

## DEFINING DICTATORSHIP DOWN

### **We Underestimate the Threat to Liberal Democracy Posed by the Mutual Necessity for President Trump and the Republicans to Institutionalize Republican Minority Rule Right-Wing Populist Plutocratic Dictatorship**

By John Seip. Updated [with corrected date for Republican Chair McDaniel's interview with Lou Dobbs] and adapted from "[The Invitation: Vote Democrat to Save Liberal Democracy from Republican Right-Wing Populist Dictatorship](#)" at Twitter: [@johnjseip](#).

In 1993 former Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY) wrote an essay titled "Defining Deviancy Down," in which he argued that deviancy had increased to such an extent in American society that, for social control purposes, much deviant behavior had been redefined as "normal," implying a moral devaluation of behavior had occurred in the United States. Unprepared to address the expansion of deviancy beyond expected bounds, society had "*normalized*" it.

Similarly unprepared to address the rise of dictatorship on the part of President Trump and the Republican Party, for political purposes, much dictatorial behavior has been redefined as "normal," implying a moral and legal devaluation of dictatorial behavior has occurred in the United States. Unprepared to address the expansion of dictatorial behavior beyond expected bounds, the nation has normalized it, undermining the values and institutions of liberal democracy, and imperiling it now and in the future.

Masha Gessen, a Russian-born American journalist and author, observed in her [article](#) that appeared days after the 2016 election, and in her 2020 book, *Surviving Autocracy*, that Donald Trump was probably the first major party nominee "who ran not for president but for autocrat." She, similarly, addresses our inability to respond to the behavior of Trump and the Republicans, and observes that an impediment to our understanding what is happening to the United States is that we lack the terminology to describe it, and offers suggestions. However, even her choice of words in describing our current state—an "autocracy" ruled by the "autocrat" Donald Trump—does not carry with it the gravity of the also accurate characterization of our condition as a budding "dictatorship" ruled by the wannabe "dictator" Donald Trump.

Additionally, we *do* have existing terminology we can use to describe our current state, and that terminology is accompanied by the context of American history. The description for this political philosophy is that used by Steve Bannon, the latest former advisor to President Trump charged with a felony: "right-wing populism"—regarding which we can observe characteristics from our history in the Antebellum South and the Jim Crow ("Redemption") period following it. Even more accurately, it may be called "minority rule right-wing populist plutocratic dictatorship" for reasons following. And those who vote for President Trump or any Republican, knowingly or not, are supporting a dictator as president and a party that supports his dictatorship, actively undermining liberal democracy in the United States and around the world.

How we got here is understandable, given that the Republicans, once Donald Trump arrived, as observed by Stuart Stevens, former Republican strategist, in his 2020 book, *It Was All a Lie*, were relieved to find that with Trump's victory in 2016 they could be "just a white grievance party" and

no longer needed to pretend to care about nonwhites (and, it can be added, women, those who will lose their health insurance with the disappearance of Obamacare, and those suffering from inequality) *and still win*. Having committed themselves to these principles, Donald Trump and his fellow Republicans face the mutual necessity on November 3<sup>rd</sup> to secure minority rule right-wing populist dictatorship, extending over the nation the dictatorial control Donald Trump has over the Republican Party, his administration (critically, including the Justice Department under Attorney General William Barr), the Senate under Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY), and soon the Supreme Court—by early on the night of November 3<sup>rd</sup> and thereafter declaring victory regardless of election results.

President Trump *has to win for himself*—if he loses the election, he faces over four hundred million dollars in debts due over the next four years and prison, along with the uncomfortable choice of moving to a country without an extradition treaty with the United States. President Trump *has to win for the Republican Party*—if he loses, liberal democracy is saved, potentially dooming the Republican Party to minority party status for as long as Republicans refuse to change their policy prescriptions to accommodate America’s changing demography, increasing recognition of women’s rights, increasing tolerance of diversity, and increasing intolerance of historically high levels of inequality.

With apologies to Ecclesiastes the Preacher, regarding today’s Republican Party, “All is cons and vexations of democracy.” The party name ought to more accurately be the *Republicon* Party. Stuart Stevens confirms that the Republican Party exists solely to serve the wealthiest Americans in *It Was All a Lie* observing, “A belief in the power of tax cuts is about as close as it can be to a definitional core belief that exists in the Republican Party.”

Admittedly, for now, what the Republican Party is promoting *sells*—at least for as much as 46 percent of the electorate, including about [92 percent](#) of the Republican Party—although:

- *Even before* the COVID-19 pandemic struck in the US and the commencement of recession in February, during the first three years of the Trump administration, the economy was performing worse than most other presidential administrations since 1980 and, since the start of the pandemic, the number of Americans receiving unemployment insurance benefits, from its peak at 32 million, even by mid-August exceeded [29.2 million](#) (before the 26-week expiration of many states’ unemployment benefits)—about 18.2 percent of the labor force of 160.8 million. The pace of hiring is slowing, so that Donald Trump will probably leave an economy with fewer jobs than when he took office;
- The incompetence of the Trump administration’s COVID-19 response has, with less than a month before the election, unnecessarily cost more than 210,000 lives, millions of jobs, and trillions of dollars, and has rendered Americans international pariahs unwelcome in most of the nations of Europe and Asia, even while the President repeatedly proudly touts his nonexistent “[China travel ban](#)”; and
- Donald Trump—who promotes racial division and violence; demands “law and order” as did [George Wallace](#) and Richard Nixon in racist dog whistles of half a century ago while disrespecting the law himself and thriving on chaos; and declared in his inaugural address, “This American carnage stops right here and stops right now,” while crime has gone *up* on his watch as president—is obviously the wrong person to have in the presidency at the very time most Americans want racial healing and serious police reform.

