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DONALD TRUMP AND AMERICA DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF

Introduction

One cannot explain a phenomenon of Donald Trump without understanding that he sensed something which the political pundits and politicians directed by them could not comprehend. This problem was named a “divided America” hating each other. It does not mean that Trump understood entirely the nature of the problem, or that he was even ready to try to comprehend it deeply, but he used it in a masterful way and in good will limited only by his innate flaws of character.

A political cunning of Trump manifested itself in his understanding that there was a huge political potential in activating this new “silent America” and to hit with it the complacent “ruling class”, the new oligarchy which comprised also both the establishment of the Democratic and the Republican parties. This “silent America” is not the same as “the silent majority” defined and used politically by Richard Nixon against the countercultural wave in 1968 because then and now America is different. For instance, even if the working class is part of this “silent” America, this is a different working class and different culture and economic scene where it operates. There existed then, still, the common American core, also in a deeper anthropological sense which made it possible to fight over politics, economy and even culture with some boundaries impossible to be crossed. Today’s America is divided between people who think that at the very essence

such boundaries do not exist, in a sense that America is a rotten country founded on sin and should be totally redefined anew, not by returning to its original, good principles as Martin Luther King or Robert Kennedy wanted it, but by rejecting them as corrupted beyond redemption.

Knowing that in America any Third Party stands no chance of being successful, Trump captured the Republican party, using a mechanism of democratic primary elections and won a nomination despite a powerful opposition of the so called “Never Trump” movement which could be “understandable, even honorable reaction to the startling victory of a Johnny-come-lately Republican who never enjoyed a deep allegiance to the conservative movement”.¹

Trump organized also overwhelmingly the voters who were born on “the wrong side of a trail” and not only in economic sense of the world but in a profoundly cultural sense. People who understood that they were not only economic but cultural and social outcasts because anything they strongly believed in was defined by other America, as Hilary Clinton during a presidential contest said, “deplorable”, a language American liberal elites have so far never used. People who were mainly white, poor, without education and prospects for a better life as well as religious people being attacked for what they believed was true, parents terrified by new “political officers” considering their educational methods and values as reactionary, the people for whom a promise of America seemed to be a dream gone a long time ago.

Trump, with his instinct of a “common man” not because of his social and material status – he belonged to the richest stratum of the American society – but because he was a man close by a character of his business to “hard America” of workers, lower middle classes and rural, middle America, neglected and devastated by the “soft America” of the media, universities, political class more and more inbred in between themselves and obsessed with “identity liberalism” and political correctness securing it, as well as with globalized political visions at the expense of the forgotten America. Going into politics he knew that he had to demolish rules and procedures of “politics as usual” and appeal to populist revolt, but not against the system, but by taking over one of the existing parties, since in the US history the Third Parties has never stand a chance of winning elections since the middle of the 19th cent. Only such populism, to take over one of the existing parties, has been historically successful, the rebellion of “the people” against “the rascals” who forgot whom they were to serve and had to be “thrown out” of power.²

¹ Ch. Kesler, “Donald Trump and the Conservative Cause”, *Claremont Review of Books*, Spring 2016, p. 10.

² This happened when, for instance, the Republicans took over the Whig Party in 1856, Bryan took over the Democratic Party in 1896 and Theodore Roosevelt the Republican Party in 1901, Ronald Reagan the Republican Party in 1980, or Trump the same party in 2016. See a good history of American populism: M. Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History*, Basic

When this “forgotten” America rallied around Trump, the “privileged” America was incapable of even a single moment of reflection why he won in a democratic election, what he saw and what they did not. The only response they could muster was hatred, abuse, and definition of him as a populist leader capturing the basic instincts of racist America and using it against enlightened America.³ That liberal left progressive camp launched from the beginning an adamant critique of Trump, hysterical and not related to his conflicting policies.

For the liberal-left or the progressives, the loose motley of people defined as “the Resistance”, Trump was kind of an usurper, a tyrant to be stopped at all costs. As one of the commentators remarked: “I’m reminded of Winston Churchill’s line about the socialist Stafford Cripps: ‘He has all the virtues I dislike and none of the vices I admire.’ The Never Trumpers see no virtues in Trump and admire none of his vices. The resulting portrait is a caricature, a rough, unrevealing one. [...] The critics seem to prefer an explanation of Trump that is, as the cosmologists say, non-luminous.”⁴

Democratic election and its liberal enemies

The liberal-left criticism, having little to do with immediate Trump’s policies showed a level of hostility rarely seen among political commentators or the public. This was especially visible on the predominantly liberal university campuses, which broke into hysteria, in itself a measure of immaturity of the “millennial” generation brought up on a melange of “tolerance”, “empathy” and a lack of any limitations. Protesters, especially at the elitist universities, were demanding special “safe spaces”, including psychotherapeutic help and cancellation of exams impossible to be conducted under such an unbearable stress.⁵

Books, New York 1995; and an insightful review article of it: J.R. Coyne, Jr., *The American Spectator*, July 1995, pp. 73–74; on its recent significance see: D.T. Critchlow, *In Defense of Populism: Protest and American Democracy*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2021; also: V.J. Cannato, “Our Populist Past”, *National Review*, June 1, 2021.

³ This phenomenon which is characteristic for the entire Western liberal world gets a comprehensive account in: *Vox Populi: The Perils and Promises of Populism*, ed. R. Kimball, Encounter Books, New York 2017; see also A. Bryk, *Liberalna demokracja, oligarchizacja a tzw. rewolta populistyczna w Europie*, soon to be published in France; *idem*, “Odzyskać prawdziwy wybór”, *Rzeczpospolita*, Plus-Minus, October 19–20, 2019, pp. 8–9; see also: D. Murray, *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam*, Bloomsbury, London 2017.

⁴ Ch.R. Kesler, “Thinking About Trump”, *Claremont Review of Books*, Spring 2018, p. 10–11.

⁵ For instance, at Georgetown post-election therapy was applied to shocked students who were “coming together” on campus. Tears were shed, and students were encouraged to hug those nearby in order to “take the love to a global level”. Many deans at Columbia University sent an email to faculty “after a long and highly charged Presidential campaign, our community has been deeply affected by the election results. Many of our students are experiencing anxiety and concern, such that they may find it particularly challenging to concentrate, study, complete course assign-

In general, an attitude among the liberal left or progressive of any sorts, also shared by some republican and conservative politicians and intellectuals, was that at stake was the entire liberal order and thus American democracy was in peril.⁶

For Trump's critics the election in 2016 was a symptom of the United States in danger of "backsliding", a favorite word of all progressives, towards authoritarianism. He was a man

who has praised dictators, encouraged violence among supporters, threatened to jail his rival, and labeled the mainstream media as "the enemy" – has raised fears that the United States may be heading toward authoritarianism. While predictions of a descent into fascism are overblown, the Trump presidency could push the United States into a mild form of what we call "competitive authoritarianism" – a system in which meaningful democratic institutions exist yet the government abuses state power to disadvantage its opponents.⁷

Such a danger allegedly had always been a possibility, claim the critics, since the 1970s when the Democratic Party became championing "progressive emancipatory" program and identity politics with the Republican Party conspiring to subvert foundations safeguarding the American democracy. Such a polarization both

facilitated Trump's rise and left democratic institutions more vulnerable to his autocratic behavior. The safeguards of democracy may not come from the quarters one might expect. American society's purported commitment to democracy is no guarantee against

ments, and other responsibilities in this immediate aftermath of the election results. [...] You may receive requests from students for extra time on an assignment or for a later date for a quiz or exam. We ask that you consider the extenuating circumstances when considering such requests and that you offer as much flexibility as possible in accommodating students in distress." Theologians at Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist issued a peculiar statement as far as Christian point of view is concerned in which they "invite others into a larger conversation about life in a deeply divided country [expressing] grave concern". [...] The ascendancy of Trump to the Office of the Presidency reflects a politics of fear and loathing sustained by a misogynistic, xenophobic, and racist nationalist ideology that offends moral decency and distorts the deepest values of life and civil discourse in our constitutional democracy [...]", in: R.R. Reno, "While We're At It", *First Things*, January 2017, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2017/01/while-were-at-it> [accessed: 05.06.2021].

