

Populism and the Right: Problems and Possibilities

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The election of Donald Trump as president this past November is nothing less than a pivotal event in American politics. For this was more than a ritual “changing of the guard” from one political party to another. It was also a merger of populism and the Right that almost nobody had thought possible. Trump’s victory, not unexpectedly, has unleashed the Jacobin furies of the Left; i.e., the sorts of people who have no problem with dissolving our historic national identity and working toward this outcome. That is why it is imperative to see this election as a first step in reversing an unfolding demographic and political disaster.

On the surface, Donald Trump, net worth roughly \$4 billion, makes for an unlikely populist; one normally does not think of a real estate magnate as a “man of the people.” Moreover, Trump’s conservatism, born far more of instinct than formal learning, frequently veers off-course from standard talking points of his own Republican Party, to say nothing of The Heritage Foundation, the Conservative Political Action Conference, *National Review*, and other temples of mainstream Right wisdom. Trump is highly skeptical of existing and proposed free trade agreements that erode U.S. sovereignty. He believes that business enterprises should pay a steep price for moving operations to another country to save on labor costs. He espouses a foreign policy that would minimize American intervention in the affairs of other nations. And he favors deporting all immigrants who live here illegally and limiting, if not banning, legal immigration from countries whose cultures are incompatible with our own. Such positions have earned him

the wrath of much of the Right as well as of virtually all of the Left. Trump, upholders of the conservative faith insist, is an impostor, not a “true conservative.”

Yet even if that allegation were true, such critics miss the larger point. Most of Trump’s supporters are not concerned over whether his conservatism is “true” or “false.” Nor should they be. Such a distinction never delivered all that much political mileage, even during the Reagan years.¹ Trump’s supporters, like Trump himself, see the survival of America as mattering far more than the survival of any philosophical or ideological movement, even “good” ones. If inchoately, Trump grasps a fundamental insight of Machiavelli, Hobbes, Hume, and other classical political philosophers: The supreme function of a sovereign ruler, whether in a monarchy or a republic, *is to protect his people*. Put another way, a leader places the interests of his nation above the interests of other nations. If he does not, he risks forfeiting his legitimacy. Trump senses, and with good reason, that our country’s destiny has fallen into the hands of a supranational elite, many of whose members act as though they are above public accountability. In defeating Hillary Clinton in November, Trump also handed a symbolic defeat to people whom Center for Immigration Studies Executive Director Mark Krikorian has called “post-Americans.”² This is a positive development. For Trump, though a man of the Right, is the standard bearer of a cross-ideological national populism that may be the best hope of keeping our nation together.

Donald Trump’s presidential campaign was that rare phenomenon: an authentic, *successful* national populism. Too many such movements in this country follow a pattern: They make noise, point fingers, get press coverage, and flame out. The Tea Party is a textbook case. Back during 2009-10, Tea Party organizations dominated much of the news cycle. They endorsed a large number of candidates for public office in 2010. None were particularly distinguished and some were little short of laughable. Several of these candidates did win, but the Tea Party had reached its peak. Since then, it has languished. A wasted opportunity, it is now all but extinct, having failed to shift the terms of debate on

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a single major issue. Its main purpose these days seems twofold: raising funds for the Republican Party and providing grist for political science dissertations.

The Trump presidency will be different. It is creating the foundation for a permanent shift in our political culture. The shift may not be 180 degrees or even close to that. Yet it is without recent precedent. Trump tapped into justifiable fears and resentments that *faux*-populist eruptions like the Tea Party, the Christian Coalition, and Ross Perot’s presidential campaigns of 1992 and 1996 chose not to address. Indeed, even if Trump lost the election, he would have laid the groundwork anyway for a powerful and sustained resistance to the “Third World first, America last” mindset epitomized by Hillary Clinton. Unlike Mrs. Clinton, Trump felt no need to celebrate racial, ethnic, or religious “diversity.” And neither did his supporters.

WHAT IS POPULISM?