In an opinion piece for *The New York Times*, conservative David Brooks criticized President Trump as an “[immoralist](#),” but promoted an optimistic view of the future of liberal democracy, citing some examples of pushback from Trump's former supporters. However, the far larger threat to liberal democracy is the Republican minority rule right-wing populist plutocracy the President is promoting with his remaining base of support. While the President talks of a “silent majority” of his supporters, he has never reached majority approval in any polls since his election, which he won with a minority of popular votes. The real “silent majority” is the majority of Americans—typically around [53 percent](#)—who consistently disapprove of his actions. His support is from a “loud minority” disproportionately composed of Republican voters. The actual silent majority is not, as Republicans imagine, conservative. The actual silent majority is, as polls show, center-left and, on top of that, they are amenable to moving further to the left.

### **Get Obama Voters to the Polls and Pursue a New—Blue—Southern Strategy**

Democrats will likely defeat Donald Trump, enabling restoration of majority rule and liberal democracy if, on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, they simply get as many voters to the polls as they did in 2012—especially in Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin. While it is widely recognized that Hillary Clinton received 2.9 million more votes than Donald Trump and would have won in the Electoral College if she had won only 78,000 more votes appropriately spread across Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin, less widely recognized is it that if she had only garnered the same number of votes in those states as Barack Obama did in 2012, she would also have won the Electoral College and the presidency. Working against her were high unfavorability and the third-party candidacy of Jill Stein of the Green Party—neither of those impediments are present regarding the Biden-Harris candidacy. Additionally, President Trump has campaigned to energize his base, rather than expand his pool of potential voters.

In these last days before the 2020 election, Democrats must also pursue a [new version](#) of the Southern Strategy of Nixon—call it a “Blue Southern Strategy”—concentrating on appealing to college-educated voters, women, and people of color in Texas, Georgia, and Florida, complementing their success in Virginia and North Carolina (and other former Republican “Sun Belt” strongholds such as Colorado and Arizona). Democrats’ success in Virginia has been misattributed to simply appealing to liberals in its suburbs of Washington, DC, when, in fact, what was happening was the emergence of a coalition of constituencies composed of college-educated voters, women, and people of color—disproportionately represented among younger voters and many of whom live in the suburbs—turning the state Democratic. The story of this transition is still being told—with deference to the great historian C. Vann Woodward and his *Origins of the New South* (for reasons following, newly relevant to our present era), future political analysts might address the “origins of the Blue South.” Whatever effort is expended must be continued beyond 2020 because desperation will continue to drive Donald Trump and his fellow Republicans, and they must be stopped to save liberal democracy.

### **Liberal Democracy’s Concern for the “Common Good” and Republican Abandonment of It**

“Liberal democracy” is the philosophy inspired by the “classical liberalism” of the Enlightenment, and is a system of government in which representative democracy operates based on the principles of individual social, economic, and political freedom, subject to checks on the exercise of

individual social, economic, and political power. It includes the idea of universal suffrage accorded to all citizens after reaching a sufficient age, and majority rule, again subject to checks on exercise of political power, in a setting of capitalism, again, subject to checks on exercise of economic power. Additional examples of such liberal democratic values beyond the Constitution and checks and balances are respect for knowledge, science, and truth; tolerance (support for pluralism); equality (under the law and of opportunity); peace; the rule of law; and the peaceful transfer of authority atop the government after electoral defeat; all in a setting of humility.

President Trump and the Republican Party are actively undermining all these values and institutions of liberal democracy.

**Like dictators do, he is leading his party in actively sabotaging the upcoming election and refusing to commit to peaceful transfer of power if he loses.** Republicans, led by President Trump, are [actively undermining](#) liberal democracy's devotion to voting rights and free and fair elections. The President already floated the idea of delaying the election. He continually demands his Justice Department prosecute his opponent. The Trump administration actively sabotages the functioning of the Postal Service in an effort to question legitimacy of mail-in ballots. The President has issued, and continues to issue, baseless warnings of election fraud on Twitter in the hopes of throwing the election in battleground states to Republican-majority legislatures, in the hope that they will overrule their states' popular vote results favoring the Democrats and thereby secure Electoral College victory.

The President has repeatedly refused to pledge to abide by the basic requirement of a liberal democracy of peaceful transition of power if he loses. On September 23<sup>rd</sup>, he was confronted with a reporter's question, "Will you commit to making sure there's a peaceful transferral of power after the election?" President Trump replied, "Well, we're going to have to see what happens, you know that. I've been complaining very strongly about the ballots and the ballots are a disaster. ... Get rid of the ballots and we'll have a very peaceful—there won't be a transfer frankly. There will be a continuation. The ballots are out of control. You know it. And you know who knows it better than anybody else? The Democrats know it better than anybody else." White House spokesperson Kayleigh McEnany softened the President's message, but the next day he doubled down, saying, "We want to make sure that the election is honest, and I'm not sure it can be. We have to be very careful with the ballots. These ballots—you know, that's a whole big scam."

**Undermining liberal democracy's dedication to truth, knowledge, and science, instead promoting ignorance and false conspiracy-thinking typical of a dictatorship.** The political philosopher Hannah Arendt included "lying in politics," as revealed in the Pentagon Papers, among her "Crises of the Republic." A crisis is similarly presented by the lying of the Trump administration, led by Donald Trump himself, who, according to the count by Glenn Kessler of *The Washington Post*, had already by July of this year uttered over [20,000](#) false or misleading claims since his inauguration.

As observed by Senator Kamala Harris (D-CA) in the vice presidential debate October 7<sup>th</sup>, "You respect the American people when you tell them the truth." The participants in a liberal democracy need the truth from their leaders so that they can carry out their responsibilities as citizens. The values of dedication to truth, knowledge, and science are undermined generally by the administration's disregard for truth but, more specifically, they are undermined by the

administration's war on science that led to a botched COVID-19 response (including disbanding a pandemic team in his own White House, ignoring a pandemic response plan left it by the Obama-Biden administration, downplaying the risk, and peddling "miracle cures"), ignoring of climate change, and issuing numerous false and misleading claims regarding the economy.