⁶ A symptomatic in this regard is a voice of a liberal columnist of the Washington Post Anne Applebaum: "For the first time since the Second World War, we have an American president who is sceptical of trade, of the value of Western institutions, and of the significance of the Western military alliance. He may not succeed in destroying the post-war order, but he has certainly put it in grave danger", quoted in *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2017, p. 178. One has of course to be conscious that when using such general phrases as a "liberal order", a nebulous and imprecise term in itself, one may think about many different realities. Such an order is better defined without hysteria of Appelbaum by G.J. Ikenberry, "The Plot Against American Foreign Policy: Can the Liberal Order Survive?", *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2017, pp. 2–9. Critical towards Trump's policies, the author at least understands this order's dysfunctional features to which Trump tried to respond.

⁷ R. Mickey, S. Levitsky, L.A. Way, "Is America Still Safe for Democracy?", *Foreign Affairs* 2017, Vol. 96, No. 3 (May/June), p. 20.

backsliding; nor are constitutional checks and balances, the bureaucracy, or the free press. Ultimately, it may be Trump's ability to mobilize public support [...] that will determine American democracy's fate.⁸

This accusation of populism represented by Trump and his electorate subverting progressive American march towards just society united both the intellectual university elites, the media and corporations but also establishments of both the Democratic Party as well as part of the Republican Party which misunderstood its own political situation and took a defensive stance. This "populist" uprising terrified the liberal-left which could use its powerful means of communications having control of nearly all mainstream media and universities with business giving it nearly unanimous support. Moreover, for the first time in American history the liberal-left is richer than the conservative-right side with American billionaires donating huge sums to universities bribing them intellectually and pushing to auto-censorship with Big Tech censoring the social media. What these people could not stand was Trump's challenge to their vision of social engineering and they will make everything never to let such a danger be created again.

Populism, understood in a European way, may of course be dangerous, but it cannot be managed by resistance alone. But Trump's victory showed that if a sufficient number of voters hate what their party establishments do and what affects them, they will rebel against it either to make it politically insignificant or forcing it to accommodate its voters grievances. In this sense Trump separated Republican, including conservative voters, from their establishment leaders. "That's what populist politicians do. They say what is popular but prohibited."⁹ Such a separation after the World War II happened once in 1980 when the Republican base rebelled against its Party rallying around Ronald Reagan. Trump's victory "has revealed, rather than caused, the weakness of the Republican Party and the conservative movement [...]. The great and powerful establishment turned out to be a group of weak, foolish men behind the curtain."¹⁰

Trump voters rebelled against their own Party even if at the beginning it was difficult to discern any clear, positive ideas behind his movement. But it was obvious that something ended in the Republican camp, a phenomenon of the fatigue coming from constant defeats and unfulfilled promises after many decades when Republican politicians

who extol the sacred mission of limiting government, but never seem to try very hard [...] to actually limit government [...]. [I]t becomes difficult to keep believing that GOP victories are a matter of any real urgency. This state of affairs leaves Republicans arguing that the strongest case for their party is the need to make it more difficult for Democrats to

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ R.R. Reno, "In Search of Populism: The ruling class ignored the people; the people struck back", *The American Mind*, November 7, 2018, <https://americanmind.org/features/thinking-about-thinking-about-trump/in-search-of-populism/> [accessed: 5.06.2021].

¹⁰ W. Voegeli, "What's at Stake", *Claremont Review of Books*, Spring 2016, p. 32.

do their worst. [...] One reason that Trump has taken positions contrary to those in recent Republican platforms, but paid no political price, is that Republican voters disposed to care about such things find it hard, after decades of unfulfilled promises, to take fealty to the agenda all that seriously. [Many conservatives] [...] committed [themselves] to every item on the conservative agenda: social issues, taxes [etc.]. But the list is mostly a list of things that haven't gotten done for a long time and are unlikely to get done for an even longer time. [...] By contrast, Trump and his supporters are [...] "attitudinal conservatives." Their conservatism is more concerned with solidarity and reciprocity than programs and policies."¹¹

Some commentators compare Trump's rise to the phenomenon of Sarah Palin, John McCain's vice-presidential nominee in 2008. She might be defined as a precursor of Trump not because she was clear or cared about what policies she endorsed, but because she was an instant "political magnet" attracting crowds for one reason that her voters had a perverse satisfaction in the disdain and contempt she got from the liberal media and academia. The latter disdain towards her was a disdain of her supporters, who stood behind her and enjoyed her celebrity or notoriety according to her opponents. This emotional attitude was not connected with what Palin thought or said, her ideology was not clearly articulated. But her emotional conservatism was in itself a yelling protest against political corruption in Washington and against denigration of religious people. This located her, an evangelical Christian, firmly on the social conservatism's side and right at the very center of culture war. Palin became "an embodiment of every dark fantasy the Left had ever held about the views of evangelical Christians and women who do not associate themselves with contemporary feminism, and all concern for clarity and truthfulness was left at the door". This paranoid reaction on the Left was caused by the fact that she represented a new countercultural conservative feminism, which combined cultural traditionalism with work-place egalitarianism. It was this combination which terrified the liberal and leftist feminists because they realized how powerful such an appeal can be for a new generation of young women led into wilderness by "emancipatory" left. For her supporters she became "the Joan of Arc of the American Right." The conflict had much to do with the old-age tension in America between populism and elitism in the public square, between the notion that Americans were

the best governed by the views, needs, and interests of the many and the conviction, that power can only be managed by a select few. In American politics, the distinction between populism and elitism is further subdivided into cultural and economic populism and elitism. And [since the 1950s] the two parties have broken down distinctly along this double axis. [...] Both [populisms] are politically potent but in America, unlike in Europe, cultural populism has always been much more powerful. Americans do not resent the success of others, but they do resent arrogance, and especially intellectual arrogance. [...] It was this sense, this feeling that Sarah Palin channeled so effectively.¹²

¹¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 32–33.

¹² Y. Levin, "The Meaning of Sarah Palin", *Commentary*, February 2009, pp. 15–17.

