what is right and wrong bounced back to us by the television shows that we watch, the newspapers and books we read, the blogs we visit online, the sermons we hear, and the neighborhoods we live in.<sup>34</sup>

During the past three decades, an information revolution has weakened the broadcasting oligopoly that once tended to homogenize national and international reporting. A greater diversity of information outlets today has led political campaigning to become both more expensive and tactically more sophisticated but also more brutal. Bill Bishop's remarkable observation of the 2008 Democratic Party primaries has considerable bearing on more recent events.

An election doesn't have to be between a Republican and a Democrat to find the Big Sort at work. In the long 2008 Democratic primary season, Obama and senator Hillary Clinton split the vote. But in a dead even contest between two ideologically similar candidates, half the voters lived in counties where either Obama or Clinton won by landslides – a greater percentage than in the 2004 general election between Kerry and Bush.<sup>35</sup>

This sort of polarisation is a significant trend but at the time it seemed to defy conventional wisdom. Clinton took six of the seven most populous states in the country (except Illinois, where Clinton was born but where Obama served as a senator), along with the Rust Belt, the coal country of Appalachia, and the oil-rich Southwest. Yet Obama secured the nomination by winning more states and dominating the Deep South, the agricultural upper Midwest and High Plains, the northern tier of the Mountain West, and the Pacific Northwest.

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<sup>34</sup> Bishop, above n 16, 39.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid 307. Like Ronald Reagan in the 1976 Republican primary contests against Gerald Ford, Barack Obama in 2008 waged an insurgency campaign to overtake Hillary Clinton, who at the outset of the contest was the presumptive nominee. Reagan, who had solid support in the South and the West, barely fell short in the delegate count. But Ford was defeated in the general election by Jimmy Carter and Reagan was elected president four years later. For a detailed electoral map of the 2008 Democratic primary, see <[https://www.reddit.com/r/MapPorn/comments/32ct8y/2008\\_democratic\\_presidential\\_primary\\_results\\_by](https://www.reddit.com/r/MapPorn/comments/32ct8y/2008_democratic_presidential_primary_results_by)>.

In retrospect, this outcome suggests that either a generational struggle within the Democratic Party had begun or a strong protest vote had erupted against Hillary Clinton. After all, at the outset, it was ‘her race to lose’, as the expression goes. Obama was best known as the keynote speaker at the 2004 Democratic National Convention and as a first-term senator from Illinois who had written a couple of bestselling books: *Dreams from My Father* and *The Audacity of Hope*.<sup>36</sup> During the nomination campaign, Obama certainly had done better in many areas, especially the South, which tended to vote Republican, but he also lost most of those states in the general election. Nevertheless, he was also able to expand the party’s appeal, which might otherwise have been concentrated on the East and West Coasts and in the industrial heartland. Despite all his rhetoric about hope and change, however, the evidence for a realignment or renewal within the Democratic Party, whether regional or generational, is mixed.<sup>37</sup> By 2016 it was also hard to detect a generational change in the party leadership.

Trump’s ability to appeal to the agricultural Midwest that had supported Obama and the Rustbelt states that had initially supported Clinton but voted for Obama in the general election indicates the possibility of an electoral dealignment that may eventually lead to a party realignment. This brings us to the heart of the matter: the ability of Trump and the Republican Party to blend an older suburban coalition with a newer rural-industrial fusion of the neglected and disdained. As Zito and Todd contend:

The emerging schism between the intensity of support for Republican candidates who represent this populist-conservative fusion in rural and industrial areas, and the newly competitive nature of educated suburbs that previously tilted Republican, is the core axis of our new politics.<sup>38</sup>

Ronald Reagan made significant inroads into Democratic strongholds in 1980 and even more impressively in 1984 when he swept every state except Minnesota, his opponent’s home state. In his 1972 re-election Richard Nixon had done much the same, losing only DC and Massachusetts. Elements of this critical bloc of swing voters – at various times called the ‘Silent Majority’,

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<sup>36</sup> Barack Obama, *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* (Crown, 2012); Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (Crown, 2006).