At a Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention in Kansas City, Missouri, on July 24, 2018, President Trump told the gathering, "Just remember, what you are seeing and what you are reading is not what's happening. Just stick with us, don't believe the crap you see from these people, the fake news." He then pointed out reporters covering his speech (as he often does at his rallies), leading to boos and hisses from numerous veterans in attendance. His words ominously echoed those of George Orwell's *1984*, about a dystopian future dictatorship: "The Party told you to reject your eyes and ears. It was their final, most essential command."

A dictator cannot tolerate a free press, so he will attempt to destroy it and, instead, promote propaganda supportive of him. The President has undermined the First Amendment's freedom of the press, echoing contemporary and historical dictators, not only by supporting the propagandistic Fox News but also by criticizing the mainstream press as the "enemy of the people" on Twitter February 17, 2017, saying, "The FAKE NEWS media (failing @nytimes, @NBCNews, @ABC, @CBS, @CNN) is not my enemy, it is the enemy of the American People!" and on April 5, 2019, saying of the press, "They are truly the ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE!"

The promotion of false conspiracies by his followers—such as those of the online conspiracy movement called [QAnon](#) (a more extreme successor to the Tea Party)—undermine liberal democracy. A conspiracy promoted online in 2016 was incorporated by QAnon in October 2017. The conspiracy, driven by a fantastic interpretation of Clinton campaign advisor John Podesta's stolen emails, claimed that children were being held as sex slaves by a cabal of cannibalistic Satan-worshipping high level Democratic and Hollywood pedophiles. Belief in the nonsense drove a well-intentioned but deluded believer to drive up from North Carolina in December 2016 and to walk into a packed Washington, DC, restaurant with an AR-15 and shoot up a utility closet door in the hopes of freeing the children from a basement that, he found out, did not exist. The incident, dubbed "[Pizzagate](#)," led to his sentencing to four years in federal prison.

The Texas Republican Party adopted the slogan, "[We are the Storm](#)," in an intentional reference to QAnon's use of the term "the Storm" for the imagined appointed time in which President Trump, with the military, will unmask the cabal of pedophiles, which, as the election nears, QAnon has [expanded](#) to include Joe Biden in its baseless claims. In the August Republican primary in Georgia for a seat in Congress, avowed QAnon supporter, Marjorie Taylor Greene won, prompting President Trump on Twitter to call her a "future Republican star." As observed in *New York* magazine, [24 Republican followers](#) of QAnon are running for Congress. When asked his opinion of QAnon—designated by the FBI a domestic terrorist group—the President replied, "Well, I don't know much about the movement, other than I understand they like me very much, which I appreciate."

**Undermining tolerance and dedication to pluralism by promoting racial hatred.** The President has continued to fan the flames of racism and white supremacy (more on that below), from his announcement of his candidacy characterizing Mexicans as "bringing drugs" and



“bringing crime” to his administration’s [gratuitous cruelty](#) toward immigrant families, separating parents from their children, some mere infants.

**Undermining dedication to equality by promoting policies further upwardly redistributing income and wealth.** The United States is experiencing record high levels of income inequality documented in a recent Rand Corporation report titled “[Trends in Income from 1975 to 2018](#)” and wealth inequality documented by the [Federal Reserve](#) (which revealed the top 1 percent hold 15 times more wealth than the bottom 50 percent combined, and over 30 percent of all household wealth in the US). Put another way, as observed by [Bloomberg](#), the 50 richest Americans hold as much wealth as the poorest 165 million, or half the population. President Trump has exacerbated that inequality with the signing of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, disproportionately benefitting the richest 1 percent, and by urging the Federal Reserve to constantly lower interest rates, thereby inflating asset bubbles—inflating the values of assets such as real estate and stocks—ownership of which is disproportionately concentrated among the richest Americans.

The economic philosophy of President Trump and the Republican Party is trickle-down economics, correctly identified as a con by former President Barack Obama when he observed of it in a campaign trail speech in December 2011, at a venue (Osawatomie, Kansas) visited 100 years before by Theodore Roosevelt:

It doesn’t work. It has never worked. It didn’t work when it was tried in the decade before the Great Depression. It’s not what led to the incredible postwar booms of the ‘50s and ‘60s. And it didn’t work when we tried it during the last decade. I mean, understand, it’s not as if we haven’t tried this theory.

*Numerous studies expose the trickle-down con as well—the economy has historically done better under Democratic presidential administrations than under Republican.* Among the earliest of these was a report by Michael Kinsley, “[Politicians Lie, Numbers Don’t](#),” *Slate.com*, September 16, 2008. Several studies released in 2012 confirmed Kinsley’s conclusion (among them: Bob Drummond, “[Private Jobs Increase More with Democrats in White House](#),” *Bloomberg Business*, May 8, 2012; Richard Carroll, “[Democratic Presidents Are Better for the Economy](#),” *Bloomberg Business*, June 25, 2012; the 2012 book *Bulls, Bears, and the Ballot Box: How the Performance of OUR Presidents Has Impacted YOUR Wallet*, by Lew Goldfarb and Bob Deitrick; and the study by Ameriprise Financial, “Presidential Election 2012, released September 26, 2012.) *Salon.com* returned to the argument in late 2015 with an article by Sean McElwee, “[These 5 Charts Prove that the Economy Does Better under Democratic Presidents](#),” *Salon.com*, December 28, 2015. Among the findings addressed therein, the economy under Democratic presidents averaged: higher GDP growth, a lower unemployment rate, higher stock market returns, higher corporate profits, higher compensation growth, and higher productivity increases. Additionally, income growth is faster and more equal under Democratic presidents. A study by two Princeton University economists published in the *American Economic Review*, April 2016, also confirmed better economic performance under Democratic presidents (Alan S. Blinder and Mark W. Watson, “[Presidents and the Economy: An Econometric Exploration](#)”).

