

## **“JIM CROW 2.0”: THE RESENTMENT-DRIVEN REPUBLICAN RIGHT-WING POPULIST REALIGNMENT**

*The promotion of resentment politics by Donald Trump has realigned the Republican Party from its historical guiding ideology of conservatism, defender of the values of liberal democracy, to right-wing populism of the New Right—“Jim Crow 2.0”—dedicated to Republican minority rule right-wing populist plutocratic, theocratic, and authoritarian illiberal democracy. The choice for voters in 2024 and beyond: Vote for Democrats in the existential battle to save liberal democracy or allow Republicans to destroy it.*

By John Seip

*Spoiler alert:* The original inspiration for the Republican right-wing populist New Right came from arch segregationist former Alabama Governor George Wallace, but that influence languished before reinvigoration by former Klansman and neo-Nazi David Duke, driving the Republican Party realignment of today from conservatism to right-wing populism of “Jim Crow 2.0.”

The Republican Party led by Donald Trump has been corrupting the morals of our nation since he announced his candidacy in 2015. He and his fellow Republicans promote the idea that all rich people and politicians cheat, and only because he stands up for the “the real people” as he puts it is he being singled out for prosecution. With the help of his fellow Republicans, Trump promotes dysfunctional values—anti-American values—to his fellow Americans.

These values are a threat to destroy liberal democracy in a Trump 2.0 and include resentment, fear, hatred, racism, ethnocentrism, xenophobia, cruelty, greed, selfishness, lust for power, lying, cynicism and hypocrisy regarding ethics and laws, amorality, stealing, cheating, conspiracy mongering, ignorance, misogyny, anger, violence, and the attitude that sacrifice for the United States of America is for “suckers and losers.” Republicans used to say, “character matters.” For today’s Republicans, it clearly does not, and dysfunction reigns in the party, as illustrated by the recent debt showdown and removal of Republican Kevin McCarthy as Speaker of the House.

President Biden succinctly captured the end goals for the right-wing media and the would-be plutocrats who vote Republican—*profit*—and Republican politicians—*power*—and the method for achieving these goals: *spreading “fear and lies,”* in a speech he delivered [September 1, 2022, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania:](#)

Donald Trump and the MAGA Republicans represent an extremism that threatens the very foundations of our republic...They promote authoritarian leaders, and they fan the flames of political violence that are a threat to our personal rights, to the pursuit of justice, to the rule of law, to the very soul of this country...MAGA Republicans look at America and see carnage and darkness and despair. They spread fear and lies—lies told for profit and power.

“Fear”—as in when Donald Trump said, in an interview March 31, 2016, while running for president, “Real power is—I don’t even want to use the word—fear.” “Lies” as in the lie that he won the 2020 election.

*And yet*—the broader truth is even worse. There is a sanguine attitude among the “mainstream” media, repeatedly claiming Donald Trump is no ordinary candidate but nonetheless treating him as an ordinary candidate. Perhaps this is based on a misperception that Trump’s popularity is due to his persona alone, so that the threat he presents to liberal democracy is limited—because it is personal—and it ends if he loses the 2024 election. For reasons that follow, this is a dangerously naïve opinion that contributes to the risk of the nation becoming in 2024 an illiberal democracy ruled by Donald Trump as dictator for life.

### **The Resentment-Driven Republican Right-Wing Populist Realignment Results from Ideology and Trump’s Persona**

There is good reason to believe that what Trump has unleashed is a resentment-driven realignment of the Republican Party based on right-wing populism, appropriately termed “Jim Crow 2.0,” as identified in the July 14, 2021, column by Charles Blow, Opinion columnist for *The New York Times* (“[Welcome to Jim Crow 2.0.](#)”) This essay draws an analogy between our era and Jim Crow of a previous era—an era marked by voter suppression efforts by the Democratic Party in the South for roughly 90 years, from the end of Reconstruction in 1877 to 1968 (following the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Voting Rights Act of 1965, and Fair Housing Act of 1968).

He observed in a follow-up essay, “[Trump’s ‘People’ Means His People.](#)” *The New York Times*, September 27, 2023, that the theme of “Jim Crow 2.0” evokes the idea of “a particular form of populism, one aimed at xenophobes and subversives.” He continues:

This is, I believe, why Trump maintains strong support even as his legal troubles grow: He has been unflinchingly loyal to one portion of the body politic, and his followers are simply reciprocating.

They don’t worry about Trump torching the country if he’s re-elected, because they believe that they will frolic in the ashes. They believe that whatever benefits Trump will eventually benefit them. Trump has deceived his people into believing in trickle-down tyranny.

More broadly, Trump has prompted a resentment-driven right-wing populist realignment of the Republican Party in pursuit of a Republican minority-rule right-wing populist plutocratic, theocratic, and authoritarian illiberal democracy, reminiscent of that practiced by the Democratic Party during Jim Crow. He has given permission to his followers to vent their resentments as he plays on their gullibility. It is no coincidence that the most hideous political violence of the right-wing populism of Jim Crow—lynching—was revived as a threat at the Jim Crow 2.0 right-wing populist inspired January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection with the erection of a gallows and repeated calls of “Hang Mike Pence!”

The idea that an ideologically driven realignment has overtaken the Republican Party is currently a minority opinion. An exchange among panelists on [ABC News’ This Week, September 17, 2023](#), is instructive. Senator Mitt Romney (R-UT) had earlier in the week announced, in a statement critical of his Republican Party, that he would not be seeking re-election. Panelist *POLITICO*’s Jonathan Martin observed to host Jonathan Karl, regarding the Republican Party Senator Romney was criticizing, “This to me, Jon, is what realignment looks like in real time.” Fellow panelist

senior editor of *The Dispatch* and former Justice Department spokesperson in the Trump administration, Sarah Isgur agreed, adding, “The Republican Party at this point is going through one of the fastest realignments I think we’ve seen in politics in the last 100 years.”

Martin added that the realignment is “not even ideological...It’s a cult of personality...This decade’s challenge for Romney is...it’s persona, not policy.” There is good reason to agree. Ronna McDaniel, Chair, the 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.](#)” The Republican National Convention’s 2020 platform statement was a one page document containing only one statement regarding policy: “[RESOLVED: That the Republican Party has and will continue to enthusiastically support the President’s America-first agenda.](#)” As Donald Trump said [campaigning in the Republican primary in 2016 in Iowa](#), “I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody, and I wouldn’t lose any voters, OK? It’s, like, incredible.” Polls continue to show him leading fellow Republican candidates for the 2024 presidential nomination.

There is also good reason, however, to believe that Trump’s success is not simply due to *a cult of personality* but, rather, is also due to his revival of *the cult of right-wing populist ideology* of Jim Crow long dormant in American politics and, as this was the dominant ideology of a large part of the country for nearly a century, the resultant realignment should be expected to outlast him.

Senator Romney, [in his September 13, 2023, statement](#) regarding why he would not seek re-election, addressed the Republican Party: “My wing of the party talks about policy and about issues that will make a difference in the lives of the American people. The Trump wing of the party talks about resentments of various kinds and getting even and settling scores and revisiting the 2020 election.” The Republican Party today promotes resentment politics like the resentment politics promoted in the Jim Crow South for nearly a century—and like the resentment politics promoted in fascism.

Senator Romney, [in a quote to biographer McKay Coppins that appears in \*The Atlantic\*, November 2023](#), observed he and his fellow Republicans *feared violence from Trump supporters* and observed, “A very large portion of my party really doesn’t believe in the Constitution.” This again provides parallels to the Jim Crow South, in which violence was promoted in pursuit of political goals and flimsy legal theories such as “states’ rights,” “nullification,” and “interposition” were promoted to negate the mandates of the Constitution.