<sup>37</sup> The Obama candidacy represented his supporters’ hope to inject new blood into the languishing New Deal and Great Society coalition that had dominated the country’s political agenda since 1933 and, again, 1964. For a philosophic treatment of American liberalism, see Charles R Kesler, *I Am the Change: Barack Obama and the Crisis of Liberalism* (Broadside Books, 2012).

<sup>38</sup> Zito and Todd, above n 5, 25.

Middle American Radicals, and Reagan Democrats – have played an essential part in most Republican Party electoral successes since 1968 but without great enthusiasm after the Reagan years.<sup>39</sup> Their support, once squandered, has been difficult for Republicans and Democrats alike to win back.

## VI AFTER THE FALL

Richard Nixon's fall from political grace resulted from an investigation into political 'dirty tricks' that began before he was reelected in a landslide in 1972. The aftermath to the break-in at the Watergate offices of the Democratic Party unfolded in the manner of a Greek tragedy and has become the preeminent object lesson as well as window into the American psyche. Every subsequent 'scandal' has been branded with the suffix 'gate'.<sup>40</sup> Even more than the Kennedy and King assassinations, Watergate marks both a culmination of the Sixties' turmoil and a turning point that has shaped American controversies and political attitudes ever since. Conrad Black conveys the reasons vividly:

The Watergate debacle, partly due to Nixon's mismanagement, caused the evaporation of executive authority and led to the immolation of one of the most successful presidencies in American history. The Democrats in the Congress seized the opportunity to cut off all assistance to South Vietnam and doomed Indochina to the murderous attention of the Viet Minh, Viet Cong, Khmer Rouge, and Pathet Lao, and millions perished. As Trump watched the assault on Nixon, the disorderly rout in Vietnam as the Democrats undid Nixon's 'peace with honor,' and the irresolution of the Carter administration, he believed he saw the failure of the self-proclaimed best and brightest, the Eastern Establishment, the Ivy League, and the career State Department. The national media, academia, and the Democratic party establishment celebrated the defeat in Vietnam and the Watergate putsch as triumphs of American integrity, but the thirtyish Donald Trump strongly suspected that this was self-serving claptrap thinly masking a series of largely self-induced national disasters.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> See Donald I Warren, *The Radical Center: Middle Americans and the Politics of Alienation* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1976).

<sup>40</sup> 'Chinagate' is an example. See Byron York, 'When a Foreign Adversary Meddled in a Presidential Election', *Washington Examiner* (online), 9 September 2018 <<https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/columnists/byron-york-when-a-foreign-adversary-meddled-in-a-presidential-election>>.

<sup>41</sup> Black, above n 4, 6-7. Black adds: 'Though under very different circumstances, Trump would become intensely familiar with the shameless guerrilla tactics of the same media, academic, and political elites who had bloodlessly assassinated Nixon. He was forewarned.' Victor Davis Hanson updates and summarizes the use of these guerrilla tactics during the election and the early Trump Administration. Victor Davis Hanson, 'Just How Far Will the Left

The case has been made that the war was ‘as good as won’. This betrayal of wartime allies and the resulting ‘Vietnam syndrome – described as ‘doubt about America’s goodness and power, and fear of casualties and foreign “quagmires”’<sup>42</sup> – is a matter of profound national shame that has never been fully exorcised.

After Nixon resigned in disgrace in August 1974, the congressional Democrats were swept into supermajorities in both Houses that November. Even before that happened, however, the party’s new antiwar leadership had chosen to cut off further assistance to the South Vietnamese regime. Several countries fell into the Soviet orbit before the decade was out.

The election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 started to break the longtime Democratic grip on Congress but it also failed to secure a party realignment. Since the Reagan years and the end of the Cold War, however, neither party has managed to extend its control over one or both houses of Congress or the presidency for more than a few years at a time.

