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The World Turned Upside Down

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The tale is as old as the American republic. On October 19, 1781, Lord Charles Cornwallis, Knight Companion of The Most Noble Order of the Garter, surrendered to George Washington and the American Continental Army. Defeated yet defiant, Cornwallis ordered the Red Coat band to accompany the proceedings with the tune “The World Turned Upside Down.” The choice was not accidental. It alluded the shocking events leading up to His Majesty’s troops’ ignominious capitulation at the hands of upstart colonists, which seemed straight out of Macbeth where nature itself has gone awry. King George III, like his routed general, proved so dazed and confused by defeat at the hands of the Americans that for years after the Treaty of Paris he refused to allow his cabinet to speak the words: “the United States of America.” Had the world turned upside down?

Two hundred and thirty-five years later, on 20 January 2017, Donald J. Trump became the duly elected American president, 45th in a direct line from General Washington. Brilliant and talented individuals have occupied the presidential chair, among them John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, two Roosevelts, John Kennedy and Barack Obama. Trump’s elevation to that exalted office sent shock waves through American and world political institutions. Virtually everyone wondered how this man, of all Americans seemingly so utterly unfit for office, could become president of the United States. Could the world be so upside down that Trump would be the chief executive of the self-same nation secured at Yorktown by Washington’s Army? The very implausibility of his triumph initiated a groundswell of

opposition, “the resistance,” dedicated to reversing the Democrats’ defeat and dispatching the interloper. One comedian’s staged decapitation of a presidential look-alike went viral,¹ while a multitude of women took to the streets in protest donning self-styled pussy hats.² Given the choice between accepting the electorate’s slim preference on the day that resulted in a lopsided electoral majority, on the one hand, or seeking to delegitimize the entire election, on the other, the members of the resistance vehemently chose the latter option. The real risk to American trust of their political institutions seemed at the time a small price to pay to remove the miscreant. Trump could not be the legitimately, constitutionally elected president. Some organization or foreign power had interfered and the resistance would provide the impetus to root out the culprits. If the election of 2016 did prove constitutional and fairly staged, then the Republican triumph only demonstrated how far the republic had degenerated, how it was already in crisis. For the resistance inside of the United States and for many others and beyond its borders the world had indeed turned upside down.

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Who is Donald J. Trump and how did Americans elect him? What do we know about him and the MAGA moment? The answers are not so easy to discern. He is the first American president to have neither served in the military nor held public office before becoming chief executive. A twice-divorced property developer and television celebrity whose tax returns remain under embargo, the public continues to be as ignorant of Trump’s personal fortune as his genuine political convictions. His media persona offers intriguing clues but little beyond intimations of the real Trump behind the gilded, spray-tanned veneer. Trump has several books to his name, so one might be tempted to read *The Art of the Deal* or *Think Big and Kick Ass* to discover clues to his identity, if he actually wrote a word of them.³ How about a diary or journal? Not a shred of evidence suggests that such objects exist. Trump seems the least self-reflective political figure of our times. How do we get behind the orange-coifed façade?

Presidents enjoy certain prerogatives, some of which intimate aspects of their character. One such privilege relates to the placement of art and iconography in the White House. President Obama famously banished Sir Jacob Epstein’s bust of Winston Churchill from the East Room to make way for one of Martin Luther King, Jr.⁴ Predictably, many presidents choose likenesses of former famous residents to grace

White House walls. Especially popular have been the Founders such as Washington or Jefferson. Abraham Lincoln was Obama's choice. Which leads us to Trump. Conspicuously visible behind the president during his briefings is Thomas Sully's striking portrait (1845) of Andrew Jackson⁵. That Trump would find in himself critical aspects of the seventh president should come as no surprise. By all measures an outsider, Jackson seemed to be an enemy of 'establishment' Washington and always in opposition. Jackson's personality more than his policies became the centerpiece of the political discourse of the 1830s. Old Hickory strikes this American historian as about as apt a presidential precedent as one might imagine in the entire American political firmament. How fittingly Sully's portrait hangs behind Trump and how revelatory of the president's self-image. Hardly the Age of Trump, the moment in which we find ourselves seems one of disruption whose themes seem to converge on the orange-haired outsider who snookered the 2016 election from the political class. Separated by two centuries, Trump and Jackson the disruptors mirror each other.