Roger Stone, former adviser to Richard Nixon and Donald Trump, provides the context for the Republican Party’s return to resentment politics in one of “Stone’s Rules” (expletive deleted from the quote): “The past is prologue.” The past is Jim Crow, the prologue for Jim Crow 2.0.

### **The Dual Cons that Right-Wing Populism Has Not Replaced Conservatism in the Republican Party and of Right-Wing Populism Itself**

Former Vice President Mike Pence, in an address to the New Hampshire Institute of Politics at Saint Anselm College in Manchester, [September 6, 2023](#), observed, “Should the new populism of the right seize and guide our party, the Republican Party as we have long known it will cease to exist. And the fate of American freedom would be in doubt.”

Former Vice President Pence joins other Republican Party leaders and allies on the Right in promoting the con that the Republican Party is still the party of conservatism, a con that gets support from the public because so little attention in the media is given to right-wing populism, and Republican Party leaders recognize the threat to their party and their power if they fail to maintain this con.

The “new populism of the right,” however, more accurately, the right-wing populism of the New Right of the Republican Party—contrary to what is implied by former Vice President Pence—*has already seized and taken over guidance of the Republican Party, has already caused the Republican Party as it has long been known to cease to exist, and is already taking away freedom from millions of Americans*, and it is engaged in replacing liberal democracy with illiberal democracy.

*It is too late for any Republican to save the party and the liberal democracy it threatens. Only the American voter can save liberal democracy from its destruction, by voting for Democratic candidates for office in 2024 and beyond, until right-wing populism is no longer the guiding ideology of the Republican Party.*

The con that the Republican Party has not surrendered to right-wing populism is joined by another con—the con of right-wing populism itself, spreading white resentment, fear, and hatred, dividing white voters against non-whites by indulging their resentment in exchange for their support for tax cuts for the rich and other policy measures to upwardly distribute income and wealth. Right-wing populism is “faux populism;” “an alliance of big money and cultural grievance” as described by Hannah Gurman, associate professor at NYU’s Gallatin School of Individualized Study, in “The Aristocrats,” *The Baffler* (September-October 2023).

To promote these dual cons would require a “con man” as Donald Trump was referred to by Florida Senator Marco Rubio [on the 2016 campaign trail in Oklahoma City](#) and of whom journalist Matt Taibbi warned America: “He’s no ordinary con man. He’s way above average—and the American political system is his easiest mark ever.” (“[How America Made Donald Trump Unstoppable](#),” *Rolling Stone*, February 24, 2016.)

### **The Resentment Politics Promoted by Right-Wing Populism**

The power Trump’s Republican Party holds over the electorate is due in great part to Trump having grown up in Queens with a wealthy father who cultivated in him resentment toward minorities and liberal elites in Manhattan, resentment that, as a wealthy con man, the younger Trump was able to channel politically to resonate with the resentments of working class whites and to promote cynicism against all the institutions of liberal democracy.

Reminiscent of George Wallace’s rant against “[pointy-headed intellectuals](#),” the resentment politics of the Republican Party targets several of our institutions, among them, the military, federal government, Justice Department, FBI, schools, colleges and universities, libraries, and science (especially vaccines and climate change).

Donald Trump was promoting resentment politics in 1989, when he purchased full-page ads in all four New York City newspapers calling for the death penalty for all of “[the Central Park Five](#)”—African American and Hispanic young men accused of raping and assaulting a young woman

jogger in Central Park—and later exonerated (although Trump to this day refuses to admit he was wrong). Trump again promoted resentment politics as he joined the birther movement promoted by [the reactionary Tea Party](#) claiming Barack Obama was not qualified to be president because he was not born in the United States. This was nonsense from the beginning because even if Obama had not been born in the United States, his mother was American, thus, he was a “native born American” as the Constitution requires (and qualified in the same manner as Republican Senator Ted Cruz who was born in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, but to an American mother). The birther movement exposed the truth that for many Tea Partiers, the movement was never really about budgets but, rather, racism—resentment that an African American had the affrontery to run for and win the presidency.

### **Resentment Politics Is So Powerful Facts Don’t Matter to Its Cult Members**

It is tempting to marshal the facts showing the Biden administration has done far more to help the working class Americans who Trump claims to fight for than did the Trump administration. And it is easy to find examples of Trump’s mental unfitness for office, while polls of potential voters continue to reflect greater concerns about Joe Biden’s mental fitness to serve. Donald Trump—less than three years younger than President Biden—over the space of just one month claimed seven times in an interview on *Meet the Press* [that Democrats favor abortion “after birth”](#)—even after being corrected by the moderator; before a religious gathering [claimed he defeated Barack Obama](#) in the general election in 2016 and again in 2020, and warned that Joe Biden will “get us into World War I;,” implied in [Truth Social post](#) Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley deserved execution for treason for his reaching out to China to assure the Chinese then-President Trump was not going to launch an attack in association with January 6<sup>th</sup>; and, in [a speech in South Carolina](#), misspoke that he had run in the Republican primary against George W. Bush (confusing him with brother Jeb).

Resentment politics, however, is so powerful that it creates a cult of believers for whom facts don’t matter. As observed by David French, Opinion -editor for *The New York Times* in [“The Rage and Joy of MAGA America”](#) (*The New York Times*, July 6, 2023), this cult creates a raucous sense of community among its members. They are united by their victimhood, resentments, their “it’s not working for me, so burn it all down” cynicism, and their shared entertainment with the “Greatest Show in Politics” provided by a charismatic leader who they believe hears them, and they exert pressure on other members to remain true to the faith of the cult. This cult exists within a larger Republican tribe of members who do not agree with Trump but enjoy profit and power from their membership in the tribe.

Historically, conservatives in the Republican Party have defended liberal democracy. The conservative William Kristol, co-founder of the now defunct conservative magazine *The Weekly Standard*, in [a November 2016 essay](#) observed, “One of the historic tasks of American conservatism has in fact been to preserve and strengthen liberal democracy.”

He was stating a truth about conservatism that goes back to its inception, in the writings of the Anglo-Irish social philosopher Edmund Burke, especially his 1790 pamphlet *Reflections on the Revolution in France*: Conservatism was founded *in reaction to* liberal democracy’s threats to the monarchy, the Church, and the landed aristocracy but *not as a rejection of* liberal democracy. Conservatives, thus, join with modern liberals in defending liberal democracy, although occasionally disagreeing with modern liberals regarding application of the values of liberal democracy when application of these values conflicts. Accordingly, Kristol fervently opposed



Trump in the pages of his magazine until, due in great part to its editorial opposition to Trump in the face of Republican embrace of him, the magazine folded.

Regarding policy, a [Fox News poll conducted in February 2023](#) found voters preferred Democrats over Republicans on abortion by 58 percent to 38 percent. That same poll found voters also preferred Democrats on climate change, health care, Medicare, Social Security, energy policies, voting rights, election integrity, and school curriculum.

However, that poll found voters preferred Republicans over Democrats on the economy—yet, as Donald Trump himself in 2004 explained, he was a Democrat then “[because the economy does better under the Democrats](#).” David Leonhardt, a senior writer at *The New York Times*, in a 2021 study [confirmed](#) that GDP growth, job growth, income growth, productivity growth, and stock market performance over the past century have all performed better under Democratic presidents than Republican. A CNN study [also found](#) that, from the Reagan through Trump administrations, the stock market performed better under Democrats.