Despite presiding over the end of the Cold War, George H W Bush failed to hold onto the so-called Reagan Democrats when he ran for re-election in 1992. But nearly a generation later it appears many of the Reagan Democrats’ latter-day counterparts were willing to endorse a tough-talking, relatively non-ideological businessman who spoke their language, just as Reagan, a former union president, had done earlier. Much of Trump’s attraction for a marginalized part of the electorate seems to exhibit the ‘not born yesterday’ attitude of people who are tired of betrayals. Black recognizes this, as shown by this summary of his brief on Trump’s behalf:

On the subject of Donald Trump, righteousness can be overdone, and often is; he has, as has been recounted, his inelegant aspects. But Benjamin Franklin’s role in persuading Britain to expel France from Canada and fifteen years later in persuading France to help expel Britain from America was the ultimate expression of the art of the deal. Some of Jefferson’s most florid passages in the Declaration are among history’s greatest expositions of truthful hyperbole. In international relations, Richard Nixon was a chess player and Ronald Reagan was a poker player, and both were very successful. Trump seems more of a pool shark, but it seems likely that he will

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Go?’, *American Greatness* (online), July 23, 2018 <<https://amgreatness.com/2018/07/23/just-how-far-will-the-left-go/>>.

<sup>42</sup> Bruce S Thornton, *The Wages of Appeasement: Ancient Athens, Munich, and Obama’s America* (Encounter, 2011) 150, 151.

do well too. Trump isn't very reminiscent of Franklin or Jefferson or FDR or Nixon or Reagan; but he is a man of his times, and his time has come.

With President Trump, no setback is admitted or accepted; for him, rebuffs are really victories, disguised victories, moral victories, or the preludes to victories. Hyperbole, truthful or otherwise, is his common parlance. He speaks for the people, he has been a very successful man, and he has repeatedly outwitted his opponents, which is why he is attacked with such snobbery, envy, and spitefulness. But America is reversing its decline and wrenching itself loose from the habits of lassitude, elitist decay, appeasement of foreign enemies, and domestic inertia. His record is impressive; his foibles are not durably relevant.<sup>43</sup>

### VIII WHO ARE WE?

The great question raised by the candidacy and election of Donald Trump is whether the growing schism between the new elites and the general population can be healed. As the rise of identity politics endlessly reshuffles the political deck, the question of national identity has become more urgent for Americans as well as Europeans and others. In *Who Are We?* the late political scientist Samuel P Huntington even referred to a 'global crisis of identity'. Huntington himself wished to show the wisdom of choosing a revitalized 'Anglo-Protestant culture, traditions, and values that for three and a half centuries have been embraced by Americans of all races, ethnicities, and religions and that have been the source of their unity, power, prosperity, and moral leadership as a force for good in the world.'<sup>44</sup> But the assimilationist 'melting pot' ideal of a century ago has been challenged in the name of multiculturalism.<sup>45</sup>

The American political class and the leadership of both major political parties increasingly spoke the language of globalism, quite noticeably so at the end of the Cold War with George H W Bush's vaunted 'New World Order' a decade before the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. The idea of 'global governance' became part of the new political language and the Supreme Court began citing international standards. The press itself is largely oblivious to public

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<sup>43</sup> Black, above n 4, 213.

<sup>44</sup> Huntington, above n 31, xvii.

<sup>45</sup> A bold defense of the nation-state has been undertaken by Melanie Phillips, a London-based journalist: see Melanie Phillips, 'Israel Gets the Nation-State Right While the West Fumbles with Identity', 27 July 2018 <<http://www.melaniephillips.com/israel-nation-state-west-identity/>>.

sentiment outside the major metropolitan areas and consequently failed to detect a growing resentment over perceived disrespect, both to the people themselves and to the country.