Even *before* COVID-19, the idea that the Trump Economy was booming was a con. Stock market performance, as measured by the S&P 500, was greater during the first three years of the Obama

Economy than under the first three years of the Trump Economy, and job growth under the Obama Economy's last three years exceeded by *1.52 million jobs* the job growth under the first three years of the Trump Economy. However, GDP growth was slightly better during Trump's first three years in office—up 2.5 percent—versus Obama's second term—during which GDP was up 2.3 percent. For broader historical perspective, though, according to a [February 2020 study by Axios](#) of average annualized GDP growth, growth of the Trump Economy—even before COVID-19—was only the sixth best among all president's terms since 1980. Of course, too, the Trump Economy's final GDP growth numbers will be substantially lower due to the recession that started in February 2020 and Trump's gross mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Regarding the economy under COVID-19, President Trump has observed that US employers added more than 9 million jobs in May, June and July of this year—but he neglected to mention that that was fewer than half the 22 million jobs that were lost in March and April as the economy, under his watch, slid into recession.

The Democrat Barack Obama is not alone among those who see trickle-down as a con. Republican Senator Marco Rubio of Florida, in an interview with *The Economist* (April 26, 2018), echoed Barack Obama's observations about trickle-down in his comments regarding the Trump administration's Tax Cuts and Jobs Act:

There is still a lot of thinking on the right that if big corporations are happy, they're going to take the money they're saving and reinvest it in American workers. In fact they bought back shares, a few gave out bonuses; there's no evidence whatsoever that the money's been massively poured back into the American worker.

Of course, the real reason for the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act was not promotion of the common good, in the form of the benefits described by Senator Rubio. The real reason was explained by President Trump when he told his wealthy guests at Mar-a-Lago, December 22, 2017, after he had signed the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act into law earlier in the day: "You all just got a lot richer."

**Encouraging violence and undermining peace.** President Trump attacks the value of peace as he repeatedly encourages violence on the part of his base and treats the Department of Homeland Security as his private militia, as he did when he had his Attorney General William Barr order the military and Homeland Security forces to break up a peaceful protest so that he could stand in front of a church and mutely display a Bible. He encouraged threats of violence on the part of right-wing terrorist groups in his April 17<sup>th</sup> Twitter messages: "LIBERATE MINNESOTA!" and "LIBERATE MICHIGAN!" and "LIBERATE VIRGINIA, and save your great 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment. It is under siege!" Armed militia groups gathered outside the Michigan State Capitol several times after these messages were sent. He followed up in the September 29<sup>th</sup> presidential debate with the message to the white supremacist Proud Boys: "Stand back and stand by." On October 8<sup>th</sup> the US Attorney for the Western District of Michigan announced arrests had been made in breaking up a plot by a right-wing terrorist group to kidnap Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan. The deployment of paramilitary militias to spread terror and undermine liberal democracy is, of course, another similarity President Trump's right-wing populism shares with fascism.

**Undermining the rule of law.** The President's repeated devotion to "law and order," as observed above, can only be interpreted as a racist dog whistle, for his actions betray a disdain for the law—most blatantly exemplified by his repeated violations of federal election law banning the solicitation of campaign aid from foreign nationals, commencing with his seeking aid from Russia as a candidate in the 2016 election ("Russia, if you're listening..." July 27, 2016), continuing through the 2020 election campaign as President regarding Ukraine ("I would like you to do us a favor though," July 25, 2019), for which he received blessing in impeachment proceedings by fellow Republicans in the House and Senate, and regarding China ("China should start an investigation into the Bidens..." October 3, 2019). Additionally, he followed these actions by repeated obstructions of justice in blocking congressional investigation into the solicitations from Ukraine, actions also blessed in impeachment proceedings by fellow Republicans in the House and Senate (except for Utah Senator Mitt Romney).

**Undermining liberal democracy's value of humility.** President Trump's bluster is the opposite of the humility urged by proponents of liberal democracy. He began with his claim in front of the 2016 Republican National Convention (RNC): "Nobody knows the system better than me, which is why *I alone* can fix it." He has only continued his assault on humility, refusing, even after contracting COVID-19 himself, to admit he was wrong to promote that it was a "hoax" and mask-wearing was unnecessary.

**Undermining the concept of "the common good."** Liberal democracy at its core holds concern for "the common good" is the highest political value—perhaps best summed up in the truism that we all do better when we *all* do better. The concept of the common good appears in the Preamble to the Constitution, in one of the purposes recited for the enactment of the Constitution: to "promote the general Welfare."

In the liberal democratic vision, government policy, the market, and civil society all influence, and are influenced by, each other. In his book, *Statecraft As Soulcraft: What Government Does* (1983), the conservative commentator George Will presented a conservative vision of this interrelationship, but one very consistent with conservatism's roots in liberal democracy.

Will addressed both liberals "and those who call themselves conservatives" when he said, "Politics is more difficult than you think" (a departure from conservative and right-wing populist orthodoxy) and "there is more to a social system than can be presumed." Will quoted Justice Felix Frankfurter: "Law is concerned with external behavior and not the inner life of man;" to which he responded: "The purpose of this book is to say why that proposition is radically wrong." Will approvingly quoted the liberal Daniel Patrick Moynihan: "A purpose of politics is to facilitate, as much as is prudent, the existence of worthy passions and the achievement of worthy aims. It is to help persons want what they ought to want." Moynihan's quote was similar to another of his, perhaps more familiar: "The central conservative truth is that it is culture, not politics, that determines the success of a society. The central liberal truth is that politics can change a culture and save it from itself."