Yet, numerous polls show Donald Trump and President Joe Biden in a deadlock heading into the 2024 presidential election. Insight regarding Trump’s attraction was provided during the 2016 presidential campaign, when journalist John Heilemann, then of Bloomberg Politics, organized a 12-person focus group in New Hampshire to discuss 2016 presidential candidate Donald Trump. Of Trump, focus group member “Jane” said, “He’s like one of us. He may be a millionaire...but beside the money issue he’s still in tune with what everyone is wanting.” Other focus group members admired that he “says it like it is,” “he speaks the truth,” “he’s just tough,” and “he tells you his opinion”—although they admitted that they had not “heard a lot of positions.” They believed that a Trump presidency would be “classy” and looked forward to his “calling everybody out.” (See Chris Cillizza, “[The Single Most Amazing Sentence from a Focus Group of Trump Supporters](#),” *The Washington Post*, July 30, 2015.)

Similarly, a 2016 Fox News poll found many of Trump’s supporters saying they were voting for him because—[as an ABC News poll found had been said by voters for David Duke a quarter century before](#)—“[he will shake things up](#).” And, tapping into their resentments, he did.

The movement Trump has created will survive him because both major parties have failed the working class, as [inequality of income and wealth have grown massively since 1980](#) and the resentment politics of right-wing populism, like the resentment politics of fascism, cons voters into thinking that the leaders promoting these ideologies genuinely care about raising—and will promote policies that actually will raise—the living standards of the working class and others among the non-rich. And, this appeal to resentment is addictive. Right-wing populism has created a political crisis disproportionately affecting the white working class, like the opioids that created a health crisis of “[deaths of despair](#)” identified by economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton in their 2015 paper “[Rising Morbidity and Mortality in Midlife Among White Non-Hispanic Americans in the 21st Century](#).”

### **The Recurring Republican Dream to “Make America Great Again” as in an Imaginary 1950s**

Ronald Reagan promised as he accepted his party’s nomination for president on July 17, 1980, [at the 1980 Republican National Convention in Detroit](#): “For those who have abandoned hope, we’ll restore hope, and we’ll welcome them into a great national crusade to make America great again!”

Reagan’s pledge was, as is the Republican Party of today’s pledge, to return America to an imaginary golden era in the past—often thought of as the 1950s, before the 1960s and the movements for civil rights and women’s rights.

Donald Trump returned to his echo of Reagan’s promise in his March 6, 2023, speech to the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), saying “We started a great, great, positive revolution. Nobody’s ever seen anything like it before. It’s called Make America Great Again. We want to make America great again.”

[A 2021 poll by the Public Religion Research Institute](#) found, among Republicans, *70 percent said life had changed for the worse since the 1950s* (and 68 percent believed the 2020 election was stolen). Donald Trump not only promises to continue his Make America Great Again revolution to take America back to the 1950s but talks to his supporters *as though they are paranoid voters of the 1950s*, [saying before supporters in Georgia](#), “Either the Communists win and destroy America, or we destroy the Communists” and, of Fani Willis, Fulton County District Attorney, she is a “lunatic Marxist.” Trump’s speech in June 2023 accepting the Oakland County, Michigan Republicans’ “Man of the Decade” award contained [a word salad of 1950s enemies](#): “Every time the radical left Democrats, Marxists, communists, and fascists indict me, I consider it a great badge of honor and badge of courage. I consider it both. Essentially, I’m being indicted for you.”

*The 1950s that Republican Party leaders and politicians want to return to was during the era of Jim Crow*, with racial segregation and second class citizenship for racial minorities and women. [The horrendous murder of Emmett Till](#) for allegedly whistling at a white woman occurred in 1955. This part of idealized history is airbrushed out, as well as the fact that 1950s America was that of WASP—white Anglo-Saxon Protestant—heterosexual men, and the Republican Party was the epicenter of WASP rule, with non-Anglo-Saxon ethnics and Catholics generally belonging to the Democratic Party. As recently as 1960 John F. Kennedy, on the presidential campaign trail, felt obligated to trek to [Houston to address the Greater Houston Ministerial Association](#) to allay concerns of Protestants that, as the first Catholic president, he would not be taking direction from the Vatican.

Ronald Reagan’s first campaign stop after accepting the Republican Party’s presidential nomination—where he began his campaign to “Make America Great Again,” like it was in the 1950s—was August 3, 1980, at the Neshoba County Fair in Philadelphia, Mississippi, where he declared his support for the Jim Crow ideology of “[states’ rights](#)” in the city in which three civil rights workers had been murdered just 16 years before. As president, Reagan would declare in his first Inaugural Address in 1981, “government is not the solution to our problem; government *is* the problem”—taken by the extremist Right as a dog whistle that government is the enemy.

Returning to Charles Blow’s second essay, elaborating on all the above:

It isn’t as simple as saying that Trump wants to drag the country backward. He wants to do something far more destructive: He wants to marry the country’s more intolerant past to a more autocratic future. He wants to bend his brand of straight white male nationalism into a kind of totalitarianism. That his definition of “the people” is implicit, not overt, only helps him.”

## Resentment Politics Drives the Pursuit of Illiberal Democracy by Right-Wing Populism and Fascism: Why This Matters

[“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.”](#)

Elections shape politics, and the potential for politics to work for good was observed by former Harvard University professor and Democratic Senator from New York, Daniel Patrick Moynihan.

As observed by Barack Obama, when he paraphrased Moynihan’s lesson in *The Audacity of Hope* (2006) (page 63) “government” (being *derived from* politics) holds the potential to shape culture in ways that help society, but also in ways that *harm* society. Politics and government shape culture in ways that help or harm society by promoting certain *values*.

The Enlightenment provided the values of Western liberalism—of liberal democracy. While there is no definitive list of the values of liberal democracy, a representative list includes universal suffrage upon achieving a prescribed age; majority rule subject to protection of minorities; checks and balances and separation of powers; respect for the rule of law under the Constitution including its First Amendment protections and the peaceful transfer of authority after electoral defeat; a capitalist economic system with private property, subject to regulations preventing monopoly and for the protection of the environment, health and safety, combined with a social safety net; “enlightened self-interest;” respect for knowledge, science, reason, and truth; empathy, unity, and tolerance (support for pluralism); love of and compassion for our fellow humans and all living creatures; equality (under the law and of opportunity); goodness; justice; trust; and peace; all in a setting of humility.

As observed above, conservatism, historically the guiding ideology of the Republican Party, joins with modern liberalism in defending the values of the Enlightenment—of liberal democracy—although differing in how to apply those values when they come into conflict. In contrast to conservatism, right-wing populism rejects the values of the Enlightenment—of liberal democracy—and promotes illiberal democracy and minority rule plutocratic and theocratic authoritarianism.

Right-wing populism promotes power any way that it can be achieved, and in its drive for power, it disrespects majority rule and the rule of law under the Constitution, and the peaceful transfer of authority after electoral defeat. It promotes the suppression of voting rights and efforts to reject opponents’ victorious election results. It disrespects knowledge, science, reason, and truth. It rejects empathy for “others” and promotes division, intolerance, and hatred based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and religion. It promotes victimhood, resentment, and white grievance, and rejects equality both under the law and of opportunity. In its promotion of paranoia and conspiracy, right-wing populism undermines trust. It rejects peace and sacrifice in defense of the nation as for losers; and it promotes anger and violence for political ends. Finally, it rejects humility and adores leaders who do the same, as [did Donald Trump addressing the 2016 Republican National Convention](#) when he said, “Nobody knows the system better than me, which is why *I alone* can fix it”—although his voters in 2016 gave him four years to do so *and he failed*.