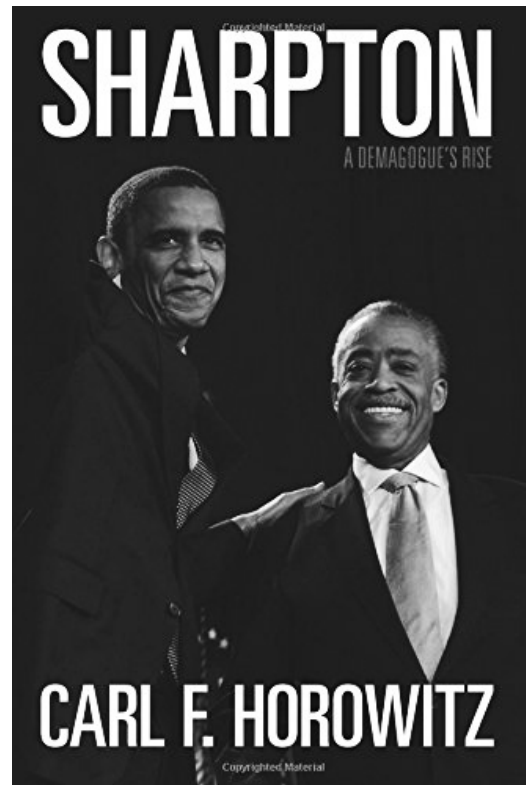
If Donald Trump is a populist, then what does that say about the condition of populism today? To answer that, it is necessary to define populism and the people who identify with it. Populist leaders, by definition, want to be popular. And they believe themselves to be popular. Their rhetoric fairly brims with “bandwagon” appeals to audiences to join a righteous and triumphant cause. Yet all too often, they and their followers are unable to generate lasting influence, even with requisite money and publicity. Putting this in reverse, just as being a populist doesn’t automatically make one’s cause popular, being popular doesn’t automatically make one’s cause populist. This holds true for prominent public figures as it does for the causes they advance. Example: Al Sharpton. As my recent book on the subject³ describes in detail, Sharpton has been a toxic presence in this country for more than 30 years. Yes, the Reverend Al has a large and admiring audience. And at times, he resembles a populist. But underneath he is nothing of the sort. His vision is utterly removed from, and hostile toward, our nation’s historic white-majority identity. Like his friend and ally, President Obama, he represents a black-led coalition of aggrieved minorities. And he receives large doses of corporate money. Co-sponsors of the annual April convention of his nonprofit group, National Action Network (NAN), have included AT&T, Facebook, Master Card, Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, McDonald’s, Time Warner, Verizon, and Fox News Channel. During calendar year 2014, NAN took in about \$7 million from all sources. Some populist!

Many other persons and organizations from all walks of life also project a surface populism that collapses upon closer inspection. Think of Bill Clinton, Glenn Beck, Billy Graham, Jimmy Fallon, Taylor Swift, Katy Perry, Jay Z, Occupy Wall Street, People for the American Way, and the American Association of Retired

Persons. Each is popular, yet none can be called populist.

In defining populism, then, *there is something going on besides popularity*. And there is a substantial literature on the subject, particularly as it relates to the American experience.⁴ America is a natural focus of study. Our very founding, after all, was sustained populism in opposition to a distant monarchy.

In combing through the literature, several themes recur which, taken together, form a reasonable working definition of populism.



Resentment of centralized economic and political power. All populism, even the centrist “feel good” kind, a la Ross Perot, feeds upon a groundswell of public resentment of remote powerful individuals and institutions. Whether the targets are actually remote is less important than the widespread *perception* that they are. Populism thrives during periods of a rising conviction that “the system” is rigged in favor of an elite few.

Wealthy businessmen long have been a ripe target of this impulse. This is especially true if they are cultural outsiders; if they manage finance capital, as opposed to manufacturing capital; and if they receive favors from government to achieve advantages over market competitors (“cronyism”). Loathing of “the bankers” is especially ingrained in our character. Thomas Jefferson famously observed: “I believe that banking institutions are more dangerous to our liberties than standing armies...The issuing power (over money) should be taken from the banks, and restored to the people, to whom it properly belongs.”⁵ He had plenty of company

back then. Donald Trump and to a lesser extent Ross Perot, though wealthy businessmen, have articulated popular grievances against elites. As such, they are less elites than first among equals.

Government likewise is another common target. Across the ideological spectrum, people commonly denounce “politicians” and “special interests,” so long as they are someone else’s. All too often, especially with no names attached, such targets amount to straw men. This is where Trump succeeded where others before him failed. He had the temerity to call out unaccountable elites by name, most of all, Hillary Clinton.