Palin's provocations resembling those of Trump defined her as the arch-enemy of the America's intellectual elite which, as was the case with Trump, hated her. This was a kind of highbrow intellectual elitism traditionally not visible in America.¹³ In fact, such an intellectual elitism is new in America although it has been European tradition today visible in radical form in the EU. Palin was anti-elitist in the American sense of the word which the liberal elite defined as anti-intellectual when she was only non-intellectual and those who reacted furiously against her "evinced [...] no appreciation for the essential premise of democracy: the practical wisdom matters as much as formal education and that leadership can emerge from utterly unexpected places. [...] Palin's populism was not her weakness, but her strength; her weakness was [as Trump's – A.B.] that she failed to tie her populism to anything deeper."¹⁴ But during Palin's time, as well as during the first true rebellion against the establishments of both parties, that is the Tea Party, the voters who supported both phenomena believed that they represented the true American spirit corrupted by the treacherous elites. The same was and is still true with the Trump supporters who think that they represent the true American ethos, that is a certain silent assumption that the elites have power and prestige but they get this so the rest of America can prosper. In other words, Trump's voters do think that they have been faithful to the American social contract while the elites betrayed it orienting themselves towards the global economic market and its increasingly ideological dimension.¹⁵

Here we come to the most dramatic problem of the late liberal-democratic society, a split between the general public and the elites, the essence of populism. This split is increasingly connected with the fact that a contemporary American elite wants to be solely revered according to an individual merit of its members separated from any obligations towards the rest of their fellow Americans. They do not have any *noblesse oblige* features of character which in times of turmoil and hardships create a sense of mutual solidarity of all. However, large part of the American citizens is increasingly skeptical and suspicious whether merit should be a sole legitimate basis of power, a situation visible in other Western countries as well, one of the causes of today's populism, a rebellion against governing elites. The very word itself has become a widely circulated insult, mainly because the way these elites are formed and replenished has been losing legitimacy, that is a basis upon which power and status are recognized as justly achieved. Elites in democracy have always had to justify their authority and privileges, and any widely held doubts that power and wealth are distributed in a shadowy, unjust way is a deadly danger for such an elite to retain an authority, undermining solidarity and social cohesion. Thus,

¹³ G. Himmelfarb, *The Roads to Modernity: The British, French, and American enlightenments*, Vintage Books, New York 2013.

¹⁴ Y. Levin, *The Meaning of Sarah Palin*, *op. cit.*, pp. 15–19.

¹⁵ See e.g. W. Voegeli, "What's at Stake", *op. cit.*, pp. 32–33.

[w]hen we fail to find [...] a persuasive justification for the privileges of an elite, the tendency of the democratic public is to rebel against that elite [...]. But populists are not anarchists. They demand liberation from oppressive authority because they want legitimate authority. [...] [Such] elite authority is unavoidably channeled through elite institutions. This is why populist frustration with elite authority is so often expressed as a loss of faith in institutions [...]. Elite institutions [in a liberal society] [...] should be suited to constraining our elites and pressing them into the service of the public. But too often they are not, because they do not perceive themselves in these terms, [the] institutions increasingly understand themselves as expressive of the ethos of the people within them.¹⁶

There are two ways of establishing elite legitimacy, writes Yuval Levin. Elites have to assure an open, democratic access to the institutions which create tools of gaining power, prestige and money. But even more important is a sense that such privileges are exercised with restraint and promote common good. If contemporary American elites claim that they represent merit this does not really mean that such a claim is recognized by the general public. These elites are perceived as oligarchical, exclusive and inbred, becoming a democratic equivalent of the old time aristocracy with hereditary privileges. Democratic changes in the second half of the 20th cent. might have eliminated the dominance of the once true American WASP elite, but primacy of merit which allegedly was to follow has not been observed and a pool of meritocratic people has not enlarged. We may say that meritocracy has solidified itself into an oligarchy with the same background, cultural connections, political values and ideas. This new oligarchy is also more confident that they have a right to be where they are because they achieved such a position by right of merit. Thus, today when Western elites engage in public activity, they

tend not to see it as the fulfillment of an obligation to give back but rather as a demonstration of their own high-mindedness and merit. [...] [T]he idea at the core of our meritocracy is radically individualistic and dismally technocratic: Merit is demonstrated by test scores and a glittering resume rather than a service to the larger society [...]. The sort of elite this produces implicitly substitutes a cold and sterile notion of intellect for a warm and spirited understanding of character as its measure of worth [perceived] by society [as] an unjustifiable substitution. But rather than impose some standards of character on itself, our elite inclines to respond to these concerns with increasingly intense displays of social justice.¹⁷

Responsive populism against contemptuous technocracy

Trump responded to the aforementioned mistrust towards governing elites, however critics mistook his brash style for the essence of his way of governance. He understood that since the end of the Bill Clinton presidency in 2001 the United States has deteriorated both internationally and internally. For the first time in

¹⁶ Y. Levin, "Toward a Conservative Institutionalism", *National Review*, February 10, 2020, pp. 25–30.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

American history a possibility that such a decline might be structural and difficult to reverse began to be widely discussed while the establishment seemed to be incapable of defining the problem, let alone take up decisive action demolishing traditional political pieties.¹⁸

Trump understood that a growing sense of unease revolved not only around endlessly debated traditional issues such as unfavourable trade agreements, mass illegal immigration or endless foreign wars.¹⁹ These issues seem to be unsolvable because fundamental cultural problems have changed, with monopolistic language of political correctness and “identity” liberalism constituting an ideological framework suffocating open discussions, a public ritual in which, with disdainful complacency towards the voters, politicians of both parties, business interests, dominating liberal-left media and the university elites participated. Trump realized that there were two Americas, even if the losing one might not guarantee victory. His strategy was to use the logic of the Electoral College to win, if not numerical then the electoral majority, a phenomenon happening several times in American history.²⁰ But this electoral majority amounted to 85% of the United States territory, showing how deeply divided America had become. On the one hand there were affluent, culturally and politically liberal, with economic global mentality in the East and the West coasts, on the other the huge country in between, culturally mainly conservative, religious, poorer, socially devastated, abandoned and disdained by the elites who neither knew nor tried to understand them getting back similarly intense emotions. To such emotions appealed Trump with the liberal elite considering such an alliance to be naive, reactionary and doomed to failure.

These liberal elites were dubbed by Barack Obama’s deputy national security adviser David Rhodes as “an incestuous echo chamber”, a phrase referring to their inbred insularity making impossible any contact with real America.²¹ These elites harbor contempt and disdain for Middle America with their allegedly unenlightened reactionary and counterproductive ways of living and mentalities to be reeducated. When Obama lost the primary election in Pennsylvania in 2008, he defined people who were losing *en masse* their jobs in huge regions devastated economically as people who did not understand his prophetic genius,

¹⁸ See: A.M. Codevilla *The Ruling Class: How they corrupted America and what we can do about it*, Beaufort Books, New York 2010. Even if the crisis of 1968–74 was perceived as devastating it did not structurally weaken the American military and economic potential which Reagan soon mobilized to win the Cold War.

¹⁹ Here the situation of the United States may resemble a typical fate of a universal empire: they united everybody against them and threw around its forces too widely.

²⁰ Hilary Clinton won about 3 million votes more than Trump, the majority of them were from California.

²¹ V.D. Hanson, “Presidential Payback For Media Hubris”, *Hoover Institution*, March 1, 2017, <https://www.hoover.org/research/presidential-payback-media-hubris> [accessed: 5.06.2021].

psychologically unable to withstand stress.²² Hilary Clinton fighting Trump during the election in 2016 wrote off one fourth of the American electorate as “deplorables” stating “you could put half of Trump’s supporters into what I call the basket of deplorables. [...] The racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic – you name it [...]. And he has lifted them up.”²³

Such a rhetoric was the best indicator of utterly narcissistic language of the liberal elites abandoning large sections of the American people not realizing that they may be called to task for thinking that their values were or should be shared by all. Their values, Hillary Clinton’s opinion quoted above testified to this in the most devastating way, were the standard values of the post-1968 liberalism, or progressivism. This liberalism has as its operating principle an idea of “emancipation” from all “oppressive” (as defined by them) traditional institutions, systems of thoughts identified as “false consciousness”, including “religious superstitions” as well as patterns of life detrimental to human wellbeing according to the emancipators’ criteria. The “enlightened” liberal elite were thus to provide a definition of this truly “emancipated” society and to break a resistance of people in opposition to social engineering. This “emancipatory” ideology and its underlying anthropology annihilates all roles demanding a subordination of one’s imperial will to a higher authority of objective moral norms and duties limiting one’s own ego. This would require inculcation of virtues through autonomous institutions independent of any ideological social engineering. These virtues reach beyond a fleeting impulse of the self and a mere choice subjecting them to the truth higher than one’s own ego, the only basis of significant relational arrangement which can come only from authority outside of one’s own subjectivity.