These ideas from Will and Moynihan are consistent with the liberal democratic vision of using government to promote liberal democratic values with the utilitarian end of providing for the common good—providing the greatest sum of happiness to the greatest number of people.



The Republican evolution away from concern for the common good began with the embrace, during the 1980 presidential campaign of Ronald Reagan, of trickle-down economics, which provided for tax cuts oriented to the richest Americans and business, cuts to business regulations designed to protect the health and safety of Americans, and cuts in social safety net spending upon which the non-rich rely. Underlying trickle-down was the self-serving philosophy of the plutocrats atop the Republican Party that we all do better when the rich do better, simplifying policymaking to the principle that promotion of the common good means promotion of policies to help the rich.

Trickle-down perverted the ideal of classical liberalism to the simple defense of “freedom” to use one’s property as one sees fit—when, in reality, liberal democracy from its beginnings sought to impose checks on freedom. A critical question for the new government of the United States was how to ensure that, given the new nation’s philosophical commitment to freedom, no one person or group could achieve concentrated power. From the Enlightenment, a crucial idea in liberal democracy is that conflict and struggle over power are inevitable in society. That idea appears in James Madison’s *The Federalist* No. 10, published in 1787, where he referred to what is called today “class conflict” as conflict among “factions” divided by “unequal distribution of property”:

[T]he most common and durable source of factions has been the various and unequal distribution of property. . . . The regulation of these various and interfering interests forms the principal task of modern legislation, and involves the spirit of party and faction in the necessary and ordinary operations of the government.

Note that Madison was talking about class conflict more than 30 years before Karl Marx was even born (in 1818). Madison and his fellow architects of the Constitution addressed the inevitability of conflict by providing for popular elections and representative democracy, and the power resulting from elections tempered by checks and balances. Liberal values and institutions enforce that system of checks and balances, and thereby temper both the potential for harm inflicted by the *politically and socially* powerful on those lacking such power, and the potential for harm inflicted by the *economically* powerful upon the have-nots.

Thus, self-interest under classical liberalism was exercised subject to self-imposed restraint—it was *enlightened* self-interest, combatting individualism and selfishness for the common good, as exhibited in the works of two other classical liberal philosophers, one French and the other Scottish. Alexis de Tocqueville titled a chapter in his *Democracy in America* (1835) “How the Americans Combat Individualism by the Doctrine of Interest Well Understood”—in the original French, “*Comment les Américains combattent l’individualisme par la doctrine de l’intérêt bien entendu.*” Similar notions of the importance of restraint on self-interest and power appear in Adam Smith’s *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) and *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). A quote from Adam Smith’s *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* provides a relevant critique of attitudes in his time that resonates today regarding our attitudes toward the rich (and election of Donald Trump):

This disposition to admire, and almost to worship, the rich and the powerful, and to despise, or, at least, to neglect, persons of poor and mean condition, though necessary both to establish and to maintain the distinction of ranks and the order of society, is, at the same time, the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments. That wealth and greatness are often regarded with the respect

and admiration which are due only to wisdom and virtue; and that the contempt, of which vice and folly are the only proper objects, is often most unjustly bestowed upon poverty and weakness, has been the complaint of moralists in all ages.

Under President Trump, the Republican Party has jettisoned concern for the common good, adopting the philosophy of minority rule right-wing populist plutocratic dictatorship, promoting only those policies that benefit the rich and those whose support they need to stay in power.

### **Republican Minority Rule Dictatorship Driven by Mutual Desperation**

Dictatorships do not, necessarily, come into being as result of majority will. Rather, they may come into being in a liberal democracy out of demographic and ideological desperation—out of a desperate attempt by a minority to obtain power or retain power already held—which that minority recognizes will disappear in a functioning liberal democracy.

The necessity for Donald Trump to win the election for his own benefit has never been clearer than was made in the article in *The New York Times* on the President's [tax returns](#), revealing that he is personally liable for loans and other debts totaling \$421 million, with most of it coming due within four years. He must bet that, if he wins re-election, he can, after the COVID-19 threat passes, resume collecting tens of millions of dollars in tributes—"emoluments" in the language of the Constitution—from his properties as revealed by [Forbes](#) magazine and [The New York Times](#) and forestall lawsuits based on that debt plus prison arising out of the criminal investigations of him that have been underway for several years.

The necessity of the Republicans for Donald Trump to win comes from the realization by Republican leaders that their party is in deep trouble. Commencing with Bill Clinton's win in 1992, the Republicans have failed to secure a popular vote plurality in six of the last seven presidential elections, and the election in November will almost certainly make that seven out of the last eight—and this election will also almost certainly repeat majority support for the Democratic presidential candidate, as did the elections of 2008 and 2012.

Even though they currently hold the White House, the Senate and, presumably, soon, a 6-3 conservative majority in the Supreme Court, along with numerous governorships and state house majorities, Republicans know that their prospects for the longer term, due to demographic and ideological changes, including changing attitudes toward rising inequality and increased cultural tolerance of diversity, look dim. As was also observed by Stuart Stevens in *It Was All a Lie*, according to the U.S. [Census Bureau](#), beginning in 2018, non-Hispanic white residents made up less than half (49.9%) of the nation's under age 15 population. Demographic and ideological changes help make it more likely that Democrats will win the four most populous states—California, Texas, Florida, and New York—in presidential elections in November and beyond, putting the presidency out of Republican reach for many years to come.