Desire for a forceful leader. Popular discontent requires mobilization by an assertive leader capable of articulating grievances. Audiences crave such a leader. Populist audiences don’t negotiate, but their leaders can. At the same time, populist leaders cannot lead people who don’t want to be led. They can exploit discontent, but they can’t create it. A populist leader tells his audience what they *want* to hear, not what they need to hear. If he doesn’t, the audience is likely to transfer its loyalties to some other charismatic leader. A populist leader and his audience have a symbiotic relationship; each needs the other to grow more powerful. For this reason, the populist leader-audience relationship tends to be authoritarian. The leader appeals to his audience more to follow than to think. And his audience dutifully follows.

Appeals to immediate emotions. Populist audiences demand *action*. They are present-oriented. They thrive on speeches, rallies, leaflets, pamphlets, blogs, and tweets that vow to “do something” now. Such people are impatient with debate, dialogue, analysis, parliamentary procedure, and judicial review. “Gridlock” for them is a four-letter word. The heat of the moment matters more than the light of the ages. Winning debates is nice, but far less important than “sending ’em a message.” Populist leaders know this. They succeed with their audiences by bypassing conventional political etiquette.

Attachment to locality. This trait is often indispensable to populism in America, less so in Europe.⁶ Its leaders appear more human if possessed of a local, statewide, or regional backstory. Donald Trump for decades has worn his Outer Borough New Yorker roots on his sleeve. Voters like candidates who are passionate about their own community, state, or congressional district and look after their constituents’ interests. They are likely to keep electing them, even while expressing discontent with “politicians” everywhere else. In this light, the failure of the congressional term limits movement, which grew like brushfire on the Right during the first half of the nineties, could have been predicted. Intended as a way to make Congress as an institution more responsive to the people back home, few supporters could admit that voters *already felt* their representa-

tives to be responsive; that’s why they kept re-electing them. By their voting behavior, people expressed their widespread dislike of being ordered around from the outside. The 1995 Supreme Court ruling in *U.S. Term Limits v. Thornton*⁷ symbolically ratified this view, thus ending the juggernaut.

Racial/ethnic homogeneity. Multiracial populism may be appealing in the abstract, but it is not sustainable. To be successful in any country, populism must reflect the identity of a reasonably homogeneous majority, not those of minorities suspicious of each other as well as of the majority. For people to fight for self-governance — or “empowerment” — they must have consistently high levels of mutual trust. And trust can’t be achieved in a multiracial context, except maybe in “The Fast and the Furious” and its many sequels. I’m a big fan of those movies, by the way. But the reality is that their rules of the road don’t apply to politics in America or anywhere else.

BUT IS IT OF THE RIGHT?

That populism can be a potent force is undeniable. But does it mesh with the larger arguments advanced by the Right? The answer: not very often. The two overlap, but they are anything but interchangeable.

First, populism and conservatism each are less about ideology than temperament. And the populist temperament — present-oriented and given to mass incitement against constituted authority — is thoroughly at odds with the classical conservative temperament. Populists, in other words, normally don’t read the works of Russell Kirk, Kenneth Minogue, Robert Nisbet, or Michael Oakeshott. And if they did, they likely would be bored. Populists want *action*, not reasoned discussions that counsel restraint prior to embarking on drastic courses of action. “Prudence” is not a word found in the populist dictionary.

Libertarianism presents more possibilities for a populist Right, but not by much. Its adherents have an almost unshakeable faith in the free market to harmonize conflict. Whatever the social problem, libertarians argue, removing government from the picture will fix it. Their critique of the State is compelling — it would be hard to argue that government is not excessively intrusive in everyday American life — yet it rarely has lit a populist fire. Libertarians have adapted by generating opposition toward state-connected elites. Populist libertarians, in other words, don’t rally *for* “free markets” or “the Constitution”; they rally *against* the Federal Reserve System and the New World Order. Yet even the latter approach is self-limiting, in or out of a Republican Party context. Libertarianism has won adherents almost exclusively from among disaffected individuals along the margins of Left and Right. It is a coalition of the fringes, *not* the center. That is why Ron Paul was never

a threat to win the Republican nomination, much less the general election, in 2008 or 2012.