The most striking contradiction within liberalism today, defined by different names such as postmodern or identity liberalism, is its inability to form any mutual lasting social obligations. With a diminishing force of the Christian anthropology and a social ethic built on it, liberal society tries to build moral responsibility on human rights incapable of forming social solidarity with minute pragmatic administrative rules of conduct, essentially means of crisis management among proliferating, competing rights at every social level. It is this dissolution of social cohesion which America began increasingly to experience. The countercultural revolution tries to build social solidarity on a motley stew of essentially psychologically defined categories like e.g. “authenticity” or “non-judgmentalism”, regulated by minute rules of mutual accommodation animated by human rights rhetoric which pushes them into a neo-Marxist dichotomy of

²² *Condescending to Tell People You’re Not Condescending is Still Condescending*, April 14, 2008, <https://stumplane.us/2008/04/14/condescending-to-tell-people-youre-not-condescending-is-still-condescending/> [accessed: 5.06.2021].

²³ Clinton gave this speech at an LGBT campaign fundraising event in New York City on September 9, 2016, see e.g. “Basket of deplorables”, *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basket_of_deplorables [accessed: 5.06.2021].

“oppressors” versus “victims”. This is a basic framework within which contemporary “woke” movement and “cancel culture” operate. There is a paradox and contradiction in this moral deregulation which places a sole point of moral judgment in an autonomous individual. Acceptance of non-judgmentalism is a natural outcome of such an axiom since there are no criteria of judging different “opinions” when a category of truth relating to some stable ontological or anthropological structure of reality, something called natural law has been rejected. The only accepted anthropology is anthropology of the “self”, each truly legitimate. As a consequence, liberal human rights form the new public morality. This is a hopeless task going against historically confirmed fact that “everyone who has gotten any systemic morality in his or her life received it from a primal community [mainly] conceived religiously.”²⁴ Public morality created on the basis of human rights in principle aims at securing non-discrimination, equality and unbound individual freedom, of which the most blatant example is a right to choose subjectively any identity meaning rebelling against any historical, cultural let alone religious identity. In fact, the only identity is a constant potential of fluidity, an understanding of freedom secured by human rights scaffolding. Rights have to relate to any chosen identity without any judgment on its moral legitimacy, except pragmatic reasons of public safety or rules preventing “hate crimes” constituting in fact ideologically certified principles of non-judgmentalism.²⁵ But with such an anthropology demanding that a total content of any subjectively chosen identity be defined in a language of rights autonomous individuals “are inevitably unable to resist seeing all their rights become entitlements from the state. That is because none of these rights can be conceived to be ontologically prior to the authority of the state and therefore none of them are essentially outside its control. Furthermore, none of these entitlements are irrevocable.”²⁶

Tyranny of identity politics began to define public discussion as legitimate only if conducted within prescribed ideological rules disregarding basic rules of logic or science, let alone common sense. This creates an illusion of true debate pushing out any predefined legitimate criticisms into a forbidden zone. As a consequence, not social solidarity has been created but loneliness and social dissolution.²⁷ America has become a country profoundly divided against itself. However, the major class line today is not so much racial or economic. They remain as sharp as ever but causes of contemporary divisions go deeper. Lower classes are affected by cultural dissolution and devastated by the sexual revolution, easy

²⁴ D. Novak, *In Defense of Religious Liberty*, ISI Books, Wilmington, DE 2009, p. 100.

²⁵ P. Manent, *A World Beyond Politics? A Defense of the Nation-State*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2013.

²⁶ See on a process of development of identity politics: K. Kersten, “Adversary Culture in 2020”, *First Things*, February 2021, pp. 41–46; M. Eberstadt, *Primal Screams: How the Sexual Revolution Created Identity Politics*, Templeton Press, West Conshohocken, PA 2020.

²⁷ One of the first analyses of this process was given by a sociologist R.D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Simon & Schuster, New York 2000.

divorces, drugs and alcoholism. These are phenomena separating economically, socially and morally the lower classes, especially the white working class, from the upper middle classes, a process of America “coming apart”.²⁸

Benefits of globalization have affected this upper class but shattered the lower classes resisting more and more policies of the most culturally and politically influential, most wealthy Americans. When this half of America, predominantly Middle America in class and in geographic terms suddenly realized that they were

targeted by globalization and was culturally caricatured for its supposed irredeemable and deplorable habits by the smug winners of internationalism, [it was not surprising] that it looked desperately for a politician who promised to put them back to work and to honor rather than deride their manner of living [...]. A renegade Manhattan billionaire understood the angst of Middle and of the rural America far better than seasoned conservative professional politicians [from the Republican Party] (many of them from fly-over states), media and Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama – and then, like all successful populists, he crafted messages to make them feel they could be as prosperous and respected as were their critics who dismissed them.²⁹

Trump message was addressed to all Americans as Americans, thus his target was the American “people”, while Clinton’s message was addressed to identity groups, very much dependent, as clients, on different government’s programs distributed by the liberal left. Within such a perspective, common America was just a pale shadow of group interests and identities addressed by Clinton. For Trump united America was more important than identity groups based on race, gender, class (except the workers) and of course middle-class intelligentsia connected with corporations, the media and academia. Trump appealed to a common-sense American patriotism, empowering huge groups treated by the liberal left, culturally and economically, as sites of the worst American vices. Here Trump’s program was closer to Bernie Sanders than Hilary Clinton, differing only by means of governance. Sanders appealed from the principles of social democracy never strong in America, Trump from the principles of patriotism and equal opportunity within the American model of economy.

Trump sensed something which Hilary Clinton was incapable of grasping: that it was impossible to win the election without groups defined by economic and social inequality. Identity groups allied with cultural liberal left and affluent upper class were not enough. The CNN’s exit polls showed that white working-class voters, usually defined as ‘whites without four-year college degrees’, constituted staggering 34% of the 2016 electorate totally neglected by the Democrats. 66% of their vote went to Trump, when only 29% voted for Clinton, a real

²⁸ Ch. Murray, *Coming Apart: The State of White America 1960–2010*, Crown Forum/Random House, New York 2012.