The current occupant of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue offers little evidence that he has a grasp of American history. It seems highly unlikely that he perceives the remarkable parallels between himself and his predecessor of nearly two centuries as would a scholar or student of history. Nowhere has Trump revealed any particular knowledge, much less deep understanding, of Andrew Jackson and how his career might parallel his own. Nevertheless, Trump has certain affinities with Jackson and seems to have stumbled upon a model of leadership from the nineteenth century that speaks to his own time and political moment. When asked about Jackson, a White House spokesperson noted that Trump admired his predecessor's "ability to never give up," that he was "an amazing figure in American history — very unique so many ways." Sully's East Room portrait depicts a president who, like Trump himself, was largely unschooled; his critics lampooned him for his apparent ignorance. Jackson famously boasted that his education was solely of the 'school of hard knocks' variety. "They're both seen as uncompromising fighters," notes National Public Radio journalist Steve Inskeep, who has written a book on Jackson. Despite obvious differences, both men "took the side of the people they were loyal to [and] ... fought for those people and for themselves as well and didn't care who else got hurt."⁶ As unlikely as it may seem, Trump's intuition of the striking similarities across almost two centuries of American history has resulted in Thomas Sully's Jackson unflinchingly surveying this administration not unlike F. Scott Fitzgerald's fictitious

ophthalmologist, Dr Eccles, who imperiously observed Daisy, Tom and Nick in *The Great Gatsby*. What the seventh president's judgment of his twenty-first century successor is any one's guess.

The provenance of the Sully portrait hanging in the East Room seems clear enough. Steven Bannon hatched the idea. The erstwhile Trump campaign advisor and Oval Office consultant had read Walter Prescott Meade's biography of the Hero of New Orleans⁷. After quickly warming to the relationship between Trump and Jackson, Bannon managed to convince the new president of the historical correlation and its symbolic utility. As if to cement the connection, Trump only weeks into his presidency made a well-staged visit to the Hermitage, Old Hickory's Nashville plantation.⁸ However, no sooner did the president return from Tennessee than he banished Bannon and his unsavoury right-wing connections from the White House for good. Yet the Sully portrait remained. It reminds friend and foe alike that the Jackson-Trump connection bears deeper scrutiny than from one populist to another, there exists a vital ideological link with roots deep in the American political tradition. Andrew Jackson, American president from 1829-1837, serves as an eminently suitable window into the whacky world of Donald J. Trump.

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Jackson and Trump are far from identical. Unlike Trump, the seventh president boasted a pedigree from our perspective today eminently suitable for the nation's highest office. Before winning the election of 1828, Jackson had run for president in 1824, a four-way race in which he had garnered the most popular and electoral votes, but fell short of an electoral majority. Denied the office in the House of Representatives in favour of John Quincy Adams, Jackson was nevertheless destined to triumph four years later. Prior to running for national office in 1824, he had represented his state of Tennessee in both houses of Congress, culminating in one of the state's first appointments to the Senate at the turn of the nineteenth century. A lawyer by profession, Jackson served on the High Court of the Volunteer State after his retirement from the Senate. Compared to Trump's career trajectory, his proved to be that of the consummate republican politician.

Jackson was also a military man. In fact, his fame stemmed almost entirely from his martial exploits, none more so than his miraculous triumph over the British at the Battle of New Orleans. A leader of the Tennessee militia, Jackson had ascended to the rank of major general in the United States Army by the conclusion of

the War of 1812. His astonishing 1815 victory at New Orleans with a miniscule fighting force of soldiers, militiamen and slaves became the stuff of legend; it made him the most popular military figure since Washington. He was also controversial. Jackson commanded an 1817 invasion of Spanish Florida, which many Americans hailed as a triumph of the will and a vocal few furiously condemned as a willful adventure. The summary trial and hanging of two British nationals in Florida cemented Jackson's bifurcated reputation, a decisive leader on the one hand and as a would-be despot with little or no regard for the rule of law on the other.