Second, the American Left has a long populist tradition of its own, one well predating the Right. The agrarian and factory worker revolts of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries were populist as well as progressive in character. Muckraking investigative journalism was born of this environment. Red State-style blowhards, unable to admit this, typically prefer to post insults, threats, and epithets on the Web that denounce Enemies Within (e.g., “libtards”) who “hate America.” The reality is that Leftists very frequently invoke patriotism in putting forth their program. And they’re quite sincere about it. Granted, they’re wrong on most things, often egregiously so. But rarely do they hate this country. Consider the following list of populist white Americans on the Left, past and present: Ralph Nader, Richard Trumka, John Steinbeck, Eugene Victor Debs, William Jennings Bryan, Mary “Mother” Jones, Barbara Ehrenreich, Jack Newfield, Norman Mailer, Barbara Mikulski, Woody Guthrie, Jim Hightower, Bruce Springsteen, Steve Earle, John Mellencamp, Willie Nelson, Garrison Keillor, Tom Laughlin, Thomas Frank, Molly Ivins, John

Grisham, and Elizabeth Warren. These people, whether or not politicians, spout (or spouted) much foolishness, but their sensibility is not anti-American.

The Left-populist man of the hour, Senator Bernie Sanders, has a pitch-perfect sense of this tradition, which explains why his recent presidential campaign did so well. When he announced his candidacy, many dismissed him as a “protest candidate.” Yet he proved to be much more, combining radical populism with an odd-ball charisma to become a genuine threat to Mrs. Clinton’s Democratic Party nomination. His audiences may have been poorly versed on the issues, but they sensed that Sanders, far from being a crazy old man, was telling it like it is about the state of our nation. They turned out in droves to see him, cheer him, and vote for him. Hillary Clinton’s campaign by comparison seemed stage-managed and spin-doctored. Her rallies seemed like giant Tupperware parties with lots of hugs and smiles. It didn’t matter that she agreed with Sanders on at least 95 percent of everything. In *style*, where it really counted, she came off as his opposite. And populists on the Left, like those on the Right, instinctively recognize if a candidate is “one of them.” Even if Sanders never runs for



office again — a prospect that should not cause anyone a loss of sleep — his campaign will reverberate for many years. That so many of his supporters are under age 30 guarantees this.

Third, populism is more about preserving economic gains for the middle- and lower-middle classes than about asserting a “pure” libertarianism or conservatism. Historically, these movements have drawn support from farmers, small businessmen, skilled blue-collar tradesmen, and civil servants, each in their way beset with insecurity. George Wallace, by far the foremost populist of his time, a man who embodied both the best and worst aspects of populism, understood this. Back in 1968, when running for president as an Independent (he had run as a Democrat in 1964), his stump speech contained this brief tribute to the common man: “This man in the textile mill, this man in the steel mill, this barber, this beautician, the policeman on the beat.” It wasn’t exactly Walt Whitman or Carl Sandburg, but it had a poetic ring. The man knew his audience. And his audience lapped it up. Far more than any animus he may have harbored toward blacks, his ability to capitalize on a growing estrangement from economic and political elites explains why he won 13.5 percent of the national popular vote. Yes, he was a demagogue, regularly caricaturing his targets with outrageous and inflammatory taunts. Yet in a weird way he was an honest demagogue, addressing real grievances. That bought him a lot of support outside as well as in the South.

Wallace voters didn’t go away after that election. Many were absorbed into the Nixon base, becoming part of the marketing niche, “the silent majority.”⁸ Wallace’s presidential prospects, far from dimming, grew even stronger. Until that fateful day on May 15, 1972, when he was paralyzed for life by a would-be assassin during a campaign stop in Laurel, Maryland, Wallace was a first-tier candidate for the Democratic Party nomination, right up there with his main rivals, George McGovern and Hubert Humphrey. In 1980, many among his natural base, especially white urban ethnics in the North, became Reagan Democrats. They were a major reason why the Republicans won back their governing coalition that year — and kept it for a dozen more years.

OBSTACLES TO POPULIST SUCCESS

Populism and the Right thus can and do mix. *They just don’t mix that often.*

Leaders of the Right may take advantage of a situation in which large numbers of people feel grievance and loss. But they can’t create that feeling. They only can ride the wave while hopefully refraining from inciting mob instincts. Populism is a double-edged sword. On one hand, it is a terrific corrective to the abuses of power and a strong reminder of national collective identity. On the other hand, it can be a nasty piece of work

when people feel that they are losing their jobs, identity, property, and freedom. Under such circumstances, reason often takes a back seat to raw emotion. An aggressive “us vs. them” psychology can produce demagogues and mindless mass fawning over them.