²⁹ V.D. Hanson, *The Unlikeliest Populist*, [in:] *Vox Populi: The Perils and Promises of Populism*, ed. by R. Kimball, Encounter Books, New York 2017, p. 152.

landslide. This was not necessarily surprising since Trump just capitalized on a trend which began with John McCain who won 58% of the white working-class votes in 2008 and Mitt Romney who got 61% of their vote in 2012.³⁰ Neglecting over one third of the electorate in a two party system while polarizing American politics was a strategic mistake. The Democrats could not become the party of the working class as they were during the New Deal once they decided in the 1970s to focus on identity politics, but they could lose with a narrower margin. Clinton was rejected by the working class because she did not notice a rising tide of anger not so much visible yet during Obama's elections, but also because her campaign strategy rejected this class, thought by her advisers to be a winning strategy. But she also focused on identity groups because she thought she could not win the working class anyway, a strategic misjudgment. A symbolic end of her campaign were rallies in the inner cities and college towns, the numerically and intellectually very center of the rainbow coalition based exactly on identity criteria, minority groups like Blacks, Hispanics, gays etc., with whites with college degrees focused on advanced or professional degrees. Here in a nutshell was visible this alliance of the upper class with the identity groups.³¹

Of course, the white working class distanced itself from the Democratic Party anyway a long time ago and to win them back required an extra political effort. But Clinton's strategy rejected the class dimension of a conflict, both in its traditional economic aspect and this new cultural one in favor of identity politics, and lost. Clinton could have appealed both to the rainbow coalition and the workers if she tried to notice their economic hardships. But she renounced the latter *en masse* defining them as bigots, rednecks and xenophobes, racism *a rebours*, considering their culture and social ideas as illegitimate. Clinton showed a shocking disdain of the better off towards the poor not realizing that economics at the time of global dislocations mattered in the election of 2016 much more than often marginal identities. The Democrats did not notice this economic dimension coming back in American politics.³²

But the Democratic Party and Clinton did not grasp the fact that a choice between their rainbow base and the white working class was real in yet another dimension, defined by their rainbow coalition as the only legitimate and by the working class or religious traditional groups as not acceptable. When the

³⁰ W. Voegeli, "The Democrats' Dilemma", *Claremont Review of Books*, Fall 2017, p. 21.

³¹ According to CNN "voters of all races with a postgraduate education accounted for 18% of the 2016 electorate and favored Clinton by a margin of 58% to 37%", *ibidem*.

³² They should have noticed this connection and responded to "the [...] aspirations, anxieties, and resentments [of all working class people] with a newer, post-industrial New Deal. Both former Vice President Joe Biden and Senator Bernie Sanders, Clinton's opponent for the 2016 nomination, have insisted that the white working class voters who favored Donald Trump so decisively were not, by and large, bigots. Rather, Sanders said earlier this year, Trump understood 'that there's a lot of pain in this country' [...] Clinton could have defeated Trump if she had addressed that pain with the sort of economic populism that defined the Sanders campaign [...]"; *ibidem*.

Democrats obsessively focused on even the most marginal, for instance transgender, aspects of the rainbow coalition, they totally disregarded the working class values let alone religious freedom. Clinton's disdain was just a consequence of a demand that the other side should totally accept the liberal-left ideology and anthropology which stood behind it as the essence of universal morality and it did not do this.³³ The Democratic Party and the liberal-left elites consider themselves to be carriers not only of political, economic and social strategy for America but guardians of the only civilized morality. As such they look at themselves as endowed with a mission of "enlightening" people with wrong morality and "false consciousness" and warriors in the culture wars without compromises nor taking prisoners. This is a zero sum "we against them" battle in which the liberal-left thinks that the democratic process, subject to populist and xenophobic sentiments, is faulty and should be curtailed and guarded against such sentiments by administrative "deep state" or the courts in which liberals have an advantage because they are coming from liberal law schools³⁴. That is why for the liberal-left abandoning even the most drastic aspects of the morally right policy of the rainbow coalition and identity politics was in their judgment by definition politically wrong since

curtailing identity politics in order to emphasize greater economic security could result in a net loss for Democrats if the number of disaffected rainbow voters who stay home exceeds the number of white Trump voters attracted to a corner-cutting [since] economic populism has the capacity to attract significant numbers of white working-class voters, and over "the difficulty of luring [such] voters without turning away the Democratic Party's loyal base." And the moral wrong? [...]. [A]ny Democratic pivot to the white working class requires denying "the primacy of racism" – denying that Trump did so well with such voters because they were willing to accept, and in many cases eager to embrace, "the very real racism and sexism that [he] deliberately channeled" in 2016. In other words, retooling their message to make it more appealing to white working-class voters will probably leave Democrats worse off, due to more-than-offsetting losses from the rainbow base. [...] Political parties must determine how to win elections, but also remember why. To win by betraying the fundamental reason for contesting an election in the first place validates the other party's rejection of one's own principles.³⁵

³³ This is a thesis which was unequivocally put forth by J. Walsh, *What's the Matter with White People? Why we Long for a Golden Age that Never Was*, Wiley, New York 2012.

³⁴ This is a tactics suggested by Harvard Law School professor Mark Tushnet, who several months before the election of Trump, overtly advocated that all who do not agree with liberal-left Tushnet's views should be forced to do this by constitutional litigation. When Tushnet wrote that "the culture wars are over; they lost, we won" he did not think so much about politics but culture and morality, and thus a need to reeducate these who disagree and who happened to be voting for Trump. M. Tushnet, *Abandoning Defensive Crouch: Liberal Constitutionalism*, May 6, 2016, <https://balkin.blogspot.com/2016/05/abandoning-defensive-crouch-liberal.html> [accessed: 5.06.2021]. This brings to mind an observation by the foreign minister of Great Britain during the time of the Vienna Congress of 1815 that "the fundamental problem of politics [...] is not the control of wickedness but the limitation of righteousness".

³⁵ W. Voegeli, "The Democrats' Dilemma", *op. cit.*, pp. 21–22.

Hilary Clinton's strategy repudiated. Her husband's strategy of exactly doing what she considered an anathema, worked. Bill Clinton made very substantial compromises with the liberal identity politics dogma, even if at his time its rigidity was not so pronounced. It was Obama who made identity politics a cornerstone of his policy even if in practical terms such a policy contained many compromises. Hillary Clinton did not make any compromises, despite warnings of such liberal critics of identity politics as Mark Lilla³⁶. But Lilla might be missing the point. His old time liberalism of the Democratic Party is gone not because it is not rational, but because its time has ended when ideology immune to any argument captured the Democratic consciousness. This identity liberalism is what opponents of Trump "desperately want to hold up as an alternative to Trumpism, not the old civic liberalism [...] but a more sacralized politics, a liberalism of transgression and transformation. Identity and ecstasy."³⁷

Clinton was forced by radicals in her party to apologize for her husband's previous policies accepting Obama's definition of American politics in identity categories. But Obama also indirectly criticized Clinton and Bush for not being able to stop a decline of industrial America, adding that in fact one had to recognize this as a matter of reality impossible to be thwarted. That meant that the Democrats came to the conclusion that they "have run up against the limits of what they – or anyone else – can do to create and protect good jobs," as a result, "working-class whites seem more and more aware of the fact that Democrats have lost the ability to deliver stable, well-paying jobs [...] [thus] they will naturally gravitate to Republicans on the basis of national security, social issues, and cultural affinity."³⁸ This is exactly where the identity politics coalition and the Republican Party, appealing to the white working class, dramatically differ. The Democrats have nothing to offer the workers, the chasm between the white working class and them is colossal, and no economic populism was and is going to run traction among them.³⁹

³⁶ M. Lilla, *The Once and Future Liberal: After Identity Politics*, Harper, New York 2017.

³⁷ R. Douthat, "A Fishy Left-Wing Tale", *National Review*, March 5, 2018, p. 43, <https://www.nationalreview.com/magazine/2018/03/05/a-fishy-left-wing-tale/> [accessed: 05.06.2021]. It is symptomatic that after Trump's election the first Best Picture Oscar for 2017 year's film went exactly to a movie "The Shape of Water", a manifesto of identity politics as the highest stage of human development and morality.