Comparisons across centuries can be fraught and the direct affinities between the two presidents at best sheds only dim reflected light on each. More illuminating is an exploration of semiotics, of what each represented as popular political figures in their respective epochs. As the Princeton scholar John William Ward noted about Old Hickory in his *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age*, Jackson the individual, as interesting as his biography might be, proves less meaningful today than Jackson the symbol.⁹ The multitudes of Americans who respectively elevated Jackson and Trump to the Oval Office projected a particular and powerful set of images onto their candidates, images that speak more to the times than to the men. These symbolic qualities suggest the genuine meaning of the men in their times. Not the man but the symbol serves to explain the political culture of the times.

Certain similarities are striking. The complex, even contradictory nature of their personae comes first to mind.¹⁰ Both Jackson and Trump presented themselves as interlopers and disruptors, despite the former being a wealthy plantation owner and the latter being, or at least projecting the image of being, one of the wealthiest individuals in a nation of over 300 million. It is paradoxical yet oddly American that the Hero of New Orleans and the host of a top-rated television show, both as recognizable as any of their political contemporaries, could appeal to multitudes of Americans as outsiders, as somehow underdogs with the administrative state and educated elite arrayed against them. Understanding why Trump sullies building facades across America with his name is beyond the scope of this essay; that people by the millions, otherwise unwelcome into the lobbies of Trump Towers or Mar-a-Lago, view their eponymous developer-publicist-promoter as representative of their interests and sympathetic to their sense of powerlessness and desperation begs for explanation. So apparently unrepresentative, Trump is yet their man.

The explanation for the Make America Great Again phenomenon emerges from deep in the American past, at least as far back as the Age of Jackson. Trump's

base seems Jacksonian proportionally to the peculiarly American strand of populism still extant in the American character, an element that defines itself largely in opposition. Feeling increasingly enfeebled in a world of great inequality, today's 'Jacksonians,' who comprise the MAGA movement, clearly identify with a charismatic disruptor.¹¹ In this sense, both Jackson and Trump positioned themselves, or became available, to play the vanquisher of a smug, self-serving, entrenched elite. Denied the presidency in 1824 in a 'corrupt bargain' that to his supporters seemed no less corrupt because it was technically constitutional, Jackson secured for himself the role of the outsider destined to restore the people's government from those using the state for their own corrupt ends. If voters measured their man by his enemies, then Jackson reigned supreme as underdog and outsider, fighting back against the subversion of the popular will in the election of 1824 as well as the influence and inertia of the old guard massed against him.¹² His opponents haughtily proclaimed Old Hickory's unfitness for office, that he was an orphan, lacked a pedigree, had not attended Harvard or Princeton, that he was from the West, that he was a duelist. The more his Whig opponents embellished the symbolic role of disrupter into which Jackson seamlessly stepped, the greater his popularity in the country at large. The democracy did not seek to elevate Jackson to the presidency despite his lack of elite credentials. They elected him because of it.

The same for Trump in 2016. As with Old Hickory, The Donald seems a most unlikely underdog or outsider. He might never have won the presidency if his opponents had possessed the native wit or political instincts to understand his popular appeal. Both Republican and Democratic establishments sought in 2016 and seek to this day to expose Trump's complete lack of *bona fides*, as if the MAGA constituency concurs that an Ivy League education is a prerequisite to higher office. The tried and true criteria of 'Ivy League or out of this league' has never played in Peoria or anywhere else in Middle America. Taking his cue from George Bush who spoke as if he never gone to Yale, candidate Trump never mentioned his years at the prestigious Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. The more frequently the Bushes, Clintons and their Yale-pedigreed allies scolded Trump in 2016 for his lack of education, his imbecilic syntax and his Queens English (the outer New York City borough, not the English monarchy), the more they played into his disruptor persona. Capitalizing on his opponents' smug elitism, Donald Trump, despite his preparatory school education and a multi-million-dollar inheritance, emerged as the

Andrew Jackson of our times. Trump fashioned himself in 2016 as the underdog outsider candidate. He still does.