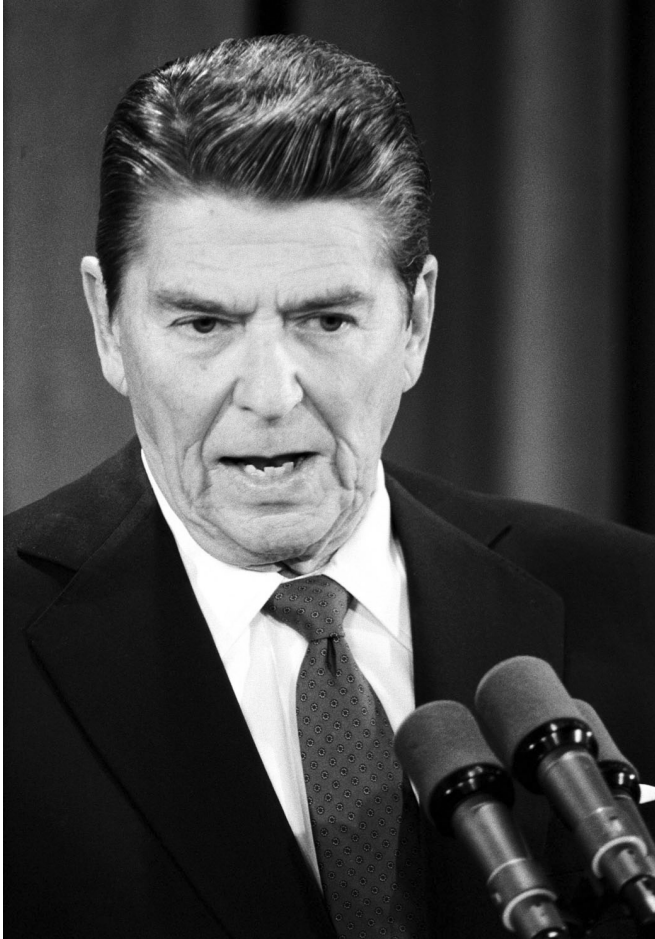
Even when level-headed, populism may identify the wrong “them.” Conservative populism, in particular, may not be effective or even all that conservative. Case in point: California’s Proposition 13, a genuine populist movement.⁹ For those who can remember back that far, Proposition 13 was a June 1978 ballot initiative to amend the state constitution to limit real estate taxes on homes, businesses, and farms. The wording was complicated, but in essence it said that a locality could not raise property taxes by more than one percent in any given year without first obtaining two-thirds voter approval. This movement generated tremendous alarm among those fearing the populist impulse. Here was a pair of aging white men, Howard Jarvis and Paul Gann, leading an uprising that could serve as a model for tax limitation uprisings in other states.

On closer examination, however, Proposition 13 was *not* a conservative ideological crusade, though it contained the raw material for one. The catalyst was a 1971 California State Supreme Court ruling, *Serrano v. Priest*.¹⁰ Originating in Los Angeles County a few years earlier, this decision ordered the equalization of expenditures across local school districts regardless of tax effort. The court effectively told established middle-class communities that they had to subsidize poorer ones. Most of the people feeling the pinch were middle-aged and elderly white homeowners. These people were hardly poor, but most were not wealthy either. Their home was their prime asset. Property taxes, the main source of funding for public schools, were increasing rapidly. Many people feared losing what had taken decades to accumulate. And they resented being ordered to transfer their wealth to people who owned or produced little of it.

Proposition 13 passed by nearly two to one. Opponents filed suit. The case eventually made its way to the U.S. Supreme Court as *Nordlinger v. Hahn*.¹¹ In 1992, fully 14 years after passage, the Court ruled that the law was constitutional. Formally, Proposition 13 has been a success. It limited residential property taxes for large numbers of people and, as an indirect consequence, raised property values (and home prices for first-time buyers). It spawned similar successful initiatives, such as Proposition 2½ in Massachusetts. It was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court. And it’s still on the books. No California legislator has tried to repeal it. Yet where it matters most, Proposition 13 has not won. It made no effort to slow down, much less halt, the explosive population growth that was driving home prices skyward. And it was silent about escalating immigration by low-skilled laborers and their families from Mexico and

Central America; i.e., the kinds of people who not only lived in “poor” school districts, *but who were making them poorer simply by moving there.*

Proposition 13 was authentic populism. It was made of grass, not Astroturf. Yet it dealt with effects, not causes. As such, it was unable to stem larger social forces that gave rise to it. The same can be said of other populist Right movements, from the John Birch Society to the Moral Majority to the Tea Party.