Leading national journalists missed the potential efficacy of Trump's grievance appeal because they exemplified, professionally and personally, the other end of the complaint. Trump's campaign went straight at the idea that cultural power was stacked against voters who live outside the elite zip codes.<sup>46</sup>

What galvanised the greatest opposition to Hillary Clinton may have been her ill-chosen remarks two months before the election when she told a group of donors: 'you could put half of Trump's supporters into what I call the "basket of deplorables." ... The racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic, you name it.'<sup>47</sup> It was a self-inflicted wound, added to all the political baggage she already carried due in part to other self-inflicted wounds. The elitist disdain and general lack of respect shown towards ordinary Americans by 'those with access to the megaphones of culture' moved many reluctant voters off the fence. As a resident of Wisconsin commented:

"Our culture in Hollywood or in the media gives off the distinct air of disregard to people who live in the middle of the country. As if we have no value or do not contribute to the betterment of society. It's frustrating. It really wants to make you stand up and yell 'We count,' except of course we don't. At least not in their eyes."

And a store owner in Michigan complained: 'There is no respect for anyone who is just average and trying to do the right things.'<sup>48</sup>

By contrast with the suppositions of the bipartisan political establishment, '[t]he connective tissue of the Trump movement is nationalism,' as Zito and Todd remark. Even so, much of it is philosophically 'driven by a value that places localism over globalism.'

The new populism is a movement against bigness. It distrusts big government, big corporations, big media conglomerates, and, perhaps more than anything else, big multinational agreements and organizations. Just as the Whole Foods shopper is leery of the pesticide practices of a Mexican

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<sup>46</sup> Zito and Todd, above n 5, 234.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid 239.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid 236, 237.



agribusiness, the Trumpian populist has no confidence that the Brussels bureaucrat will make economic decisions that consider the well-being of the American blue-collar worker.<sup>49</sup>

What some would label truculence is what, for many Americans, is simply a reassertion of the traditional fighting spirit. In a famous speech laced with profanities, General George Patton probably exaggerated when he raised it to the level of a principle: ‘Americans love a winner and will not tolerate a loser. Americans play to win all the time. That’s why Americans have never lost and will never lose a war. The very thought of losing is hateful to Americans. Battle is the most significant competition in which a man can indulge. It brings out all that is best and it removes all that is base.’<sup>50</sup>

Yet as Adam Smith remarked about British military reversals in America: ‘There is a great deal of ruin in a nation.’ National survival requires a resiliency that must also withstand repeated testing in the political and military arenas. Notwithstanding the tarnish of historical shortcomings, a young Illinois legislator in 1838 mustered his audience with a call to transmit America’s ‘political edifice of liberty and equal rights’ to future generations as a ‘task of gratitude to our fathers, justice to ourselves, duty to posterity, and love for our species in general.’

At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer, if it ever reach us, it must spring up amongst us. It cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide.<sup>51</sup>

Adversity takes the measure of men and nations. Institutions must be periodically renewed or else they drift until the consequent decay becomes too entrenched to reverse. The late Samuel P Huntington understood the stakes: ‘All societies face recurring threats to their existence, to which they eventually succumb. Yet some societies, even when so threatened, are also capable of

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid 247.

<sup>50</sup> General George Patton, Speech to the Third Army: <<https://genius.com/Gen-george-patton-speech-to-the-3rd-army-annotated>>.