The Jackson-Trump brand of insurgent politics features a particularly American characteristic often labelled populism. While right-wing populists have emerged in recent decades around the world from Eastern Europe to South America, the populist movement as a phenomenon boasts roots that lie deep in the United States and its political culture. Crucial aspects of Jacksonianism that gave the era its name signalled the beginning of a novel political culture of populist insurgency. The insurgent-as-populist speaks to, or embodies, a specific challenge to established authority, a challenge featuring a set of grievances advanced in the name of the common people. Attacking established institutions is important, even essential, but hardly the critical feature of American populist movements. Rather, to be populist the insurgency must involve a call for 'return,' for the embrace of a lost or diminished ideal. In this sense, only the American tradition genuinely embraces populism as home grown, for in the United States alone has government "of the people, by the people and for the people" taken the form of scripture. The populist challenge to authority demands a return to rule of the people, which the United States claims to constitute a reversion to the ideals of its founding. We associate these ringing nostrums with Lincoln at Gettysburg in 1863 in the midst of a great Civil War but in fact they recall the founding principles of a nation "so conceived and dedicated" four score and seven years earlier. Lord Cornwallis called it right in 1781: the American Revolutionaries had turned the world upside down. The Jacksonians in the 1830s presaged the MAGA purveyors of our time. Both disdain revolution, instead demanding restoration. The second "A" in MAGA carries immense weight. It references a nostalgic desire to restore a preferred past rather than the overthrow of political culture. As disenchanted as Trump supporters seem, they do not seek destruction; they demand democratic renewal instead. One American revolution is sufficient.

Claiming to be the American people's tribune, in either the 1820s or the 2020s, captures an essential problematic: the tribune cannot lose. The American populist narrative demands victory. It is logically impossible for "the people" to defeat populism. A populism of the minority cannot exist. Fortunately for Jacksonians, their candidate was hugely popular, winning the popular vote in 1824 and trouncing his opponent in both popular and Electoral College voting in the two subsequent elections. Upon his retirement in 1837, Old Hickory's coattails even enabled Martin

van Buren, his less-than-populist successor, to retain Democratic control of the White House. In the nineteenth century, victory validated and vindicated the populist hero. The same, one presumes, can be said about the MAGA movement and its candidate in 2016. No fool, candidate Trump understood the value of demonstrating his popularity. His populist mandate demanded that he make an issue of the 'huge' adulating crowds at his rallies. Time and again, Trump dared the media to pan wide, to show the size and scope of his popular appeal. The tribune of the people requires a great, even overwhelming turnout. Crucially, Trump and his apologists had to explain – or explain away – his defeat in the popular vote in populist terms, how California and New York were outliers, whose effete populations were somehow brainwashed or un-American. Far from discounting his populist status, the extreme, uniform opposition of the coastal elites proved beyond a doubt the providential aspect of Trump's electoral triumph of 6 November 2016. The same line of reasoning explains the tempest in the teapot over the inaugural attendance six weeks later.

Populist triumphs are providential. Providence, broadly understood, plays a critical role in the populist appeal. In *Symbol for an Age* Ward observed how Jacksonians' symbolic embrace of their hero coalesced around three characterological tropes: nature, will and providence. All three in their own way translate from the Age of Jackson to the present day. The last trope – providence – particularly resonates with and depends upon victory. It is the reason that the crowds at the inaugural were the biggest ever. Trump feels obliged to deny losses or rationalize them away. There can be no losses in a genuine democratic environment, no popular-vote setbacks, and no mid-term defeats. It is just not possible to back any losers and 'the people' cannot be 'wrong;' they can be over enthusiastic or impatient, but not wrong, because then democracy would be wrong. The Alabama special election to fill Jeff Sessions' Senate seat is a case in point. The Republican defeat required a *post-mortem* that completely and absolutely exculpated MAGA. "Roy Moore was never a true Trumpian populist," the White House insisted; "he was a hopeless candidate whose thin margin of defeat in fact proved a Trump victory." Losing the House of Representatives in the mid-term elections required similar apologetics. The Administration explained the result in terms of influence and spillover from the bogus Mueller probe and deep state sabotage. In historic terms, Republicans suffered a smaller loss of seats than the average mid-term election and therefore really experienced a MAGA victory. Unlike other insurgencies, to be populist

is by definition to be providential. Populists must win or they are not genuinely tribunes of the people.