Love, itself, is a concept Donald Trump exhibits difficulty understanding, as illustrated by Trump’s [criticism of John McCain’s sacrifice in the military](#) of years in a POW camp out of love for his country and Trump’s calling those in the military who sacrificed and died out of love for their



country “losers” and “suckers.” Trump also [expressed wonderment](#) over the love Representative Steve Scalise’s wife displayed when he was in the hospital after being shot. Trump observed, when he brought flowers to Representative Scalise in the hospital, his wife “cried her eyes out when I met her at the hospital that fateful day ... I mean not many wives would react that way to tragedy, I know mine wouldn’t.” (Telling?!)

Donald Trump, ultimate leader of the Republican Party’s war against liberal democracy, does not even know what liberal democracy is. [At the G-20 news conference in Osaka, Japan, in 2019](#), Peter Baker of *The New York Times* asked Trump to comment on a quote he paraphrased (the actual quote follows) Russian President Vladimir Putin made to the *Financial Times* “that Western-style liberalism is obsolete.” Trump’s reply was an embarrassment to all Americans, as he showed his ignorance of the term “Western-style liberalism,” synonymous with “liberal democracy,” mistakenly believing the term refers to American liberals and the states of the western United States: “Well, I mean he may feel that way. He sees what’s going on, I guess, if you look at what’s happening in Los Angeles, where it’s so sad to look, and what’s happening in San Francisco and a couple of other cities, which are run by an extraordinary group of liberal people.”

“Illiberal democracy” is a term first prominently addressed by Fareed Zakaria in his 1997 *Foreign Affairs* article “[The Rise of Illiberal Democracy](#),” which he expanded upon in his 2003 book, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*. In illiberal democracy elections continue to be held, but, through various measures of voter suppression and corruption a corrupt—often minority—party wins and retains power. Illiberal democracy rejects the values of liberal democracy and institutionalizes crony capitalism, championing a winner-take-all, might-makes-right vision promoting hatred, anger, and violence to suppress those not in its favored group. It rejects both liberalism and democracy, in favor of authoritarianism.

Illiberal democracy is the stated vision of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, to whom Donald Trump gave his “[Complete support and Endorsement](#),” [as did Fox News’ Tucker Carlson](#), and the planners of the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), who held [their conference in Budapest](#) in May of 2022 and 2023. Orbán [in 2014 declared](#), in a speech to his Fidesz Party’s supporters in Romania, “The era of liberal democracies is over.” So popular among Republicans is Orbán’s ideal of illiberal democracy that [Orbán was invited to address the Dallas meeting of CPAC](#) in August of 2022—less than two weeks after he commented that Hungary must not become a “mixed-race” country. There he urged, “we should unite our forces.” [CPAC returned to Budapest in May of 2023](#), and on opening day Prime Minister Orbán endorsed Donald Trump.

The crisis we face is made more menacing by the fact that Democrats, liberals, and the mainstream media have long been aloof from political ideology. Bill Clinton famously downplayed the “liberal” label and floated “progressivism” instead. Barack Obama is among those who have correctly identified the Republican Party’s dominant ideology as “right-wing populist” as he did [in a 2020 interview with Jeffrey Goldberg in \*The Atlantic\*](#)—but expressed surprise that Trump was right-wing populism’s standard bearer: “I would have expected somebody a little more appealing.” Resentment-driven violent authoritarian illiberalism, however, is the fundamental nature of right-wing populism.

“There’s a soft totalitarianism coming into play,” observed former Republican National Committee Chairman Michael Steele, quoted (at page 45) in Miles Taylor’s frightening book,

*Blowback: A Warning to Save Democracy from the Next Trump* (2023). Taylor worked in the Trump administration’s Department of Homeland Security, including as chief of staff, and authored, under “Anonymous,” the essay, “[I Am Part of the Resistance Inside the Trump Administration](#),” *The New York Times*, September 5, 2018, and, also under “Anonymous,” the book, *A Warning* (2019).

*All Americans*—especially those who would consider voting for any Republican candidate for any political office—should heed the warnings above and by others herein, and recognize the Republican Party is, through politics, promoting values that pervert American culture and threaten destruction of liberal democracy. Conservatives, who formerly guided the Republican Party and are dedicated to the defense of liberal democracy, have sold out—for profit and power—to right-wing populists of the Republican Party’s right-wing populist New Right, dedicated to the destruction of liberal democracy. Today’s Republicans claim to fight for “democracy”—but their fight is against liberal democracy and for *illiberal* democracy.

The relative success of two ideological enemies of liberal democracy, right-wing populism and its related ideology, fascism, is due to a frailty of human behavior: We humans can be made to ignore that we are not, in fact, getting ahead, so long as we are confident those who we look down upon are not. This attitude drove Jim Crow generally, the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921 specifically, and drives Jim Crow 2.0 of today. At the basis of right-wing populism is resentment on the part of a group of people regarding how the law treats people who are not like them and may have what they do not have. Its proponents ignore the Biblical Commandment, “Thou shalt not covet...”

### **The Party Realignments that Brought Us Here**

Prior to the 1960s, there had been “liberal Republicans” and “conservative Democrats,” especially in the South—called the “Solid South” because it was essentially a one party political system due to resentment cultivated under Jim Crow toward the Republican Party for having implemented Reconstruction. With the 1960s civil rights and women’s rights movements, the Democratic Party went through a realignment, becoming the liberal party, and, in reaction, the Republican Party went through realignment, becoming the conservative party.

The Republican Party, however, went on to another realignment—from conservatism as its guiding ideology to right-wing populism. Two members of President Richard Nixon’s staff, Kevin Phillips and Pat Buchanan, who famously invited into the Republican Party the right-wing populists who felt abandoned by the Democratic Party in the 1960s and had voted for Alabama Governor George Wallace for president in 1968—the famous “Southern Strategy”—also urged the Republican Party to pursue ethnics and Catholics who joined the right-wing populists in their feelings of abandonment by the Democratic Party.

With the candidacy and the election of Donald Trump, the right-wing populists in the Republican Party completed the realignment begun under Nixon with the inviting into the Republican Party right-wing populists, as right-wing populists replaced conservatives as the source for the guiding ideology of the Republican Party, leading many true conservatives to leave the Republican Party. However, many conservatives remained in the Republican Party, selling out their faith in liberal democracy in exchange for the power and profit the right-wing populists delivered. Right-wing populism is compatible with extremist conservatism but, in its dedication to replacing the values of liberal democracy and its policies with the values and policies of illiberal democracy, it is like fascism.

Two prominent conservative Opinion columnists for *The New York Times*—Bret Stephens and David Brooks—expressed concerns regarding the “illiberal” and “populist” takeover of the Republican Party in a January 2023 essay, [“The Party’s Over for Us. Where Do We Go Now?”](#) Stephens lamented that conservatives in the party lost their nerve when the “illiberal barbarians” stormed the gates. There was no storming of the gates, however—as recounted in *Thunder on the Right: The “New Right” and the Politics of Resentment* (1980) by Alan Crawford, just over a half century ago conservatives eagerly opened the gates to let in the illiberal barbarian right-wing populists because, with the Democratic Party having abandoned right-wing populists in the 1960s, Republicans saw an opportunity to appeal to them and thereby enhance their power. Crawford was a former editor of *New Guard*, journal of the conservative Young Americans for Freedom, former assistant editor of *Conservative Digest*, and aide to conservative Senator James Buckley.