<sup>51</sup> Abraham Lincoln, Lyceum Address, 27 January 1838 <<http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/lyceum.htm>>. Just a few years earlier Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote a short story, ‘The Gray Champion’, to make a similar point about renewing the patrimony. It features the timely return of an ancestral ghost during the ‘Glorious Revolution’ to pronounce judgment upon Massachusetts’ royal governor, Edmund Andros, and his officers.

postponing their demise by halting and reversing the process of decline and renewing their vitality and identity.<sup>52</sup>

## IX THE POLITICS PRESIDENTS MAKE

Too often, however, any revitalisation comes at the expense of institutional integrity. Another American political scientist, Stephen Skowronek, has explored this pattern. Although he acknowledges that the American constitutional system was designed to counteract ‘the degenerative propensities of republican institutions,’ he adds a proviso that should trouble Constitutional originalists:

The dismal cycle of classical republican politics may have been controlled by this design, but it was not stopped. Presidential leadership has worked to pull the federal government ever more deeply into crises of legitimacy before suddenly swinging things around in one spectacular display of its regenerative potential. A few incumbents, thrust to the commanding heights of political authority, have found new ways to order the politics of the republic and release the powers of the government; but they have done so by building personal parties and shattering the politics of the past, actions the Constitution originally was supposed to guard against. Moreover, each of these great political leaders – Jefferson, Jackson, Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt, and Reagan – passed on a newly circumscribed regime, so tenacious as to implicate their successors in another cycle of gradually accelerating political decay.<sup>53</sup>

The Reagan presidency failed to accomplish such a realignment. It focused instead on defeating the Soviet Union. The last major realignment followed the election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1932 during the Great Depression. It resulted in a long period of intensive legislation and centralized administrative regulation known as the New Deal, which was rendered effectively permanent through the *Executive Reorganization Act of 1939* (‘1939 Act’) and was later extended through Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society program (1964-1968) and subsequent administrations. As a result of the 1939 Act,

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<sup>52</sup> Huntington, above n 31, xvii.

<sup>53</sup> Stephen Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to George Bush* (Belknap Press, 1993) 33. The cycles, beginning with reconstructive leadership and ending with a disjunctive epigone, may signal merely an advancing political sclerosis.

the administrative presidency was conceived with the expectation that it would be an ally of programmatic liberalism. It is not surprising, therefore, that when this expectation was violated with the rise of a conservative administrative presidency beginning in the 1970s, serious conflict developed between the presidency and bureaucracy. Nor is it surprising that this conflict influenced still another reform of administrative law with the objective of more effectively insulating reform programs from presidential influence.<sup>54</sup>

The candidacy and elevation of Donald Trump to the presidency was, from the start, difficult to imagine except under the most extraordinary of circumstances. Even in a state of decline, the bipartisan New Deal settlement militates against any such challenge from the outside. Yet it is very likely that Donald Trump – who explicitly campaigned to protect Social Security and Medicare benefits – was the only Republican who had a clear shot at winning the general election. People threw their support to him because they took the measure of the man and concluded that he would fight to revitalise the American experiment. His own use of guerrilla tactics against the resistance of an entrenched bureaucracy is what many voters expected and, indeed, demanded.

After an era in which a sizable share of the Republican base, not to mention its often-checked-out margins and its most recent converts, had been disillusioned by the efficacy of more ideologically conservative politicians, from George Bush to Paul Ryan, Trump's new coalition may have been the only path back to presidential parity for the GOP.<sup>55</sup>

The deck is clearly stacked in favor of the existing power elite. Even if President Trump succeeds in establishing an effective administration on his own terms and is able to keep his commitments, another question remains. What can the Republicans do for an encore? Charisma, like lightning, cannot be bottled, marketed, or genetically reproduced. As always, the great institutional challenge is to broaden the party's base of support while securing a line of succession. If one or both houses of Congress revert to control by the Democratic Party, will President Trump or his successor be able to push his agenda, given its unpopularity with the bipartisan political establishment?

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<sup>54</sup> Sidney M Milkis, *The President and the Parties: The Transformation of the American Party System Since the New Deal* (Oxford University Press, 1993) 146.

<sup>55</sup> Zito and Todd, above n 5, 245.