Today's political Progressives and their media allies largely concur, if only obliquely and inversely. At times, they appear resigned to accepting numerical defeat, especially in the Midwest, the Plains, the South and the non-coastal West. Progressives no longer identify losses in the flyover states as some temporary setback but as something more profound, something that confirms their deeper, often unarticulated doubts about democracy (as opposed to their preferred meritocratic oligarchy). The fact that the majority of non-coastal voters chose Trump on that fateful Tuesday in November signals to Progressives that American democracy itself is in a state of existential crisis. Progressives argued after the election that the nativist Trump voters proved themselves either hopelessly ill-informed or hopelessly ignorant of their own basic self-interest. The states that went Republican, they hastened to point out, depend more on the very government largesse they symbolically disdain than those in which the majority voted Democratic. Confronted with a choice between revising a Progressive message that played so poorly in the last election or instead moving farther to the left, the 2020 Democratic primaries suggest that the Progressive leadership, despite shunting aside Bernie Sanders in favour of the more 'electable' Joe Biden, has decidedly chosen the latter option. It disdains the type of triangulation made famous by Bill Clinton in the 1990s, notwithstanding its prospects for reclaiming the majority of the electorate from Iowa to Pennsylvania and in states like Arizona, Tennessee and Florida. It seems unlikely that even a Trump re-election in 2020 would induce Progressives to reverse course. Instead, they likely will continue seek salvation in some combination of constitutional overhaul and/or demographic reconstruction of the nation through wholesale immigration. So much for the American experiment in self-government.

The Make America Great Again movement manifests another deep connection to a longstanding strain of American populism—that of latent animus. Non-revolutionary does not suggest a lack of hostility. Profound anger fuelled MAGA's embrace of a vanquisher-hero like Trump in 2016. They still seek retribution. Focused on eviscerating the enemy, Trump's supporters worried little, if at all, precisely who or what would follow on from victory. Destruction before construction. Herein lies the profoundly anti-intellectual aspect of populism famously alluded to by historian Richard Hofstadter.¹³ University-educated elites build; institution building and

administrative growth are their calling card. The possibility looms that MAGA voters possess an elemental distrust of any and all structures, as all of them, whether institutional or ideological, tend to be specialized, hierarchical and based on precise knowledge claims. Hierarchies discriminate on the basis of education and expertise; they are likely to exclude anyone wearing a MAGA cap. Disdainful of elite-enabled and complex constructions, populists harbor a wanton element of destructiveness and anti-institutionalism that makes effective governance extremely difficult. Their cries of “drain the swamp” suggest that MAGA populists content themselves merely with replacing the old regime. Draining the swamp echoes the very non-American Louis Antoine de Saint-Just’s observation from the French Revolution: “*On s’engage et puis, on voit,*” which might roughly be translated in Trumpian terms as “Scramble the pieces, dismantle the administrative state and then we’ll see.”

Direct comparisons of the today’s administrative elites with the monopolists of the Age of Jackson is a fool’s errand. Yet, in the ideological fabrications of their antagonists, comparative analysis reveals substantial commonalities across two centuries. Populists swear that the administration of Adams then and Obama recently, as well as those of Madison and Monroe and Clinton, preyed on the vast majority of citizens for whom Trump and Jackson speak. These administrators fall into general categories. Firstly, there are the entrenched political elites of both the right and left, who cross long-standing party and ideological lines. Neither Trump nor Jackson demonstrated particular allegiance or personal ties to political parties. Trump changed his party affiliation five times before 2016. He remains as president a most unconventional Republican, embracing tariffs, demonstrating an utter aversion to adventurism in foreign policy and dubious of the alliance with Europe. In Jackson’s case, he proved as much the product of a political moment of party disintegration, when Federalist and Republican alike were in eclipse, as the creator of a novel party. Jackson’s allies largely constructed a new party out of the ruins of the old. Nonetheless, Jackson’s party transcended an old regime of elite Founders by means of an appeal explicitly untethered from old disputes between Massachusetts and Virginia or North and South. Although himself a Southern slaveholder, Jackson sought less to be the heir of Jefferson than the child of the new West and its frontier population. While in 1824 Jackson outpolled the highly educated son of the second president, his defeat of Adams was as much a victory over Jefferson’s William and Mary and Madison’s Princeton as it was Adams’ Harvard. From a geographical perspective, Jackson was the successor of Jefferson; from a generational and

populist perspective, he sought not to inherit but disrupt the old order. Raised by women, a sensitive reader and devotee of the violin, the highly learned Jefferson was the epitome of respectability. Self-educated and self-made, Jackson the duellist was the political neophyte capable of building a party around the reputation of Old Hickory, martial heroism and being a force of nature.