The evolution of the welcoming of Trump into the Republican fold can be traced in issues of the conservative magazine *National Review* beginning in 2016: Editor-in-chief Richard Lowry dedicated the magazine’s February 15, 2016, issue to essays from prominent conservatives [“Against Trump.”](#) However, in the October 24, 2016, issue published just weeks before the election, there appeared an article by *National Review* contributor and Hoover Institution fellow Victor Davis Hanson titled [“The Case for Trump.”](#) *National Review*’s surrender to Trump was finalized with Lowry’s essay [“The Never Trump Delusion,”](#) *National Review*, March 30, 2018. Coming full circle, the December 19, 2022, *National Review* carried an article by editor Ramesh Ponnuru, [“Never Again: The Case Against Trump in 2024.”](#)

A parallel track can be observed in the statements and actions of former House Speaker Representative Kevin McCarthy (R-CA). [In a June 15, 2016,](#) recording, McCarthy said, “There’s two people I think Putin pays: Rohrabacher and Trump.” Representative Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) was known in Congress over his career (1989-2019) as a fervent defender of Putin and Russia. As House Minority Leader McCarthy [on January 19, 2021,](#) said, regarding the January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection, “The President bears responsibility for Wednesday’s attack on Congress by mob rioters. He should have immediately denounced the mob when he saw what was unfolding.” Yet, when presented the opportunity to hold Trump accountable, McCarthy voted against impeachment for incitement of insurrection. He soon thereafter went to Mar-a-Lago to complete his sellout to Trump.

### **Wallace to Duke to Trump: The Realignment of the Republican Party from Conservatism, Defender of Liberal Democracy, to Right-Wing Populism, Dedicated to Illiberal Democracy**

Republican leaders and office holders, intellectuals on the Right, and members of the right-wing media cling to the delusion that the party’s dominant ideology is still conservatism, and in doing so they define down the threat of illiberal democracy posed by the right-wing populist New Right of Trump’s Republican Party.

Typical of Republican thought leaders defining down the threat of illiberal democracy posed by Trump and his followers is Matthew Continetti, senior fellow at the conservative American Enterprise Institute and adjunct instructor, American University. He observes in the Introduction to his 2022 book, *The Right: The Hundred Year War for American Conservatism*, that by 2016 the “center of gravity of American conservatism” had drifted from the Northwest Washington, DC location of such conservative institutions as *The Weekly Standard*, the Project for a New American

Century, and the American Enterprise Institute to Capitol Hill, where can be found the Claremont Institute’s Center for the American Way of Life, the Kirby Center of Hillsdale College, and the Heritage Foundation.

It was *not*, however, the center of gravity of *American conservatism* that shifted but, rather, *the center of gravity of the American Right—of the Republican Party*—that shifted from the *liberal democracy* supporting conservative ideology of *conservative institutions* to the *illiberal democracy* supporting right-wing populist ideology of the *illiberal right-wing populist institutions* of the New Right—to which Continetti’s book accords insufficient attention. *The Right* mentions “liberal democracy” or “liberal democracies” at least eight times (pp. 42, 66, 70, 131, 289, 302, 379, and 382), but neither term appears in the index, nor were Republican threats to them or the threat of illiberal democracy mentioned.

Continetti also erred by minimizing the role of David Duke in molding the right-wing populist New Right and the modern Republican Party. He mentions Duke only once (page 306) and erroneously refers to him as having served in the Louisiana Senate (he served in the House). He also only mentions “right-wing populist” once (page 63) and “right-wing populism” once (page 307, in the quote from libertarian economist Murray Rothbard, below).

Continetti did, however, appropriately observe the critical role the outrageous con man Rush Limbaugh played in preparing the electorate for Donald Trump: “Limbaugh’s importance to the conservative movement cannot be overstated.” (Page 310.) Again, however, Limbaugh, with his appeals to white grievance with hatred, racism, ignorance, and lying—appropriately described in the title of one of his books: *The Way Things Ought to Be* (1992)—was appealing to the rising right-wing populist base in the Republican Party. Limbaugh’s “dittoheads” proudly declared, “I don’t believe it till I hear Rush say it”—although much of what Limbaugh said was nonsense.

A good starting point for the history of the New Right and the right-wing populist takeover of the Republican Party is Alan Crawford’s *Thunder on the Right: The “New Right” and the Politics of Resentment* (1980). As far back as Barry Goldwater’s 1964 presidential campaign, Republicans secretly met with racist right-wing populists. It was not until the 1970s, however, that right-wing populists were welcomed by conservatives into the party. The “thunder” of which Crawford wrote was the warning of a storm approaching conservative Republicans on the far right of their party—the “New Right” of the right-wing populists promoting the politics of white resentment, of white grievance.

Crawford traced how the Republican Party welcomed the right-wing populists of the New Right. Funding for the New Right came from wealthy families including the Coors family and Koch brothers. As Crawford observed, “Today’s New Right is also a primitive kind of right-wing populism that has all but exterminated the few remnants of the Burkean tradition...” (Page 303.)

Crawford warned his fellow Republicans of the threat to conservatism posed by the union of wealthy business families with illiberal right-wing populists—exemplified by the joining of the Coors family with Paul Weyrich in the founding in 1973 of the Heritage Foundation. [At a Religious Roundtable](#) meeting in Dallas in August 1980 Weyrich demonstrated the contempt which right-wing populists hold for liberal democracy, as he criticized what he called the “goo-goo syndrome” of Christians who want “good government” and “everybody to vote.” He stated, “Our leverage in the elections quite candidly goes up as the voting populace goes down.”



Weyrich’s anti-democratic opinion was echoed by former President Trump on [Fox and Friends March 30, 2020](#), when he said of Democrats’ proposals in a COVID relief bill to make it easier for people to vote: “The things they had in there were crazy. They had things, levels of voting, that if you ever agreed to it, you’d never have a Republican elected in this country again.” Trump expressed again this concern regarding Automatic Voter Registration being considered in Pennsylvania [in a September 2023 Truth Social post](#), saying it would be “a disaster for the Election of Republicans, including your favorite President, ME!”

After the Southern Strategy, the most important influence on the growth of right-wing populism in the Republican Party was the relative success of David Duke. In 1988 Duke, not long after he renounced his ties to the Klan and neo-Nazism, ran as a Republican and won a seat in the Louisiana House of Representatives, serving from February 1989 through January 1992.

*Critical to understanding the Republican Party’s rightward evolution* is to realize the degree to which Republicans are tolerant of intolerance and tolerant of those dedicated to destruction of liberal democracy and its replacement with illiberal democracy. As evidence of this tolerance of intolerance, Duke was followed in the 81<sup>st</sup> House District by David Vitter, a Republican who went on to serve as US Senator from Louisiana for two terms. Serving the bordering 82<sup>nd</sup> District from 1996-2008 was Steve Scalise, current Republican Majority Leader in the US House of Representatives. Scalise got into controversies when, as a young legislator, he was quoted by a reporter as saying that he was [David Duke without the baggage](#) and when he later [spoke at a white supremacist function](#)—he was defended by his colleague from New Orleans, Representative Cedric Richmond (D-LA), who later served as an adviser to President Biden. The 81<sup>st</sup> and 82<sup>nd</sup> Districts at the time that Duke, Vitter, and Scalise served were both in Jefferson Parish bordering New Orleans—referred to in a 1995 gubernatorial campaign debate by Republican candidate Mike Foster as “the jungle” (Foster went on to win the election [with Duke’s endorsement](#)).