The high-energy, high-wire Trump presidency may be an impossible act to follow. Failure to pass the trapeze bar to a steady hand in a timely way risks a very different alignment of political fortunes. ‘Whatever happens,’ as Black concludes his book,

Donald Trump will be one of the most vividly remembered presidents and characters of American history. Difficult though it may be to believe at times, the office of the presidency, in that astonishing, ineluctable, and fateful American way, may have sought the necessary man again.<sup>56</sup>

## X AFTERWORD

The midterm elections of November 2018 have changed the electoral landscape sufficiently to indicate that both major parties face mounting challenges in the lead-up to the 2020 presidential and congressional elections.

Following a shift of approximately 40 seats in the House of Representatives that led to a Democratic Party takeover of the leadership positions, President Trump confronts a divided Congress. Strong resistance to his policies and investigations directed at his Administration may be expected across a broad front within the House. Sean Trende discounts talk of an electoral ‘wave’, however, and suggests that the Democrats’ surge in the House may be due in part to ‘the Democrats’ enormous fundraising advantage.’<sup>57</sup> The Republican majority in the Senate was somewhat strengthened, which may better enable the president to appoint more conservative jurists.

As for the 2020 national elections, third party or independent challenges in the presidential and perhaps a few congressional contests may contribute to a greater fragmentation – if not a realignment – of the two-party system. The president’s prospects for reelection and restoration of a Republican majority in the House will hinge considerably on enlarging his coalition while fending off rivals within the party, a strategic grasp of the opportunities to reshape the national conversation, and retaining the confidence of his original supporters.

As to the character of the Trump coalition, Frank Buckley differs from Zito and Todd in describing it as a ‘Republican workers party’ which coalesced in 2016 by offering the electorate

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<sup>56</sup> Black, above n 4, 213.

a conservative reiteration of an earlier tradition of liberal nationalism.<sup>58</sup> Internationally, it has counteracted the longstanding bipartisan dominance of liberal internationalism by promoting a renewed emphasis on national sovereignty as opposed to global governance.<sup>59</sup> Yet it does not countenance anything less than a robust and ‘mutually beneficial cooperation among different nations. ... Trump is not a globalist who denies the value in nationalism, but an internationalist whose vision of global harmony is rooted in independent nations, each pursuing its own interests.’<sup>60</sup>

Domestically, this American nationalism – which Buckley compares with Benjamin Disraeli’s and Randolph and Winston Churchill’s – champions ‘the common good against corrupt special interests’ and seeks ‘to promote the well-being of all fellow citizens, and not simply a favored few.’<sup>61</sup> It is embodied in the loyalties that bind fellow citizens within a larger community or civil society without tyrannising over their lives, liberty, property, or consciences.<sup>62</sup>

Nationalism is more than a duty to look after fellow citizens. It’s also one of the particularistic emotions that bind us to others, like love of family and friends, creating the sense of solidarity or community that is one of the most basic of human goods. Simone Weil called this “the need for roots,”<sup>63</sup> and it’s especially needed in today’s America. ... In our loneliness, in the animosities that divide us, there has never been a greater need for fraternity.<sup>64</sup>

The public has reacted electorally to this loss of roots in often unanticipated ways as, for instance, when politicians seek to replace what politics has helped displace. Philosophically, Michael Oakeshott’s remarkable analysis of ‘Rationalism in Politics’ attributed the uprooting of social and moral conventions to the intellectual arrogance of those who have “no sense of the cumulation of experience, only of the readiness of experience when it has been converted into a

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<sup>57</sup> Sean Trende, ‘So, Was It a Wave?’, *RealClear Politics* (online) <[https://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2018/11/16/so\\_was\\_it\\_a\\_wave\\_138677.html#2](https://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2018/11/16/so_was_it_a_wave_138677.html#2)>.

<sup>58</sup> F H Buckley, *The Republican Workers Party: How the Trump Victory Drove Everyone Crazy, and Why It Was Just What We Needed* (Encounter Books, 2018) 63-73. For a discussion of the influence of Biblical Christianity on the rise of the nation-state concept in the West, see Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge University Press, 1997) 5, 185ff.