Any attempt at achieving a populist Right fusion, then, quickly bumps up against hard limits. To be successful, populism must attract adherents and yet avoid alienating the majority of the population. Paradoxically, the process of attracting adherents means risking mass unpopularity. And the last thing that most political leaders (and their consultants) on the Right, especially in the Republican Party, want is to become unpopular. Some might say President Reagan’s genial, folksy, “straight talk” conservatism was the epitome of political success. Yet his greatest victories occurred when he took that genial, folksy style into attack mode. His firing of more than 11,000 illegally striking air traffic controllers in August 1981, entirely legal and justified, risked the wrath not only of PATCO and other labor unions aligned in solidarity, but also of millions of potentially stranded

commercial airline passengers. Likewise, his outspoken and frequent assertion that Communism was destined for the dustbin of history risked accusations, and not just from the Left, that he was a “warmonger” oblivious to the possibility of war with the Soviet bloc. The Soviet bloc did collapse, of course, and without the U.S. being drawn into a direct war — truly, a testament to the power of conviction politics.

Unfortunately, the issues on which Reagan most needed to take risks — race and immigration — were those from which he reflexively backed down. If Reagan really was a hardcore conservative, it is inconceivable that he would have signed the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act authorizing amnesty for 3 million persons, mostly from Mexico, illegally residing in this country. It is likewise inconceivable that he would have signed the 1983 legislation creating Martin Luther King Day, its honored personage anything but conservative. That he did sign these bills suggests a populism only fitfully of the Right. And this was Ronald Reagan! Less still can be said on behalf of his putative successors such as George Bush the Elder, George Bush the Younger, Newt Gingrich, John McCain, Mitt Romney, and Jack Kemp. Each in his own way proved unwilling to bring opprobrium upon themselves if there was any chance of being tagged a “racist.”

A BRIEF CHECKLIST FOR WINNING (MOST OF THE TIME)

This leads to a paradox: Populism plays well during election time, yet “populists” of the Right who get elected seem unable or unwilling to challenge the main sources of populist discontent. If anything, they seem eager to adopt the views of their accusers in hopes of hoisting the latter on their own collective petard. The key to a successful Rightist-populist fusion would seem to be winning elections, but without fearing fallout from easily offended voting blocs, especially racial minorities. Three principles to meet this challenge come to mind.

Principle No. 1 — Put identity over ideology. Many on the Left will interpret this as “white racism.” Let them. It’s an empty charge. The response should not be the usual retort from Conservatism Inc.: “Liberals are the real racists.” Such a response is at once politically futile and historically ignorant. The proper response should be: *What’s so bad about defending the American historic identity?* That, however, is a question from which the mainstream Right flees. Asserting that white lives matter, in their mind, could jeopardize reputations and careers.

Of course, ideology is a factor in any program. But it is not the *defining* factor. Every modern nation from France to Russia to Israel to Japan has its own version of Right vs. Left. The fights can get bitter. But in the end,

they are manageable if a clear majority of the people share a common ethnicity, language, religion, and sense of history. It's when identity disintegrates — especially when encouraged by unaccountable leaders — that the Left becomes truly lethal. Much as one ought to oppose socialism, history has shown that it is possible to reverse its march. One cannot say the same of national identity. Once dismantled, it is almost impossible to reassemble.

Principle No. 2 — Engage our nation; don't disengage from it. For all that is wrong with us, there is still a lot more that is right. There is something reprehensible about giving up on America. Assuming that remaining here is preferable to migrating somewhere else, it is crucial that we keep the nation together despite all the political and cultural differences. National populism otherwise is not possible.