As the Republican Party nominee for US Senate from Louisiana in the 1990 election, David Duke won approximately 60 percent of the white vote and, again as the Republican Party nominee for Governor of Louisiana in the 1991 election, approximately 55 percent of the white vote. Both losses were due to overwhelming African American opposition. The second loss, however, was also due to opposition from business people (worried about businesses leaving the state) and religious leaders—especially those rallied by the [Louisiana Coalition Against Racism and Nazism](#), organized to oppose Duke, which ran television commercials with a photograph of him in a Nazi uniform from his college days. (In contrast, in 2016 and thereafter Trump rallied to his support business leaders and Evangelical Christian leaders.)

In a nationally syndicated opinion column published the month before that 1991 election, [Pat Buchanan took note of Duke’s popularity](#), observing, “The way to deal with Mr. Duke is the way the GOP dealt with the far more formidable challenge of George Wallace. Take a hard look at Duke’s portfolio of winning issues and expropriate those not in conflict with GOP principles...in the hard times in Louisiana, Mr. Duke’s message comes across as Middle Class, meritocratic, populist, and nationalist.” (Due to the crash in oil and natural gas prices, [through much of the 1980s](#), Louisiana’s monthly unemployment rate was over 10 percent, highest in the nation.) Buchanan and Duke favored cutting taxes, fighting crime, and eliminating affirmative action; and opposed immigration, free trade, US policy toward Israel, and the Persian Gulf War.



Three days after that Louisiana gubernatorial election in November 1991, a 45-year-old Donald Trump, on [Larry King Live](#), expressed concern that if Duke—who, he observed, channeled the same resentment as had George Wallace—ran for president in 1992, he could attract enough voters away from President George H. W. Bush that it could cost him his re-election. Trump exhibited a keen understanding of the political appeal of David Duke and observed that Buchanan running for the Republican presidential nomination in 1992 would promote Duke’s same philosophy but present it in a more palatable package, potentially capturing the nomination.

Richard Lowry, [in a comment](#) regarding Michael Continetti’s *The Right* in the June 2022 *Commentary* magazine symposium on it observed, “I found myself reading the book with an eye to who was most prescient about the potential of the party taking a Trump-like turn.” He considered George Wallace, Kevin Phillips, and Pat Buchanan, but decided on the libertarian economist Murray Rothbard, quoting Rothbard’s endorsement of right-wing populism for adoption by Pat Buchanan’s presidential campaign in Rothbard’s January 18, 1992, address to the John Randolph Club, Herndon, Virginia. The quote appears on page 307 of *The Right* (misattributed to an address given at a March 1992 meeting) and was quoted in the [March 1992 issue](#) of the *Rothbard-Rockwell Report*.

In that January 1992 address, Rothbard urged his fellow libertarians to support Pat Buchanan, observing, “The proper strategy for the Right-wing must be what we can call ‘Right-wing populism’: exciting, dynamic, tough, and confrontational, rousing, and inspiring not only the exploited masses, but the often shellshocked Right-wing intellectual cadre as well.” Rothbard added, “we need a dynamic, charismatic leader who has the ability to short-circuit the media elites, and to reach and rouse the masses directly.”

*Critically, neither Continetti nor Lowry provide Rothbard’s acknowledged inspiration* for urging adoption of right-wing populism: the relative success in the two statewide elections in Louisiana in 1990 and 1991 by David Duke as Republican Party nominee, which Rothbard observed in the [January 1992 issue](#) of the *Rothbard-Rockwell Report*. In this earlier issue, Rothbard penned an endorsement of Pat Buchanan and an article titled “Right-wing Populism: A Strategy for the Paleo Movement” (“paleoconservatism” is the term for Pat Buchanan’s ideology). It referred to David Duke as “a right-wing populist” and endorsed the ideas of Duke and Joe McCarthy.

A quarter century after his November 1991 interview with Larry King, a dynamic, charismatic Donald Trump short-circuited the media elites and reached and roused the masses directly and won the presidency. [As observed to The New York Times](#) by Mike Lawrence, campaign manager for Duke’s unsuccessful 2016 run for the Republican nomination for the US Senate, Trump won promoting the views that were Duke’s years before.

Trump’s education regarding right-wing populism continued in 2010 with a lesson from Steve Bannon on the success of the Tea Party, in a meeting recounted in the first pages of *Fear: Trump in the White House* (2018), by Bob Woodward. Bannon was talking to Trump about running for president in 2012 against Obama and lecturing him on “populism”—Trump claimed he was already a “popularist.”

Soon after the 2016 election, Trump appointed Bannon his [chief White House strategist and senior counselor](#)—and Bannon was [heralded by David Duke for “basically creating the ideological aspects of where we’re going.”](#)

Bannon had been quoted at a book party held at his Capitol Hill townhouse [in November 2013](#), calling himself a “Leninist,” elaborating: “Lenin wanted to destroy the State, and that is my goal too. I want to bring everything crashing down and destroy all of today’s establishment.” In an exchange of emails between Bannon and *Breitbart* reporter Matt Boyle [on December 16, 2014](#), obtained by *The Daily Beast*, Bannon strategized with Boyle regarding how to “turn on the hate” and “burn this bitch down.”

Bannon’s views, shared by Trump, are also the views of right-wing populism, as illustrated in the November 2018 Munk Debate in Toronto, pitting Bannon against David Frum, conservative former speechwriter for President George W. Bush and a staff writer at *The Atlantic*. (A transcript of the debate and interviews with the participants are provided in the slim purple paperback volume titled *The Rise of Populism: Stephen K. Bannon vs. David Frum*.) The motion before them: “Be it resolved: the future of Western politics is populist not liberal.” Arguing in favor of liberal democracy was the conservative Frum. Bannon rejected liberal democracy as a failure and proclaimed, “The future obviously belongs to populism. It’s only going to be defined by asking if it’s left-wing populism or conservative and right-wing populism....”

Conservative editorial writer for *The New York Times*, Ross Douthat, has similarly used the term “right-wing populism” to describe this ideology, as he did in an essay on the book *Tyranny, Inc.* by right-wing populist Sohrab Ahmari—see [“Should Right-Wing Populists Despair?”](#) in *The New York Times*, September 2, 2023.

### **Trump Doesn’t Want to Lose David Duke’s “Very Fine People”**

This represents a turning point for the people of this country. We are determined to take our country back; we’re 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.

The above quote from David Duke, [caught on video](#) on the Saturday of the August 2017 Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, was overshadowed by the violence and death that accompanied the protest later that day. However, it provides a context for all herein.

The same day that Duke gave his shout out to President Trump, the President addressed on Twitter the violence accompanying the torch lit protest of the night before in Charlottesville: “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 the car driven by [a neo-Nazi protestor](#), later sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole, plowed into a crowd of counter-protestors and killed a young woman counter-protestor).

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.”

Trump elaborated on his comment, implying he had seen peaceful protestors opposed to removal of the statue of Robert E. Lee. However, as observed by Dan McLaughlin, a senior writer at National Review Online and fellow at the National Review Institute, in [“The ‘Very Fine People’ Trap and How to Avoid It Today”](#) (*National Review*, June 1, 2020), none of the video seen of the protest shows such peaceful protestors—the “very fine people” Trump claimed to see among the Unite the Right rally attendees. As McLaughlin also observes, Trump’s rationale for that comment was more likely to make nice to the right-wing populist extremists—“my people” as he refers to them—after he had condemned neo-Nazis and white supremacists. Finally, McLaughlin also notes that one of the pro-statue peaceful protestors who stayed away that weekend observed that the only people with a permit for the event were white nationalists who had advertised it with flyers steeped in neo-Nazi imagery that didn’t even mention Robert E. Lee aside from the name of the park.