By any measure, Trump appears much less a force of nature than Jackson. Bearing no nickname like Old Hickory or any sobriquet beyond "The Donald," Trump's direct association with the natural seems non-existent. On the other hand, consider the depiction of Gotham in the recent blockbuster film *The Joker*, in which the city has morphed into an urban, concrete jungle on the brink of reversion to survival of the fittest. The consummate New Yorker, the dapper Donald is a creature of Gotham, who works out of a penthouse overlooking the Manhattan skyline. The closest thing to a natural aspect in Trump's image would date back to the 1980s and his refurbishing of Central Park's Wollman Rink and its proximity to the Zoo. A better analogy might be with Trump's symbolic embrace of the laws of nature, particularly those of the free market and laissez-faire capitalism. Trump built his business empire where the rules are weakest or where he could skirt rules and regulations. Trump would have us believe that he dominates where natural competition reigns supreme. New York City, that urban jungle where the strong predate on the weak, brings out the best in Trump. Nowhere else but the cutthroat world of New York real estate and high-rise, high-risk construction projects could have provided a better proving ground for Trump's rise. Reminiscent in some deep-rooted aspect of Old Hickory in the nineteenth century, Trump triumphs two centuries later in a state of nature populated by predatory politicians and mafia bosses; Trump equally casts aside corrupt Democratic unions and Republican old-money bankers. Seemingly without a college education or friends from Porcellian or Skull and Bones, he beats them all at their own game. Trump casts himself as the natural alpha-male. His buildings bear his name like so many pelts on Andrew Jackson's pony.

Populists demonstrate a paradoxical attitude toward money. Careful not to disparage individual initiative, making money or generating personal fortunes, they never the less champion the self-made and individual success predicated on personal initiative. Like the MAGA movement of today, Jacksonianism predicated itself on opposition to an entrenched class of wealth, particularly the bankers of Chestnut and Wall streets. Not free enterprise per se but inherited Eastern wealth provoked the wrath of hard-working Jacksonians. Their enemy was comprised of

those already possessing the power that money and connections bring and who exploited their station to impede the rise of others. By maintaining their grip on the reins of power, the privileged inhibited the progress of American democracy and constrained opportunity for the disadvantaged. The moneyed elite, Jacksonians insisted, eschewed healthy competition in favor of monopoly and government-backing alliances that shielded the interests of a few at the expense of the greater good.

President Jackson focused his animus on Nicholas Biddle and the Bank of the United States over which Biddle presided. While few Jacksonians necessarily knew Biddle or what he stood for, they well recalled the Panic of 1819 and the frequent and seemingly artificial contractions in money that squeezed debtors and foreclosed on farmers' mortgages. The Bank of the United States became "the monster bank" and Biddle its malevolent mastermind. Biddle's bank became the symbol of oligarchy and Jackson the tribune of the people. The president's 1832 veto of the Bank recharter bill became the rallying cry of the election of 1832 and ultimately the signature legislation of the Age of Jackson.

The Panic of 1819 and the rise of Jacksonianism suggests an analogy to the Global Financial Crisis of a decade ago and the rise of Trump. Legal channels unavailing, Trump supporters sought political retribution for the bankers and their elected enablers they held responsible for the economic displacement caused by their speculative excess. Trump no more ran on a platform advocating prosecution of the Wall Street and Washington culprits who brought on the crisis than Jackson did on the sources of the 1819 Panic. Not interested in explaining the disaster, Trump, like Jackson and the Panic before him, galvanized the deep-rooted if nebulous sense in the country that the GFC and globalization had cheated middle-class Americans of their hard-earned treasure. The purported industrial policy of the previous administrations, both Republican and Democratic, had ignored the working class, instead advancing the interests of the few, of the top twenty percent whose jobs could not be outsourced, whose incomes did not depend on interest in savings accounts and who were not leveraged by mortgages, soaring healthcare costs and astronomical educational debts.