³⁸ W. Voegeli, "The Democrats' Dilemma", *op. cit.*, p. 23.

³⁹ That was show by J.C. Williams, *White Working Class: Overcoming Class Cluelessness in America*, Harvard Business Review Press, Boston, Mass. 2017; R.V. Reeves, *Dream Hoarders: How the American Upper Middle Class Is Leaving Everyone Else in the Dust, Why that is a Problem and What to Do about it*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington, D.C. 2018.

Real lines of division and alienation of liberal elitists

When in 2016 the Republicans nominated an American billionaire, the Democrats thought that the working class could not support such a person. But to assume that they would vote for Clinton was a wishful thinking, because the white working class, as Joan C. Williams argued resents professionals like Clinton and

the sort over-represented in the rainbow base coalition, “but admires the rich”. Members of the working class are not rich, of course, but find the desire to *be* rich entirely comprehensible. By contrast, why someone would want to be, say, a community organizer is baffling and more than a little disquieting. Worse, members of the working class have little direct contact with the rich, but a good deal with professionals – much of which consists of being bossed around, second-guessed, and condescended to.⁴⁰

Efforts by the Democrats to woo automatically the white working-class when Trump was nominated turned out to be futile since they thought that the real cleavage was between 1% of the rich (just everyone over \$400,000) and the 99% of the rest. But the most important division in America, as Richard V. Reeves showed, is in fact between 20% at the top who earn above \$116,890 in 2015 and the 80% being the rest, in other words the upper middle class and everybody else. The electorate who supported Trump without big money

“have no problem with the rich,” but detest “upper middle-class professionals” [...]. This working-class attitude may reflect spite or resentment but is ultimately based on an accurate assessment of how modern America works. Through interlocking policies, especially ones affecting taxes, education, and real estate, the upper quintile has both fortified its advantages and steadily increased its ability to transmit them intergenerationally. [...] With all [the] advantages flowing to children who are already advantaged, it is easier for them to get into the selective colleges that play a large role in determining career paths and marriage prospects, the variables most likely to affect socioeconomic mobility.⁴¹

The problem of America today is thus not a class system as such, but an emergence of the caste system which goes against the very essence of what America wanted to be and how it has perceived itself since the beginning. In contemporary America the economic mobility has dramatically changed from absolute to a relative one.⁴²

Trump sensed that the Democrats got into a trap. Having these two options: class politics or identity politics they invested too much in the latter figuring out that the first option is closed to them either because they could not win class oriented voters, or the collateral damage done to their identity supporters who view working class as “bigoted” would be too costly.⁴³ Whether by instinct or careful analysis of the polls in relation to the logic of the electoral system,

⁴⁰ W. Voegeli, “The Democrats’ Dilemma”, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 25.

⁴² See esp. *ibidem*.

⁴³ The identity politics electorate still thinks that the revolution has not been finished and that any compromises with the opponents would amount to a betrayal of the “sacred cause”.

Trump realized that his chance depended on maintaining that sharp polarization.⁴⁴ The Democrats were yet captured not so much by identity politics, but identity politics as preached by the 1% perceiving themselves as both moral and not self-ish, disregarding the injustices of the economic distribution of wealth, since they listened only to themselves within their own narrow enclaves. Here we could observe the apparent use of the 19% of the upper income ladder by the 1% within this above mentioned 20% group.⁴⁵

The affluent belonging to the 19% are of course aware that they are just below the level of the 1% and knowing that to achieve this level was within their reach. Their aim is in fact not to stick to the classical American way of keeping access to the mobility ladder open for all but to close the upper 20%, to live separately within their class – *caste milieu* – and to defend it against those aspiring to get to it. So, they are not interested in America as one society bound at least by basic rules of fairness and solidarity for all but as belonging to a new caste, sealed off from the 80% permanently. They realize that certain goods which are important to them and not so important to the rest below them are inherently scarce which might be available not only for the 1% but also for the next 19%, but never for the rest. These are so called positional goods, for instance residential areas or access to the top colleges because of the inherently good distribution of schools where the 20% live and permanently degraded schools where 80% live.⁴⁶

These 19% thus treat identity politics, unlike class politics, as essentially morally good making them feel morally superior but requiring no sacrifices as this stance does not touch their interests. This enables them to explain emotional attitudes of the electorate which is “not like them” not in terms of class politics or economic terms of social policy but in psychological categories, as “bitter”, “disillusioned” or “resentful”. People living in devastated areas simply not only do not understand the objective situation for which the United States government is not responsible – they also direct their anger against groups which are not responsible for their bad situation so they can justify their frustrations. In other words, such anger has nothing to do with objective “dislocations” but is entirely a result of “white ethnic backlash”. “The successful” explained Trump’s rise exactly in

⁴⁴ He saw a chance of winning enough electoral votes from smaller states where identity politics was not a dominant issue and giving up on the states where identity politics was a certified dogma of the majority of the electorate, like California or Massachusetts. That gave him geographic advantage of about 85% of the country, that is nearly the entire mainland except the East and the West coast states, but even there Pennsylvania voted for him.

⁴⁵ W. Voegeli, “The Democrats’ Dilemma”, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

⁴⁶ For instance, in 2015 a developer wanted to build 224 affordable housing units in Marin County in California, the most affluent place with a median house price of 1.25 million. The *ad hoc* organized civil movement pushed to stop the program arguing that it would be impossible to “protect and preserve the character of the area”. The movement turned out to be successful in 2017 when a Democratic state legislator from Marin County passed a bill preserving such areas. Hilary Clinton got 79% of the vote in Marin County as against 16% cast for Trump, R.R. Reno, “While We’re At It”, *op. cit.*

such terms.⁴⁷ The Democrats accepted this interpretation; therefore, their message was not so much political or economic but in large measure moral. Rebellion against identity politics was thus interpreted in terms of racial politics, with racial resentment captured by an idea of "white supremacy" with a corresponding fear that the number of white "deplorables" would dwindle to insignificance.

Only within such a psychological frame of mind a phenomenon as absurd as "cancel culture" could arise. Its basic premise is that since the "white backlash" is still a dominant feature of the American psyche, and racism as strong as ever, nothing in fact has changed since the times of the Founding Fathers. The United States is still a fundamentally racist, sexist, homophobic, name what you want, country despite all efforts to the contrary so there must be a systemic "original sin" impossible to be eradicated unless the entire heritage of America will be rejected. But such an approach by "the successful" 19% has here another aim as well. They use identity politics and racialist language not only to feel morally superior, but also to manipulate the identity groups telling them that they are vulnerable and without the elite's support and protection they would be open to the "white supremacist" attacks. This kind of paternalism enables liberal elites to sustain their own economic status, prevent any real discussion about social and economic consequences of cultural dislocations, while at the same time giving all minority identity groups a sense of belonging to the "elected".⁴⁸ The Democrats were unable to properly define the real causes of their defeat in 2016, thinking that identity politics, paternalism and a sense of urgency against a threat of rising racism, xenophobia and bigotry would enable them to cast aside as publicly illegitimate people whom they opposed, the "deplorables". For this reason, they neglected important issues of a large part of the electorate. Not only the economic dislocations and degradations but cultural and moral degradation and an acute sense of homelessness as well, all strictly interrelated.⁴⁹ The Democrats thought that identity politics substituted for "objective" dislocations of the modern "fluid" society, also a decline of religion, while at the same time the liberal-left was pushing religious people to the margins or even persecuting them for their resistance to the identity politics, especially sexual revolution.