Secession, and its close relative, a voluntary breakup, ought not be an option. Lately we have been hearing a multitude of calls for splitting up the U.S. into two separate countries, one Leftist and the other Rightist. On the surface, it is an attractive solution to seemingly irreconcilable political and cultural conflict. Yet I believe that such a breakup would be disastrous, both for populism and for the Right. Consider:

- Neither nation, at least from the outset, would be ideologically homogeneous. Nor can “pure” homogeneity be sustained over the long run, even by blocking the flow of people and information. All “blue states” have red patches and all “red states” have blue patches. Should a political litmus test be required for citizenship in order to ensure a permanent majority in each new nation? Even without forcible removals of dissenters, mass migration along political lines is an unappetizing prospect.
- Once initiated, the process could be self-perpetuating. That is, individual states themselves could face a secession crisis. The Atlanta area, for example, leans liberal; the rest of Georgia leans conservative. Should metro Atlanta secede from Georgia? Or vice versa? California might well split off into northern and southern states. Carried to its logical conclusion, the result would not be two countries, but rather a patchwork of mini-countries. How would Americans be more free or prosperous, given such a scenario?
- Forcing people to minimize if not cease contact with others on account of political differences — and that is exactly what a national breakup seeks — will not assure peace. There always will be strong disagree-

ments, even with political authority devolved to the communal level. Frankly, the idea of mandatory unanimity of opinion carries a whiff of totalitarianism. Why should across-the-board cognitive affirmation be a prerequisite for a functioning nation? Have we lost our capacity to resolve conflict through negotiation and compromise? One can learn a lot from someone with a different point of view. Consider the old saying in romance: Opposites attract.

- The history of secessionist governments, here and elsewhere, has shown that a break-away nation is more likely to suffer than the nation from which it has severed ties. A renegade conservative American nation would be vulnerable to invasion and isolation. It would face boycotts of a magnitude potentially dwarfing that which brought down apartheid-era South Africa and ushered in something far worse. Even on libertarian grounds, there is a strong case to be made against secession.¹²

Advocates of a national breakup no doubt have thought through such possibilities. But they do not appear to grasp the full range of potential unintended consequences. A mutual breakup would do far more than pose temporary inconveniences. It would invite mass trauma and possibly all-out war. Whatever the benefits of a national divorce, they are not worth the risk — and certainly not at this point in time.¹³

There will always be strong differences of opinion in any legalized union — whether of 300 million-plus people or just two (i.e., “marriage”). Simply by remaining a European-derived and English-speaking majority, America can minimize the possibility of a political implosion. It would be far better for populists to pursue such a strategy than to attempt to assimilate, inevitably in vain, large numbers of unassimilable immigrants in hopes of pleasing the editors of *Time* or *The Weekly Standard*.

Principle No. 3 — Elevate an audience; don't appeal to its base instincts. In addressing an audience, whether in print or the spoken word, we should use light more than heat to make a point. And we should be open to criticism. Few things are more depressing these days than reading Web posting boards and social media pages, where posters seek to banish “trolls” from their safe space. Enforced unanimity of opinion is at once tyrannical and boring. And it doesn't build consensus on the issues. Populism and anti-intellectualism, regrettably, have a long history of marching hand in hand. It's a partnership to avoid. If populism of the Right is to have a lodestar, let it be Thomas Jefferson, not Sarah Palin.

TRUMP TRIUMPHANT?

Here one concludes, inevitably, as one began: with the Donald Trump presidency. I will grant that Trump’s loud and coarse style may create tension in our relations with other countries. And we should know by now that all politicians on some level will disappoint loyal followers. Politicians are creatures of calculated self-interest. They will do what it takes to get and stay elected. Trump is no exception. Yet the alternative — i.e., Hillary Clinton, Jeb Bush, or someone like them — would be much worse. Such leaders would be tone deaf to the imperative to preserve national identity, especially if it means restricting immigration from certain countries.

The incoming Trump presidency will run into ferocious opposition from the suites, the streets, and the campus quad. His avowed enemies will include: members of Congress; federal judges; renegade officials within the executive branch; news media outlets; and countless Social Justice Warrior bloggers. Anarcho-Left street rallies will erupt, Guy Fawkes masks optional. Opposition researchers will dig ever deeper into Trump’s public and private life to uncover his history of “racist” comments. Clergymen will inject anti-Trump references into their Sunday sermons, claiming that if Christ were here today he would be seeking impeachment. The National Council of La Raza and other mass immigration non-

profit groups will escalate their rhetoric and fundraising. Samantha Bee, Trevor Noah, Steve Colbert, and other “fake news” comedians will tell cartloads of snarky — i.e., unfunny — anti-Trump jokes on the air.