<sup>59</sup> The American Freedom Alliance held an international conference on Global Governance vs. National Sovereignty in June 2012, see <<https://www.conservativedailynews.com/2012/06/global-governance-vs-national-sovereignty/>>.

<sup>60</sup> Buckley, above n 58, 73.

<sup>61</sup> Buckley, above n 58, 64.

<sup>62</sup> See Ernest Gellner, *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and Its Rivals* (Penguin, 1996).

<sup>63</sup> Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots* (Harper Colophon, 1971).

<sup>64</sup> Buckley, above n 58, 72.

formula: the past is significant for [them] only as an encumbrance.<sup>65</sup> What has come to pass for ‘a higher morality’, according to Oakeshott, ‘is merely morality reduced to a technique, to be acquired by training in an ideology rather than an education in behavior.’<sup>66</sup>

Moral ideals are a sediment: they have significance only so long as they are suspended in a religious or social tradition, so long as they belong to a religious or a social life. The predicament of our time is that the Rationalists have been at work so long on their project of drawing off the liquid in which our moral ideals were suspended (and pouring it away as worthless) that we are left only with the dry and gritty residue which chokes us as we try to take it down. First, we do our best to destroy parental authority (because of its alleged abuse), then we sentimentally deplore the scarcity of ‘good homes’, and we end by creating substitutes which complete the work of destruction.<sup>67</sup>

By contrast, Samuel P Huntington focused more on the specific role played by political elites while also acknowledging the bloodless abstraction of their goals and ideals.

Significant elements of American elites are favorably disposed to America becoming a cosmopolitan society. Other elites wish it to assume an imperial role. The overwhelming bulk of the American people are committed to a national alternative and to preserving and strengthening the American identity that has existed for centuries.<sup>68</sup>

In the inaugural issue of *American Affairs* following the 2016 election, the political philosopher Joshua Mitchell observed: ‘If there is to be American greatness, it will emerge around the two

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<sup>65</sup> Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (LibertyPress, 1991) 6. Oakeshott’s Rationalism most resembles the purpose-driven Telocracy (as opposed to ‘the substantively neutral legal order’ of Nomocracy) as described in Michael Oakeshott, *Lectures in the History of Political Thought* (imprint-academic.com, 2006) 469-97. In a similar vein, Richard Landes surveys utopian and millennial movements throughout history that embody despotic rationalism. Landes identifies four attributes that are characteristic of the leadership, what he calls ‘prime dividers’, of ancient and modern agrarian civilizations: 1) *Privilege Legalized*: ‘Aristocrats have special status before the law they legislate, they judge, they execute’; 2) *Manual Labor Stigmatized*: ‘Labor defines commoners’; ‘the liberal arts are precisely for those who are ‘liberated’ (by slaves) from banausic concerns’; 3) *Technologies of Knowledge and Weaponry Monopolized*: ‘Elites try to maintain as much control over information as possible’; eg, the clerisy in the Middle Ages; and 4) *Honor and the Elite*: ‘[R]ecourse to force [by elites] allows them to establish their dominion in a quotidian sense by their possession of honor’: Richard Landes, *Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of the Millennial Experience* (Oxford University Press, 2011) 216-17.

<sup>66</sup> Oakeshott, above n 65, 40.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid 41. An illustration of the destruction may in found in Nancy Pearcey, ‘Justice Kennedy’s Hubris’, *American Thinker* (online), 2 December 2018 <[https://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2018/12/justice\\_kennedys\\_hubris.html](https://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2018/12/justice_kennedys_hubris.html)>.