⁴⁷ This is a phenomenon comparable to Richard Nixon's "the great silent majority". Trump used this rhetoric of "the silent majority", today composed differently but sharing a sense of exclusion, disdain and lack of dignity denied them by allegedly morally "better" and "chosen". For the "successful", this attitude had nothing to do with objective economic and social degradation but with their psychological phobias.

⁴⁸ On this paternalism of the white liberal elites see books by a black scholar Sh. Steele, *White Guilt: How Blacks and Whites Together Destroyed the Promise of the Civil Rights Era*, Harper Collins, New York 2006, esp. pp. 25–28, 143–148, 167–181.

⁴⁹ In the latter case the liberal-left and their political home the Democratic Party thought that identity policies constituted truly successful base of the new "home" after the lost "home" of traditional communities was destroyed, when in fact the identity politics was just a lame substitute. See on this M. Eberstadt, *Primal Screams*, *op. cit.*

Trump realized that America was divided against itself with the huge “neglected” part of it in a rebellious stage. He grasped by instincts that the US experienced a unique transformative period at the center of which is “revolutionary anger”, arising from a sense of oppression or exclusion. It has dominated American politics in different forms for over a century. But it has now assumed a new form since during the last couple of decades when the liberal-progressive establishment, especially in the cultural sphere, was skillful in domesticating any political *causa* on the left. Every revolutionary *causa*, the moment it appeared, was domesticated. The counterrevolutionary impulse is different, airing in contemporary times from a sense of betrayal and abandonment, as was the case with a counterrevolutionary “silent majority” backlash during Nixon’s presidency. But although the anger which Trump organized stemmed from the same sense of betrayal and abandonment it had deeper causes because it takes place in a totally transformed cultural environment. Also, optimism of Nixon’s era, again sustained for some time after the fall of communism, evaporated. America has become in fact a post-religious society as moral authority stemming from traditional Christian anthropology being also a backbone of the humanist tradition collapsed and the ideologies trying to fill the void created in turn all kinds of pathologies.⁵⁰

But rage itself is impotent and self-destructive politically if it does not have concrete targets to hit and politicians who will define enemies and lead the anger against them. Trump did exactly this, thus plunging the American political establishment on both sides of the public scene into a profound sense of horror on the liberal-left and bewilderment on the right which realized that he was the only one to organize that counterrevolutionary rage, telling in a straightforward words that a huge part of the American people were abandoned by the establishment politicians. On both parts of American politics this message was defined as a classical right-wing populism. True, Trump defined the enemies, organized and directed the anger refusing also to denounce right-wing extremism. But whatever one may think about his style of the campaign and politics, it cannot be said that he violated any constitutional norms, since, as R.R. Reno observed, the American Constitution does not forbid right-wing populism, let alone it is absurd to say that right-wing populism is an indication that authoritarian or “fascist” intentions are on the rise. Of course, such an angry, emotional political climate may pose a threat to constitutional stability. But this was not because of people like and support Trump. To portray him this way stems from the fact that American, and to certain extent European culture, depicts politics in categories mainly obsolete and worn out still coming from the post-WW II vocabulary. Communism was defeated many years ago, but Americans

⁵⁰ See esp. R.R. Reno, “Anger-Politics on the Right”, *First Things*, February 2021, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2021/02/anger-politics-on-the-right> [accessed: 05.06.2021].

still believe that legitimate and powerful anger [...] comes from the left – the excluded and oppressed. [...] But today the most potent anger comes from the right, from people who feel betrayed, not oppressed or excluded. And their rage is warranted. They have been misgoverned and misled. [...] Our governing mentality is dominated by the assumption that oppression and exclusion are the only sources of political rage. It cannot grasp the significance of counterrevolutionary anger. [...] [T]he establishment left makes radicalism part of the status quo, which by definition makes it something other than radical. This radicalism can be destructive, but it's unlikely to be destabilizing, which means the liberal-progressive establishment will stay on top. This is why BLM marches do not give elites nightmares.⁵¹

But a very narrow group of the university professors, the media or even corporations supported Trump, because it was there where the danger for the status quo was hiding itself, not on the left. What was shocking was the fact that even if more than 70 million people voted for Trump, dominating elites dismissed this as either insignificant or illegitimate. However, the causes of the rage which brought him to power have not disappeared. The most important question remains: who will organize and civilize that rage because its powerful fury will stay despite Trump's defeat. But this is a right-wing fury. Unlike the liberal-left anger managed by the liberal-left progressive establishment accepting many of its legitimate demands into the fabric of the American society, this right-wing fury – as Reno observed – has not only not been accommodated but was not even properly defined. This is because Biden refuses to confront problems which animate it, thinking that people who are its carriers cannot be treated as citizens and should be pushed into reservations or “sensitive” training programs. The 20th century was mainly a time in America of accommodation of the fury of the left but the 21st century differs. America's problems

arise from experiences of economic, cultural, and spiritual homelessness that now affect wide swaths of the [...] population. [...] But the anger runs deeper. Many are no longer sure they are allowed to say “Merry Christmas” or salute the flag. Their use of pronouns is monitored. They are subjected to “diversity training” and other rituals of self-abasement. In view of these experiences, a furious rage at real (and perceived) betrayals is certain to rock our society. [...] We are heading into a time of counterrevolution – the return of the strong gods.⁵²

Trump was the first politician to address this right-wing conservative fury of today and he rode to his electoral victory on its waves. But he failed for many reasons not necessarily connected with his character flaws but also because of an adamant resistance of the liberal-left establishment and the administrative “deep state”, let alone unexpected events like COVID-19 pandemic.

⁵¹ *Ibidem.*

⁵² *Ibidem.*

Nature and purpose of political power

The aforementioned problem of the “deep state” has two aspects. One is a phenomenon of a gradual rise of the administrative state replacing democratic control of it.⁵³ The other is its response to confrontational executive power. Trump run on a slogan “either we have a state, or we do not”, but his view of this state was at the beginning peculiar, taken more from his corporate world than coming from his desire to use the state machinery in a more efficient way to solve problems at hand which political leaders avoid.

Presidents of the United States in recent times have refused in practice to run the government as the chief executive. The American federal state comprises today a maze of administrative agencies, making and enforcing regulations, creating and running innumerable social programs. This is a universal feature of all modern democratic governments with expanding bureaucratic tasks with more and more incomprehensible procedures and rules lacking transparency beyond any control of offices managing them. But in the United States this phenomenon of the vast bureaucracy, is relatively new, dating back at most to the Progressive era. This administrative state apparatus consists mainly of the middle-class bureaucrats who have no strong collective identity of belonging to an elite class. They do not have a particularly high social prestige as in Germany or France and their economic fortunes do not especially depend on their careers in government. In the US government agencies are overwhelmingly transparent and accessible but weak in a systemic way.⁵⁴

We may thus say that the American bureaucratic state is transparent but collectively inefficient even if intrusive in all aspects of life in a negative way. Paradoxically, even if it's more transparent in relation to ordinary citizens it is more independent and inefficient acting within the constitutional limits.⁵⁵ If traditional European states have powerful bureaucratic elites with their own interests they nevertheless know that they are connected with the interest of the state and able to control the entire administrative apparatus, even if ministries are fighting each other for power and funds, in the United States that control is much less visible.⁵⁶ The constitutional system and dispersion of power is less efficient at

⁵³ See on the evolution of American administrative state esp.: Ph. Hamburger *Is Administrative Law Unlawful?*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2014; R.A. Epstein, *The Dubious Morality of Modern Administrative Law*, Rowman & Littlefield, Manhattan Institute, New York 2020.