[Duke tweeted after Trump’s news conference](#), “Thank you President Trump for your honesty & courage to tell the truth about #Charlottesville & condemn the leftist terrorists in BLM/Antifa.”

As recently as a few months before the November 2020 election, Duke offered advice to President Trump regarding his re-election campaign with the recommendation to drop Mike Pence in favor of 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.

### **Right-Wing Populism’s Triumph Is Hidden Due to Confusion Regarding Terminology**

Conservatives have lost the Republican Party, at least for now. Most conservatives, however, act as though the Republican Party is still promoting conservatism, creating confusion. To add to confusion, numerous terms have been popularized describing the now dominant ideology of the Republican Party. Among these: “Trumpism,” “fascism,” “nationalism,” “white nationalism,” “Christian Nationalism,” “white Christian Nationalism,” and “National Conservatism.” President Biden has referred to it as “MAGA,” “Ultra-MAGA,” and “semi-fascism.”

“MAGA” stands for “Make America Great Again,” and the “MAGA Republicans” are the extremist followers of Donald Trump. Trump, however, is not the problem, nor are MAGA Republicans the problem. *The problem is the Republican Party leaders, Republican politicians, and their allies on the Right* who sold out their conservatism to Donald Trump and the MAGA Republicans—the “New Right” right-wing populists and their theocratic allies—in a “the end justifies the means” desperate calculation to deliver to themselves power and profit.

The descriptors “Trumpism,” “MAGA” and “Ultra-MAGA” all fail because they describe an ideology that began with Donald Trump. The dominant ideology in the Republican Party began long before Donald Trump, in the Democratic Party of the Jim Crow South; he just resurrected it.

“Semi-fascism” is appealing because the ideology shares some similarities with fascism but is not identical to it. Fascism, like right-wing populism, is a con, promoting upward distribution of

economic and political power to a rich corporate plutocracy by—as seen in Italian Fascism, German Nazism, or Putin’s Russian fascism—promoting among the masses victimhood, humiliation, and grievance over a lost mythical past of greatness.

From a review of what we may call “source documents” for fascism—“[The Doctrine of Fascism](#)” by Benito Mussolini and Giovanni Gentile and *Mein Kampf* by Adolf Hitler: As does right-wing populism, fascism promotes resentment toward liberal democracy and those it views as having benefitted from the tolerance liberal democracy promotes (“elites” generally; Jews and other minorities, specifically); views as its enemies the Enlightenment, Western liberalism and liberal democracy, and individuals outside of its favored group; promotes capitalism (albeit crony capitalism), religion, and traditional authority; is authoritarian and emanates from the Right (“*la destra*” in “The Doctrine of Fascism”); rejects globalism; and promotes violence as a political act. Thus, fascism and right-wing populism, like conservatism, arose in reaction to liberal democracy, but, in contrast, to conservatism, reject liberal democracy.

In contrast with fascism, however, right-wing populism views the individual as supreme, while fascism views the State as supreme and, thus, promotes state-sponsored violence against dissenters, as all dissenters are seen as traitors. Also, right-wing populism promotes isolationism—as in Trump’s slogan of “America First”—while fascism promotes imperialism—the military conquest of weaker nations. Working against acceptance of the term “semi-fascism,” however, is the fact that no prominent Republicans embrace it.

Adam Serwer, staff writer for *The Atlantic*, referred to “nationalism” and “white nationalism” as descriptors of Trump’s Republican Party in several articles in *The Atlantic*, beginning with, in 2017, “[The Nationalist’s Delusion](#),” followed by essays in 2019—these insights were combined in his 2021 book, *The Cruelty Is the Point*.

The term “nationalism” is attractive because former President Trump called himself a “nationalist” at a campaign rally in Houston in October 2018. The term was also used by Richard Lowry, whose 2020 book, *The Case for Nationalism*, presents a version of nationalism that is a complement to conservatism. Nationalism has also, however, been promoted as a complement to liberalism by writer and academic Michael Lind in *The Next American Nation: The New Nationalism and The Fourth American Revolution* (1995).

Thus, “nationalism” is a broad term. David Duke narrowed the term down more precisely, replying to Trump’s Houston speech the next day on Twitter:

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.

“White nationalism,” while a more precise term for the ideology, is, however, like “semi-fascism” or “fascism” not a term many Republicans embrace.

Speaking at the Turning Point USA Student Action Summit in Tampa July 24, 2022, Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA) [declared](#) of the Republican Party, “We need to be

the party of nationalism and I’m a Christian, and I say it proudly, we should be Christian nationalists.” “Christian Nationalism” is actually “white Christian Nationalism” as observed by Philip S. Gorski and Samuel L. Perry in *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to America Democracy* (2022). The [ReAwaken America Tour](#), started, by, among others, Michael Flynn, promotes Christian Nationalism. However, as with “white nationalism,” “Christian Nationalism” and “white Christian Nationalism” are not terms embraced widely by Republican leaders, although all terms describe ideologies dedicated to preserving privilege for white Christians and are varieties of right-wing populism, and add an element of religiosity to the cult of right-wing populism, as observed by David French, Opinion editor for *The New York Times*, in [“One Reason the Trump Fever Won’t Break,”](#) *The New York Times*, October 1, 2023. Not surprisingly, [observed at the January 6<sup>th</sup>](#) insurrection were a Christian flag and other symbols of Christian nationalism.

“National Conservatism” has emerged as a term championed by the modern right-wing populist New Right of the Republican Party, centered at the Claremont Institute, and Continetti addressed it in *The Right*.

### **Right-Wing Populists’ Admiration for Fascists**

Given the similarities of their ideologies, it should be no surprise that right-wing populists admire fascism and fascists. In [an October 2023 interview](#) at Mar-a-Lago with *The National Pulse*, Trump observed of immigrants, “Nobody has any idea where these people are coming from...It’s poisoning the blood of our country.” He was echoing a quote from Adolf Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, in Volume One, Chapter 11, titled “Nation and Race”: “All great cultures of the past perished only because the originally creative race died out from blood poisoning.” (In the original German: “*Alle großen Kulturen der Vergangenheit gingen nur zugrunde, weil die ursprünglich schöpferische Rasse an Blutvergiftung abstarb.*”)

“America First,” repeatedly used by Donald Trump, was used in the right-wing populist campaign of Pat Buchanan, but, more importantly, before that, according to historian Sarah Churchwell, in *Behold, America* (2018), it was used in the 1930s by the pro-Nazi German American Bund and the Ku Klux Klan and, in 1940, adopted by the America First Committee and its isolationist campaign to keep America out of World War II, led by hero of the *Spirit of St. Louis*, Charles Lindbergh.

Nobel Prize winning economist and Opinion editor for *The New York Times* Paul Krugman asked the question contained in the title of his essay, [“Why MAGA Wants to Betray Ukraine,”](#) *The New York Times*, October 4, 2023. He answered that Republicans are not actually concerned about the budget as they claim—“they want Putin to win.”

In the previously referred to interview with the *Financial Times* at the Osaka G-20 meeting in 2019, Russia’s Vladimir Putin declared, [“The liberal idea has become obsolete.”](#) Among the admirers of the fascist Vladimir Putin are Steve Bannon, a third of Republicans as reflected in a 2017 poll, Donald Trump, racist white nationalist and November 2022 Mar-a-Lago dinner guest Nick Fuentes, Fox News’ Tucker Carlson, and David Duke.