In the face of this, it is crucial that we see the larger picture. The new Trump administration will experience setbacks, but that is a part of political life no matter who holds power. More importantly, the Trump administration presents a rare and possibly one-time opportunity to advance further a political realignment *already* under way. The result just might be a recovery of our diminished sense of national identity and purpose. We have a lot of work ahead. ■

ENDNOTES

1. Ronald Reagan won presidential election landslides in 1980 and 1984. But were they *conservative* landslides? Evidence suggests not. The Reagan Center, a partnership between the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and the Center for Civic Education, for instance, cites 1980 post-election data indicating that only 28 percent of the total electorate identified itself as “conservative.” More tellingly, only about 10 percent of Reagan voters identified their conservatism as a key motivation. See “Why Was Ronald Reagan Elected President?” <http://reagan.civiced.org>.



2. Mark Krikorian, "Post-Americans: They've Just 'Grown' Beyond Their Country," *National Review Online*, June 22, 2004. The author writes: "A post-American may actually still like America, but the emotion resembles the attachment one might feel to, say, suburban New Jersey — it can be a pleasant place to live, but you're always open to a better offer. The post-American has a casual relationship with his native country, unlike a patriot...Put differently, the patriot is married to America; the post-American is just shacking up."
3. Carl F. Horowitz, *Sharpton: A Demagogue's Rise*, Falls Church, Va.: National Legal and Policy Center, 2015.
4. The best overviews for understanding populism are: Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998; Margaret Canovan, *The People*, New York: John Wiley, 2005; Jan-Werner Muller, *What Is Populism?* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016; John Judis, *The Populist Explosion: How the Great Recession Transformed American and European Politics*, New York: Columbia Global Reports, 2016.
5. While the origin of this quote is somewhat in doubt, there is no question these words amply reflected Jefferson's disdain for the idea of a national bank. See: www.monticello.org/site/jefferson/private-banks-quotations.
6. Populism in modern Europe, more so than here, has a national identity. There are two plausible reasons. First, European nations are smaller geographically and hence have less of a reason to place a premium on regional identity. Second, almost all these nations during the last quarter-century have answered to an increasingly unaccountable supranational body, the European Union (EU), led by Germany all but in name. The EU appears determined to force mass immigration from unassimilable cultures upon member nation-states. In this light, national populism is a rational response. The U.S., though beholden to a variety of trade and military treaties, does not face an analogous situation. For a good partisan (i.e., pro-populist) overview in the aftermath of the British exit ("Brexit") from the EU, see Frank Furedi, *Populism: A Defence*, www.spiked-online.com, November 2016.
7. *U.S. Term Limits, Inc. v. Thornton*, 514 U.S. 779 (1995). By a 5-4 margin, the Supreme Court ruled that states cannot impose qualifications upon Congress that are more restrictive than those specified in the Constitution.
8. This outcome was very much the realization of a deliberate and sensible political strategy advanced by Kevin Phillips, a Nixon campaign and then White House aide. See Kevin Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority*, New York: Arlington House, 1969.
9. See Arthur O'Sullivan, Terri A. Sexton, and Steven M. Sheffrin, *Property Taxes and Tax Revolts: The Legacy of Proposition 13*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995; Jack Citrin and Isaac William Martin, eds. *After the Revolt: California's Proposition 13 Turns 30*, Berkeley, Calif.: University of California, Berkeley, Institute of Governmental Studies, 2009.
10. 5 Cal.3d 584 (1971).
11. 505 U.S. 1 (1992).
12. See Jonathan Blanks, "Why 'Libertarian' Defenses of the Confederacy and 'States' Rights' Are Incoherent," Libertarianism.org, February 22, 2012.
13. Supporters of an American political divorce, believing it can be amicable, may cite the peaceful "Velvet" divorce of Czechoslovakia that went into effect at the start of 1993. If the Czechs and Slovaks could go their own way without bloodshed, the argument goes, surely Red State and Blue State America can do likewise. But this facile assurance ignores a couple of salient realities about former Czechoslovakia. For one thing, from 1968 onward the Czech and Slovak nations *already* were separate republics, although obviously with that arrangement forced upon them. The overthrow of Soviet Communist control in the fall of 1989 made a permanent mutual split virtually inevitable. More broadly, Czechs and Slovaks are distinct peoples. Their main differences are ethnic and linguistic, not ideological. Czechoslovakia came about as a result of the collapse of the Hapsburg monarchy immediately following World War I. As its identity from the start was schizophrenic, any post-breakup trauma was bound to be minimal. By any reasonable assessment, former Czechoslovakia is *not* comparable to present-day America.