Recognition that demographic and ideological changes are working against the Republicans drove former Speaker of the House Paul Ryan (R-WI) to commission the famous report referred to as the "[autopsy](#)" after Barack Obama won back-to-back majorities in 2008 and 2012—the first president to accomplish that since Republican Dwight Eisenhower in 1952 and 1956. The autopsy recommended outreach to women and minorities. The urgings of the autopsy were ignored by

Donald Trump and his supporters who rode a right-wing populist strategy combining trickle-down economics and appeals to religious fundamentalism with white resentment to victory thanks to the anti-democratic Electoral College.

Recognizing their desperate situation, Republicans are proceeding with filling the Supreme Court vacancy created by the passing of Justice Ginsburg although [62 percent](#) of Americans believe the vacancy should be filled by the next president. Republicans' newly-found rationale for the Senate proceeding with confirmation hearings in the last year of a presidency, as opposed to when the Democrats held the White House, is that the same party holds the White House and Senate majority—allegedly reflecting majority will. This is nonsense, as President Trump won the Electoral College with 2.9 million fewer votes than Secretary of State Clinton, and Republican Senators received about [15 million](#) fewer votes than their Democratic colleagues in the Senate.

The Republican minority rule dictatorship project is evidenced in the rushed confirmation of Judge Amy Coney Barrett, following Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's abdication of the Senate's role of advice and consent by refusing to bring before the Senate President Obama's Supreme Court nominee, Merrick Garland, as well as his refusal to bring before the Senate [105](#) Obama-Biden federal court nominations. The President and his fellow Republicans thus expose her nomination as a purely political exercise of raw minority power grab to thwart majority will. The President [demands](#) she be seated with the expectation that, with a 6-3 conservative majority in the Supreme Court, he will most likely be able to get the Supreme Court to disregard outstanding mail-in ballots and declare the election in his favor. More broadly, Republicans will demand overturning of *Roe v. Wade* (1973), providing a federal right to an abortion, favored by [70 percent](#) of Americans (thereby also undermining the rationale for the 1965 case of *Griswold v. Connecticut*, providing a federally protected right to contraceptives); the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) ensuring affordable healthcare for millions of poor Americans and those suffering from pre-existing conditions, favored by [56 percent](#) of Americans; the recognition of LGBT rights in the form of constitutional protection for same-sex marriage, favored by [61 percent](#) of Americans; and protection of voting rights guaranteed by the Voting Rights Act of 1965, favored at its passage by [76 percent](#) of Americans. They will also attempt to destroy unions, with a case to extend the holding of *Janus v. AFSCME* (2018), that public sector union employees may not be forced to pay to support the union collectively bargaining on their behalf, to all workers (thus making the ill-named "right-to-work" principle federal law).

President Trump is the dictator Republicans have been waiting for, as evidenced by their having supported his securing of dictatorial control over the Republican Party, making loyalty to him the litmus test of party membership, as he has called to heel Texas Senator Ted Cruz (whose wife and father he insulted), Florida Senator Marco ("Little Marco") Rubio, who in 2016 called Donald Trump a "con man;" and South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham who in 2015 called Donald Trump "a race-baiting xenophobic bigot." As Ronna Romney McDaniel, Chair, Republican National Committee, told Lou Dobbs on Fox Business Network (June 12, 2018), "[I will say proudly that the Republican Party is the Trump Party.](#)"

President Trump's actions as a dictator of his administration are familiar. Generally, as dictators do, he rejects the rules as applicable to others and lives by his own rules. In particular, in addition to his undermining of the election, he demanded an Attorney General who would serve him—not

the nation—like the notorious (and later disbarred) Roy Cohn served his father and him—and got it with William Barr. He has secured dictatorial control over his administration, re-writing CDC warnings and sidelining health advisors at the CDC, the FDA, and the National Institute for Allergies and Infectious Diseases who expose his incompetence at handling the COVID-19 pandemic. He attempts to dictate to the nation's governors, demanding they ignore medical science and quickly reopen restaurants and schools and public gatherings in their states, thereby endangering the people they serve, in hopes it will aid his re-election campaign.

President Trump leads crowds at his rallies in chants of “12 more years!” We know he will claim the election was “rigged” by Democrats if he loses and, if he wins, according to his former counsel Michael Cohen, seek to amend or circumvent the 22<sup>nd</sup> Amendment. He openly admires dictators, among them Russia's Vladimir Putin (whose denial of interference in the 2016 election he accepted over his own intelligence agencies), China's Xi Jinping, The Philippines' Rodrigo Duterte, and Kim Jong Un, the communist dictator of North Korea, of whom he said after their meeting, “We fell in love.”

### **Right-Wing Populism in the Vision of David Duke**

The views that Donald Trump is talking about now were David's platform decades ago.

—Mike Lawrence, David Duke's campaign manager for his unsuccessful 2016 run for the Republican nomination for the US Senate, quoted in [The New York Times](#).

Over the quarter century from Republican former Klansman David Duke's failed run for governor of Louisiana in 1991, when he received roughly 55 percent of the white vote (after receiving roughly 60 percent in his failed run for the US Senate the year before), to its 2016 election presidential victory, the Republican Party evolved from its historical devotion to conservatism to minority rule right-wing populist plutocracy, comfortable with dictatorial rule and abandonment of liberal democracy. The account of this history below addresses ideology; another perspective is provided by Adam Serwer of *The Atlantic* in his November 2017 article, “[The Nationalist's Delusion](#).”

Paleoconservative columnist Samuel T. (“Sam”) Francis, authored, in the magazine *Chronicles*, in February 1992, “[The Education of David Duke](#).” The column was a commentary on the 1991 Louisiana gubernatorial election and among its lessons was the depth, breadth, and intensity of Duke's support among whites. Francis speculated that notwithstanding Duke's defeat, future historians might look on the election as a turning point in history. Francis keenly observed that the success Duke had was attributable to addressing people's “political, cultural, and economic dispossession,” and Duke's defeat he accurately attributed to intense opposition from business and religious leaders (although he neglected to mention also the staunch opposition from African Americans, roughly 25 percent of the electorate in Louisiana).