Trump's incessant bashing of "China, China, China" stood in for a general critique of globalization and the Beltway's sell-out of the American heartland. Trump dispatched eleven venerable Republicans in the primaries and one "best qualified in years" Democrat in the general election by brilliantly exploiting many Americans'

conviction that when the rich make mistakes they get special treatment. The rich and powerful always profit, whether it is Hillary Clinton in 1978 turning a \$1,000 personal bet in Arkansas into a \$100,000 windfall or some elite mistaking leverage for genius and recklessly betting and losing the entire market capitalization of an investment bank. The individuals responsible for disaster, in some perversion of natural justice, become themselves too big to fail. Government of the elite by the elite and for the elite in 2008 came to the rescue as it always does (the populist anger fueled Bernie Sanders on the left with his harsh accusations of “socialism for the rich and capitalism for the poor”). It bailed out privileged bankers’ cousins, who in the pursuit of profit had broken or at least bent the law. Americans who lost homes (or lost jobs because someone else defaulted on their home mortgage), felt most scandalized by the fact that not a single Wall Street wizard was convicted; not one did a day in jail. The failure to punish the guilty made manifest the corruption of the system. The MAGA campaign chant of “lock her up, lock her up,” expressed far more than anger at Hillary Clinton and her private email server. It represented a powerful, emotion-laden cry for economic justice. Someone should have been locked up.

Americans’ relationship with wealth is complex. Remarkably and significantly, as Trump knows instinctively, the self-made millionaire best speaks for the economically disadvantaged and disengaged. No poor or indigent person cannot lead the revolt. Her poverty simultaneously invites ridicule and the overthrow of capitalism. Led by the poor, revolt risks becoming something very different and dangerous. It portends revolution. Of course, any representative of the class of rich blue bloods cannot lead because he personifies the problem; he is the enemy. Very few candidates associated with either abject poverty or inherited wealth can issue the call for the restoration of capitalism by the overthrow of the entrenched elite. Only successful self-made celebrity can do so. Trump the populist in 2016 claimed exactly that mantle.

Trump echoes Jackson in another important way. His overwhelming disdain for intellectuals, bureaucrats and opinion makers, whether genuine or staged, characterized the essence of his ascendancy in both the Republican primaries and the general election. Trump’s opponents proved painfully slow to realize how counterproductive their protestations and exclamations about his lack of training or basic suitability for office. His apparent lack of education and inexperience defined his campaign. Both his alternative qualifications as well as his background in professional wrestling and reality television undergirded the crusade to Make

America Great Again. As a referendum on the regime of experts and intellectuals, the 2016 election demanded unconventional leadership explicitly based on the simplest and most straightforward measures of success that amounted almost to banality. The essence of both wrestling and reality TV lies in its transparency; what you see is what you get. For American audiences and voters tired of blatantly obvious manipulation, the Trump medium was the message: "Even if it's not real, at least it's authentic."

The drive for authenticity explains the ubiquitous blue suit and overlong red tie. How in the world could a ridiculous tie and dark suit be the raiment of the MAGA candidate when so few Trump supporters owned more than blue jeans and only dressed formally at the family weddings or funerals, if ever? We willfully misunderstand MAGA and Trump if we insist on voters' lemming-like identification with their candidate. Trump never pretended to be like the people. Their names do not grace the sides of buildings; they do not live in marble-floored penthouse apartments with private security details. Far from it. The meaning and political value of formal attire emerges only by means of contrast. As with "The Apprentice," the comparative value is everything. A public manipulated by Hollywood directors, producers, editors and writers hungered for reality television. An analogous revulsion stirs the public's sense of manipulation by the handlers and managers of politicians, who scripted every move and message of their candidates. Jeb Bush in overalls or Marco Rubio in an outsized cowboy hat at the Iowa State Fair was as obviously scripted as Michael Dukakis parading around in an Abrams tank a generation ago. It was all so obviously contrived as to beg Trump to burlesque it. Trump gleefully mocked his opponents, while his savage humor signified how awkward, out-of-character and ridiculous they appeared. His business suit simply highlighted in fashion what Trump captured in words during the Republican debates and in the primaries: Marco, Jeb, Ted (and Mike and Rich and Chris) were chimerical. They were nothing more (the sowing of doubt was sufficient) than the puppets of pollsters and puffers. As for Trump, perhaps the suit and tie were a bit preposterous, but they evoked his willfulness; they were his brand. That long red tie proclaimed that he dressed himself. Alone among the contenders, Trump was authentic.