*BuzzFeed* covered Bannon’s [address to a conference on poverty](#) hosted by the Human Dignity Institute at the Vatican in 2014. There he expressed admiration for Vladimir Putin’s “standing up for traditional institutions” and for Putin’s adviser Aleksandr Dugin, the main promoter of a



“Eurasianist” fascist ideology and author of the textbook *The Foundation of Geopolitics: The Geopolitical Future of Russia* (1997), which posed Western liberal democracy as the enemy of Russia and argued against continued independent existence of Ukraine. In his 1997 article, “Fascism—Borderless and Red,” Dugin [promoted a fascist Russia](#).

Also expressing a positive opinion of Putin were 32 percent of Republicans in a [February 2017 Gallup poll](#); according to a [May 2017 Morning-Consult-Politico poll](#), 49 percent of Republicans considered Russia an ally.

Former President Trump, [in a February 2022 interview](#) with radio hosts Clay Travis and Buck Sexton, praised Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine, as “genius” and “smart,” and praised him for being “very savvy.” Openly defying the values of liberal democracy, Donald Trump has expressed admiration not only for Putin, but also for other dictators who deny the blessings of liberal democracy to their own people, among them China’s Xi Jinping, the Philippines’ Rodrigo Duterte, Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia, and North Korea’s Kim Jong Un, of whom he famously said after their meeting, “We fell in love” and June 2, 2023, on Truth Social, said, [“Congratulations to Kim Jung \[sic\] Un!”](#) for his election to the World Health Organization (WHO) executive board.

As reported by *The Washington Post*, attendees at [the America First Political Action Conference](#) (AFPAC), held in Orlando, Florida, in February 2022, were asked by the leader of the conference, Nick Fuentes, “Can we get a round of applause for Russia?” He got one, as well as chants of “Putin! Putin! Putin!” from the audience. Similarly, [Tucker Carlson, on his show, in November 2019](#), said of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, “Why do I care what is going on in the conflict between Ukraine and Russia? And I’m serious. Why do I care? Why shouldn’t I root for Russia? Which I am.” Carlson later walked back his statements. All were echoing David Duke’s 2004 [statement](#) that Russia is “key to white survival.”

David Duke declared himself Grand Wizard of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan and was a neo-Nazi before his brand of right-wing populism captivated Pat Buchanan and Murray Rothbard. Duke was a leader of [the Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville in 2017](#), at which we saw, as [at the Capitol on January 6, 2021](#), Confederate battle flags and neo-Nazi flags together.

American right-wing populists’ admiration for fascism has flowed both ways historically, as observed by James Q. Whitman, of Yale Law School and author of *Hitler’s American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law* (2017). Not only did Hitler offer praise for the Jim Crow era racial practices of the South in *Mein Kampf*, but both our federal government’s citizenship laws and the anti-miscegenation laws of thirty states—many outside the South—were used as models for the two principal Nuremberg Laws: the Citizenship Law and the Blood Law.

### **Jim Crow Illustrated the Con of Right-Wing Populism, Repeated in Jim Crow 2.0**

Under Jim Crow, elites in the Democratic Party in the South learned they could channel right-wing populism to their advantage, conning working class whites into voting for upward distribution of power, income, and wealth to themselves in exchange for the elites’ granting to working class whites privilege over their non-white neighbors, thereby suppressing wages generally and lowering living standards for all workers.

Former Republican adviser Stuart Stevens observes in his 2020 book, *It Was All a Lie: How the Republican Party Became Donald Trump*, that the Republican Party has evolved into “just a white grievance party” (page 4). However, when he frames what he calls the conviction that is “about as close as it can be to a definitional core belief that exists in the Republican Party,” he does *not* say it is white supremacy. Rather, it is a “belief in the power of tax cuts” (page 75). Although he was not intending to do so, in these observations Stevens reveals the true nature of the right-wing populism that has overtaken the Republican Party. Right-wing populism is, and always has been, a philosophy that plutocrats can promote in a con, spreading white grievance, fear, and hatred, dividing white voters against non-whites by granting privilege to them in exchange for their support for tax cuts for the rich and other policy measures to upwardly distribute income and wealth.

The reality that elites during the Jim Crow era promoted the con of right-wing populism to divide the masses and upwardly distribute benefits to themselves was recognized by the historian W. E. B. DuBois in *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935), writing of Jim Crow, “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...” (Page 700.)

The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. observed [in his speech](#) at the end of the March from Selma to Montgomery, referring to historian C. Vann Woodward’s *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, that the Jim Crow system was a con of white workers—it was a “political stratagem employed by the emerging Bourbon interests in the South to keep the southern masses divided and southern labor the cheapest in the land.” The con of white workers was successful because, as he concluded, “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.”

In but one telling example of Jim Crow’s con, Columbia University historian Eric Foner observed in *A Short History of Reconstruction—1863-1877* (1990, 2014) (page 249) that the Bourbon-dominated Louisiana legislature cut education spending so much after the Civil War that Louisiana was the only state to see literacy rates for *whites* fall from 1880 to 1900.

Bill Moyers, who served as President Lyndon Johnson’s press secretary, [recounted his former boss as saying](#), “I’ll tell you what’s at the bottom of it. If you can convince the lowest white man he’s better than the best colored man, he won’t notice you’re picking his pocket. Hell, give him somebody to look down on, and he’ll empty his pockets for you.” This is resentment politics.

The current Republican promotion of white grievance and right-wing populism mimics the Jim Crow era of the Southern Democrats led by the elite Bourbons (also referred to as the “Redeemers,” who sought to “redeem” the South to its pre-Civil War conditions) promoting white grievance as part of a strategy to upwardly concentrate economic and political power in themselves. The elites who are Republican Party leaders, Republican politicians, funders of Republican PACs, and the right-wing commentators who are their allies today are the “New Bourbons.” And, as during Jim Crow, there were those in the South who could not admit they had been wrong, so they invented the “Lost Cause” to ennoble their horrendous values, so today Republicans who promote Jim Crow 2.0 and received the Holy Grail of a tax cut (and for the Religious Right, judges) from Trump cannot now admit they were wrong—cannot admit surrender to “the libs.”

## The 2024 Election: A Time for Choosing

Donald Trump in 2020 received 74.2 million votes—the second most in history—and *11.2 million more* votes than he got in 2016. Republican voters continue to elect Republican candidates for state office sworn to disregard election results and to deliver elections for Republicans. Donald Trump, ringmaster of the circus of the Republican Party under right-wing populism, has warned us what to expect between now and the 2024 election, and beyond: hatred and division. In a November 2022 Truth Social post, he called for “the termination of all rules, regulations, and articles, even those found in the Constitution.” [In March of this year at CPAC](#) he declared, “I am your justice...I am your retribution,” and, apocalyptically: “This is the final battle.”

The Republican Party under Donald Trump is dedicated to the destruction of liberal democracy and its replacement with Republican minority rule right-wing populist plutocratic, theocratic, and authoritarian illiberal democracy, threatening the freedom of all. Former Vice President Mike Pence observed in his speech quoted earlier in this essay that, as in that famous speech by Ronald Reagan regarding the election 60 years before, the 2024 election presents “[a time for choosing](#)” for Republicans—although the situation is more grave than Pence described it. *To Democrats, Republicans, and independents*: The 2024 election presents “a time for choosing” *for all of us*: Vote for Democrats in the existential battle to save liberal democracy or allow Republicans to destroy it and replace it with illiberal democracy.

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