The following month, libertarian economist, Murray Rothbard, in the [March 1992 issue](#) of the *Rothbard-Rockwell Report* authored “A Strategy for the Right” in which he urged his fellow libertarians to join with paleoconservatives like Pat Buchanan and support right-wing populism. Among the elements of the prevailing vision of conservatism, fashioned by William F. Buckley

Jr. at *National Review* magazine in the 1950s, was “libertarianism,” understood as, essentially, classical liberalism, with its attendant concern for the common good, applied to the modern age. Rothbard redefined libertarianism as devoid of classical liberalism’s concern for common good, viewing “common good” a goal of a repressive State. Rothbard combined this new vision of libertarianism with paleoconservatism—which shared with traditionalism a distrust of free trade and capitalism generally, in opposition to libertarianism—which he urged followers to overlook.

Pat Buchanan, and later Roger Stone, Steve Bannon, and Donald Trump, derived lessons from the success and shortcomings of David Duke’s campaigns that carried America over the quarter century evolution from the “Dukism” of a failed run for Governor of Louisiana in 1991 to the “Trumpism” of the successful 2016 presidential campaign, proving the Republican Party could win by discarding conservatism and its values of liberal democracy for right-wing populism, enabling it to add to its existing constituencies of the rich, business, and the religious, the resentful.

For further insight regarding the nature of Trump’s right-wing populism, it is instructive to observe that David Duke continues to support President Trump, and President Trump has appeared to acknowledge it. On August 12, 2017, at the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, David Duke was quoted on video saying, “This represents a turning point for the people of this country. We are determined to take our country back. We are going to fulfill the promises of Donald Trump. That’s what we believed in. That’s why we voted for Donald Trump, because he said he’s going to take our country back and that’s what we gotta do.”

That same day, President Trump addressed on Twitter the violence accompanying the torch lit protest of the night before: “We ALL must be united & condemn all that hate stands for. There is no place for this kind of violence in America. Let’s come together as one!” (12:19 PM - Aug 12, 2017; before 1:45 pm., when a car driven by a white nationalist plowed into a crowd of counter-protestors and killed a young woman counter-protestor).

David Duke replied on Twitter less than one hour later (from the rally but, again, before the tragedy), “I would recommend you take a good look in the mirror & remember it was White Americans who put you in the presidency, not radical leftists.” (1:03 PM Aug 12, 2017.)

The message appears to have been received by President Trump. Two days later, asked to address the death of the young woman counter-protestor, President Trump had changed his tune, saying, “I think there is blame on both sides. You had some very bad people in that group. But you also had people that were very fine people, on both sides.” (The President was including as “very fine people” those comfortable in the company of white supremacists promoting violence.)

The following year, at a campaign rally in Houston, October 22, 2018, President Trump declared himself a “nationalist,” saying:

A globalist is a person that wants the globe to do well, frankly not caring about our country so much. And you know what? We can’t have that. You know, they have a word. It sort of became old-fashioned. It’s called a nationalist. And I say, really, we’re not supposed to use that word. You know what I am? I’m a nationalist, OK? I’m a nationalist.



David Duke replied the next day on Twitter, interpreting Trump's nationalism as "White Nationalism":

Trump Embraces Nationalism in a Massive JamPacked 99.9 percent White Venue in Houston! Zio Journalists asked him if this is White Nationalism! Of course fundamentally it is as, there is no ethnic or racial group in America more Nationalist than White Americans... So What's the Problem?  
—David Duke, Twitter, 1:45 p.m., October 23, 2018.

As recently as this past summer Duke offered advice to President Trump in his re-election campaign with the recommendation to drop Mike Pence for Fox News' Tucker Carlson:

Trump & Tucker is the only way to stop the commie Bolsheviks! It is the only path to beat them!  
—David Duke, Twitter, 10:46 p.m., July 8, 2020.

Parenthetically, an important distinction to make is that right-wing populism is *not* fascism because, although it shares with fascism hatred of liberal democracy, it does not promote imperialism (the military conquest of other nations) as does fascism. (A summary of fascism's principles is provided in the 1932 essay "[The Doctrine of Fascism](#)," by Benito Mussolini and Giovanni Gentile; refer also to Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and the actions of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany.)

### **"Right-Wing Populist Plutocratic"**

It may sound counterintuitive to put "right-wing populist" next to "plutocratic," because a right-wing populist movement is always, at least partly, a movement against elites. However, the elites opposed by right-wing populism are elite intellectuals and those wealthy elites dedicated to liberal democracy. Wealthy elites who are more concerned about using political power to advance their own economic power are inclined to join with right-wing populists.

The "genius" of right-wing populism, thus, is that as it promotes support among resentful non-rich whites for policies supporting the rich, it also divides the non-rich against each other based on color, thus dividing workers and undermining any attempts to organize across color lines for better wages, better working conditions, and a stronger social safety net.

The reason for right-wing populism's political union of resentful whites and plutocrats is explained in the concept of the "Conservative Dilemma," introduced by Harvard political scientist Daniel Ziblatt in his 2017 book, *Conservative Parties and the Birth of Democracy*, to describe the problem conservatives have had from the beginning in liberal democracies of how to convince the non-rich majority to vote for policies that favor the rich minority. Conservative elites, feeling their status threatened by liberals, must inculcate in non-elites an appreciation that *their* status, too, is threatened, by cultivating in their non-elite constituency a sense that—even though they are not aristocracy—they enjoy privileges bestowed and maintained by the conservative aristocracy that separate them from other members of the nation, and their privileges are under attack by liberals

and members of the liberal constituency who are not as deserving. Thus, the goal of conservatism has always been defense of the authority of an *aristocracy* by means of government establishment of *privilege*, although in a setting of liberal democracy in which the goal is the common good.