Trump is hardly an innovator. His 2016 campaign resurrected an elemental populist impulse that has inhabited the recesses and byways of American political culture from at least the Age of Jackson. For American populists, Trump stands out, like Jackson before him, because he was an outsider and a disruptor. His very lack of

qualifications for office proved instrumental in winning him the presidency. He also had some help. Only a perfect storm could propel a disruptor like Trump into the White House. Much of the credit must go to the Democratic Party for nominating the ultimate Washington insider and running a campaign based on little more than that she deserved the office. Hillary Rodham Clinton personified and her policies expressed all the aspects of elitist superiority that the populists decry. She was as much Trump's ideal foil as John Quincy Adams was Andrew Jackson's almost two centuries earlier. One can almost hear Clinton's inaugural echoing Adams' first annual message declaring how the Progressives should not be "palsied by the will of our constituents." Highly educated and the insider *par excellence*, Hillary not only came across as superior and smarter than the voters, but actually seemed to embrace her smug superiority. Rather than highlight Trump's deficiencies, the swagger and arrogance of a campaign that boasted theirs was the "best prepared candidate ever" convinced even moderate voters that her complacent arrogant elitism was just too much to stomach. This time, in the privacy of the voting booth, they sent that smirking know-it-all a powerful lesson in humility, secure in the conviction that their disruptive protest vote would have no bearing on the outcome. Trump could not possibly win. Hillary patronized and condescended her way to defeat and with it a new populist insurgency invaded the establishment. Cue again the tune played at Yorktown in 1781.

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Edmund Morgan, *The Birth of the Republic* (University of Chicago Press, 1956)

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Notes

¹ See: <https://www.npr.org/2019/04/23/716258113/kathy-griffin-life-after-the-trump-severed-head-controversy>.

² See: <https://www.pussyhatproject.com/>

³ See Michael Schaub, "Co-author of Trump's 'Art of the Deal' says the book should be reclassified as fiction," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 May 2019.

⁴ "The Fact Checker," *Washington Post*, gives background in "Here's the real story about the Churchill bust in the Oval Office" at www.washingtonpost.com from 23 January 2017.

⁵ The portrait can be viewed at <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.1128.html>.

⁶ All quotes in the paragraph from David Bromwich, "The Wild Inauguration of Andrew Jackson, Trump's Populist Predecessor," *New York Times* (20 Jan 2017).

⁷ See Susan Glasser, "The Man Who Put Andrew Jackson in Trump's Oval Office," *Politico* (22 January 2018) for information on Bannon's role in the selection. For Meade's take on Trump see: <https://www.Hudson.org/research/12125-andrew-jackson-revenant>.

⁸ "Trump cites Andrew Jackson as his hero – and a reflection of himself," stated a *Washington Post* headline. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2017/03/15/4da8dc8c-0995-11e7-a15f-a58d4a988474_story.html

⁹ John William Ward, *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age* (Oxford University Press, 1953).

¹⁰ The Trump-Jackson connection has hardly been lost of the commentariat. See, for example, Peter Baker, "Jackson and Trump: How Two Populist Presidents Compare," *New York Times*, 15 March 2017; H.W. Brands, "This Fox & Friends Host Wrote a Pretty Good Biography of Andrew Jackson," *Politico*, 24 January 2018; Jon Meachem, "Lead all of Us: Jackson did; you can too," *The Tennessean*, 13 March 2017.

¹¹ MAGA: Make America Great Again is Trump election campaign slogan. It was pinched from the Ronald Reagan campaign of the 1980s.

¹² Biographies of Andrew Jackson abound. Marques James study handles the politics particularly adeptly. See *The Life of Andrew Jackson*, 2 vols. (Garden City Publishing, 1933 & 1938).

¹³ Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (Alfred Knopf, 1965).