<sup>68</sup> Huntington, above n 31, 366.

sorts of sovereignty that hold her together: liberal sovereignty and sovereignty based on covenantal nationalism.<sup>69</sup>

Liberal greatness means that we look at others as *neighbors* and *fellow* citizens. That we need to have strong borders, that we need to slow down immigration so that 95 million workforce-age fellow citizens can find jobs, and that we only admit foreigners who aspire to become American citizens, is not inconsistent with liberal sovereignty.<sup>70</sup>

Mitchell's chief focus, however, is with three expressions of what he calls '[t]he national covenantal aspiration to greatness' which 'must take both inward and outward forms.' The first addresses the legacy of slavery, which has been further aggravated by a form of identity politics that for half a century or more has sought to bind minorities to the hegemony of the Left while undermining traditional institutions.<sup>71</sup>

The inward form ... involves healing the still-festering wound of slavery and its aftereffects, through our churches and synagogues and through our face-to-face dealings in everyday life. The state can supplement those efforts, but it cannot substitute for them. There is no path to the Promised Land except through the agony of the desert.<sup>72</sup>

Second, greatness in its outer form requires 'orienting domestic policy toward the middle-class' in order to recover 'the strength and wisdom of a middle-class commercial republic.'<sup>73</sup> A 'cosmopolitan mindset' has emerged through the de-linking of democratic man from traditional institutions that once helped bind him into communities and families.<sup>74</sup>

Tocqueville's ideas about voluntary associations, about family, about religion, and about federalism, point to the need to bring the soul down to earth, to connect it to others. The *embodied* soul formed through these institutions is hardly irrational, as the cosmopolitan would insist; the

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<sup>69</sup> Joshua Mitchell, 'A Renewed Republican Party' (2017) 1(1) *American Affairs* 7 <<https://americanaffairsjournal.org/2017/02/a-renewed-republican-party/>>.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid 27-28.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid 15. See also Shelby Steele, 'Why the Left Is Consumed with Hate', *Wall Street Journal* (online), 23 September 2018 <<https://outline.com/TXW6L8>>.

<sup>72</sup> Mitchell, above n 69, 28.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid 28.

<sup>74</sup> See, for contrast, James McPherson, 'Emmanuel Macron and the Barren Elite of a Changing Continent', *Washington Examiner* (online), 14 May 2017 <<https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/emmanuel-macron-and-the-barren-elite-of-a-changing-continent>>.

embodied soul, on the contrary, is the *healthy* soul, whose interests are formed in and through relations with others.<sup>75</sup>

The institutional breakdown resulting from what Oakeshott calls ‘Rationalism in Politics’ has been characterised in recent years by increasingly vicious culture wars that have especially resulted from the promotion of globalism and identity politics.<sup>76</sup>

Third, beyond our borders, greatness will require the reconfiguration of our country among the world of nations. Like it or not, our national covenantal understanding is that we are ‘a shining city on a hill, and a beacon in the darkness’, to paraphrase John Winthrop’s 1630 encomium to his fellow passengers aboard the *Arabella*. We cannot renounce that charge; we can only understand and apply it well or ill.<sup>77</sup> As Mitchell notes in conclusion:

The three together suggest the need for a mix, increasingly lost in our conversations about what has gone wrong with America, involving individual responsibility, neighborly involvement in our local communities, and ennobling national projects that only presidential initiative can facilitate. No one can help but observe that the world is changing before our eyes. Donald Trump has played a larger-than-life part in this. Yet amidst all of the changes – and amidst the hopes that *he* can make our country “great again” – the burden nevertheless rests on citizens, who must either build a world together or withdraw into themselves and wish in vain that the state will carry the load.<sup>78</sup>

This is a worthy challenge for a country G K Chesterton once described as ‘the only nation in the world founded on a creed.’<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Mitchell, above n 69, 8-9. The author calls the 2016 electoral outcome ‘*a revolt in the name of national sovereignty*, not populism.’

<sup>76</sup> Ibid 9-11.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid 28. Gov. Winthrop’s sermon cited Matt. 5:14 from the Sermon on the Mount.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid 30.

<sup>79</sup> The American Chesterton Society, ‘America Is a Nation with the Soul of a Church’ <<https://www.chesterton.org/america/>>.