Conservatism, as observed by Corey Robin, professor of political science at Brooklyn College and the CUNY Graduate Center, in *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Donald Trump* (2018), has always been a reactionary philosophy formed in reaction to the threat of, or actual loss of, power due to liberalism. Conservatism arose in reaction against the classical liberal ideals formed during the Enlightenment, which placed authority (subject to checks and balances) in the hands of the people and challenged traditional sources of authority—the aristocracy consisting of the monarchy, the landed aristocracy, and the clergy. However, while founded in *reaction to* liberal democracy, conservatism was not a *rejection of* liberal democracy.

Right-wing populism shares with conservatism the Conservative Dilemma, however, in contrast to conservatism, right-wing populism rejects liberal democracy. President Trump disdains labeling his philosophy, but his 2016 campaign and later administration advisor, Steve Bannon, has been more direct. In November 2018, Bannon participated in the Munk Debate in Toronto, against David Frum, former speechwriter for President George W. Bush and an editor of *The Atlantic*. The motion before them: “Be it resolved: the future of Western politics is populist not liberal.” Bannon rejected liberal democracy as a failure and proclaimed, “The future belongs to populism. It is only going to be defined by asking if it’s left-wing populism or conservative and right-wing populism....” In that statement, he projected his illiberalism onto his opponents, claiming, erroneously, that Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders’ left-wing populism also rejects liberal democracy.

What we are seeing from Donald Trump and his fellow Republicans is not conservatism, but right-wing populist plutocratic dictatorship, part of a global movement to destroy liberal democracy. Donald Trump, with Steve Bannon, created an alternative to conservatism that combined with the proposed policies of trickle-down and religious support appeals to white resentment. This new Republican minority rule right-wing populist plutocratic dictatorship shares characteristics with the right-wing populism appearing in many other Western liberal democracies such as the UK (Cambridge Analytica, of which Bannon was a founder and officer, worked with the pro-Brexit Leave.EU and Nigel Farage), France (the National Rally of Marine Le Pen), Italy (Lega Nord, of Matteo Salvini), Hungary (Fidesz, of Viktor Orban) and the Netherlands (the Dutch Party for Freedom, of Geert Wilders), as well as Israel, Russia, Turkey, Brazil, and India. All promote, in varying degrees, rejection of liberal democracy, and all have fared worse in COVID-19 response than South Korea, Germany, and New Zealand, with responses guided by science.

Several of the European right-wing populist and neo-fascist movements are gathered under a Belgium-based umbrella organization “The Movement,” dedicated to promotion of right-wing populism globally, and of which Bannon assumed leadership. Bannon’s activities in The Movement are addressed by Benjamin Teitelbaum in *War for Eternity* and in the 2019 Netflix documentary *The Brink*, covering Bannon’s actions to mobilize right-wing populist and neo-fascist elements in advance of the 2018 midterms (his efforts at that time are also addressed by Nico Hines in *The Daily Beast*—see [Inside Bannon’s Plan to Hijack Europe for the Far-Right](#)”).

Right-wing populism, from its time in the Antebellum South, through Jim Crow, and its present revival, has always worked by conning non-rich whites that the privileges conveyed upon them by the white aristocracy because of their skin color justify their siding with the white aristocracy—the plutocracy—rather than their neighbors of color situated similarly economically. In the words of W. E. B. DuBois in *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935), “It must be remembered that the white group of laborers, while they received a low wage, were compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological wage...” This observation was echoed by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in his speech at the end of the March from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, March 25, 1965, where he observed, “If it may be said of the slavery era that the white man took the world and gave the Negro Jesus, then it may be said of the Reconstruction era that the Southern aristocracy took the world and gave the poor white man Jim Crow.”

As observed above, and consistent with the observations of DuBois and King, C. Vann Woodward’s book has renewed relevance regarding the Republican Party of Trump. The book’s full title is *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*, and among its observations is its description of the Southern aristocracy who, after losing the Civil War, under the name of the “Redeemers,” sought to “redeem” the South as it existed before the Civil War, opportunistically capitalizing on the desperate conditions of poor whites, promoting Jim Crow’s racism to divide and conquer workers. The opportunistic capitalizing of the plutocrats who support Trump’s Republican Party on the desperation of poor whites suffering under the trickle-down policies promoted by Republicans is linked to the era of the Redeemers by Adam Serwer in his essay in *The Atlantic*, “[Is This the Second Redemption?](#)” and Henry Louis Gates Jr. of Harvard University in his op-ed in *The New York Times*, “[The ‘Lost Cause’ That Built Jim Crow.](#)”

### **Use Your Power to Save Liberal Democracy and Its Value of Majority Rule**

In this election and elections beyond, please use *your* power: Vote Democrat to stop the march of Republican minority rule right-wing populist plutocratic dictatorship and its destruction of liberal democracy.

On November 3<sup>rd</sup>, Democrats will almost certainly expand their majority in the House. If Democrats are able to take back the White House and secure a Senate majority, they should immediately use *their* power and enact measures to legislatively take back majority rule.

Among the possible legislation to promote majority rule: End the filibuster; restore voting rights along the lines of the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act; provide a pathway to citizenship for “Dreamers” in a Dream Act; expand the Supreme Court to 13 seats—12 corresponding to each of the Courts of Appeals, and headed by a Chief Justice; provide statehood for Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico if its residents approve; pass “[Bidencare](#)” to attach to the Affordable Care Act and add to it a poison pill providing that in the event all or any portion of the ACA, as amended, shall be struck down as unconstitutional, Medicare coverage shall begin at birth; and commence the amending of the Constitution to abolish the Electoral College and substitute for it majority popular vote.

Our liberal democracy hangs in the balance.