⁵⁴ J.D. Michaels, “Trump and the ‘Deep State’: The Government Strikes Back”, *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2017, p. 54.

⁵⁵ See an excellent book on this problem: Ph. Hamburger, *Is Administrative Law Unlawful?*, *op. cit.*

⁵⁶ Of course, in Europe this may also have an adversarial effect when an elite is incapable of making any decisions and their insularity from political leaders may make the system incapable of action. This situation happens with immigration crisis in Europe. See D. Murray, *The Strange Death of Europe...*, *op. cit.*

controlling the workings of this huge administrative federal apparatus. The congressional control as well as interventions of the Supreme Court constitute more retroactive measures than day to day supervision operations, especially since Congress has delegated a lot of its legislative powers to the federal agencies. For this very reason if presidents abdicate their role of keeping the administrative state on a short leash and under their command, than it becomes an independent empire beyond any control.⁵⁷ This growth of independence, inefficiency and unaccountability goes hand in hand with a rising outsourcing and privatization of services subjected to their *de facto* monopolization by powerful lobbying groups changing civil officials into employees of private interests.⁵⁸

Certain services may become more efficient, but this goes with the loss of accountability and democratic legitimacy since contractors act without any control and an ability to assess their measures in view of the overall system of governance.⁵⁹ Such a situation resulted with a loss of trust in the US political class and a growing delegitimization of politics as usual, both on the right, e.g., the Tea Party rebellion, and on the liberal-left side, e.g., the Occupy Wall Street movement. The situation might be compared to the turmoil years of 1968–1974⁶⁰. The only means to control many dispersed separate agencies of the United States is the president and its “bully pulpit” including his legislative program imposed on Congress in his State of the Union Addresses. But such means are limited by law and custom.

This is one of the reasons that a maverick president like Trump could effectively challenge the incumbent political class and win the presidential office using an argument of the incompetent and corrupt government and arguing that what was needed to straighten things up is shoot from the hip business efficiency. But Trump did it in a shockingly confrontational way. A political amateur without any consistent ideas, or so it seemed at the beginning, no clear-cut program how to do certain of his proposals workable Trump nevertheless

took office as if orchestrating a hostile corporate takeover. In his first [...] months as president, he has followed his own counsel, displaying open contempt for much of the federal work force he now leads [...]. This has cost him allies in the executive branch, helped spur creative (and increasingly effective) bureaucratic opposition, and, thanks to that opposition, triggered multiple investigations that threaten to sap party and congressional support. [...] [T]he president and his surrogates have responded by borrowing a bit of political science jargon, claiming to be victims of the “deep state,” a conspiracy of powerful, unelected bureaucrats secretly pursuing their own agenda.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Ph. Hamburger, *Is Administrative Law Unlawful?*, *op. cit.*, esp. pp. 129–174.

⁵⁸ See e.g. J.D. Michaels, “Trump and the ‘Deep State’...”, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

⁵⁹ Existing system of expertise assessment by the civil servants is rather a lame check.

⁶⁰ See an excellent study by J.T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945–1974*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1996, pp.747–790.

⁶¹ J.D. Michaels, “Trump and the ‘Deep State’...”, *op. cit.*, pp. 52–54. The concept of “the deep state” was applied first in the context of developing nations with lack of democratic culture

Trump's critics derided such an approach as totally incompetent and wasteful within complicated structures of government. Trump might have been correct, his critics argued, that there are intractable obstacles in governance, but they were to come not from any "deep state" conspiring against him but simply from the very essence of the bureaucratic logic of the complex modern state. Trump, if competent, would have used that bureaucracy as an asset. "It is the insecure presidents unable to hear honest technocratic feedback, who go to war with the state they nominally lead".⁶²

This is true that Trump, the president coming outside of the establishment could effectively challenge an incumbent political class and win using an argument of a total incompetency of government while stressing his apparent business efficiency to straighten things up. But he did it in a confrontational way because he was a political amateur thrown into a maze of political and bureaucratic structures with set ways of operation trying to manage them without any consistent ideas or a program.⁶³ His effort to create a long-term convincing policy was from the beginning studded in practice with messy contradictions corroborated by his character flaws preventing long time stability against a powerful resistance of the Democratic but also Republican establishment.⁶⁴

Whatever yet one might think about Trump as a personality including his vanity and chaotic presidential moves there is no doubt that he sensed something which the globalized American elite did not. Trump was definitely an American patriot which in case of public policy was strictly related to his economic nationalism and was connected with a vision of a country in which solidarity and different needs of different regions and people should not be harmed by globalism. To

but with strong state and military elites, for instance Egypt, Pakistan, and Turkey where such elites were effectively capable of defying or thwarting democratic commands.

⁶² *Ibidem*, pp. 54–56.

⁶³ See e.g. *ibidem*. p. 52, 56.

⁶⁴ This resistance was so fierce because Trump did not define a different policy, he defined a different vision of reality. "The stakes in any cultural clash are high. [...] The class that succeeds in consolidating its own culture and making it mandatory for anyone who wants to gain entry into the elite gets to sit at the top of the social hierarchy. Its class ethos becomes society's ethic, defining what is elevated versus what is base, what is natural versus what is abnormal, what is unquestioned versus what is questioned, what is rational versus what is irrational or even insane. The fight is over nothing less than who has the power to define reality. To lose such a fight is not just to be consigned to the wrong side of history or become the point of reference for 'that's not who we are.' It is to have the weight of the dominant culture pressed firmly against you, peeling away members of your side and undermining the ability and willingness of the remainder to resist. It is to be denied access to elite institutions and networks, and to all the material and social benefits they confer. It is even to have the force of law and thus ultimately the power of the state used against you [...]. Culture wars are never strictly cultural. They are always economic and political struggles as well. Elites rule through an interlocking political-economic-cultural system. [...] As American elites become increasingly integrated and culturally homogenous, they begin to treat their cultural rivals as subordinate classes." D.E. Paul, "Culture War as Class War", *First Things*, August/September 2018, pp. 43–44.

understand what was at stake one has to look at this problem in historical perspective so to point out certain, too often taken for granted assumptions concerning global economic development. In American history economic rearrangements in response to certain fundamental structural social and cultural dysfunctions have happened several times. At the turn of the 20th century, for instance, the main task during rapid industrialization was a harmonization of interests of farmers, urban capital and labor. This model challenged by globalization in a post-industrial society required a new rearrangement with all social groups benefiting, especially aiding the productive economy against the huge fictional economy of the bureaucratic administrators. This must be done not simply to sustain economic prosperity but because stable economic basis is necessary to sustain social cohesion and culture in which people can flourish, not only as individuals but in their communities, of which the most important are families. This is so because

culture comes first – but like a final cause or end in Aristotle’s philosophy, it is first in priority, not necessarily first in time or action. [...] [Not only – A.B.] conservatives have long believed that politics is downstream from culture [...]. As Irving Babbitt [wrote in 1924] “the economic problem will be found to run into the political problem, the political problem in turn into the philosophical problem, and the philosophical problem itself to be almost indissolubly bound up at last with the religious problem.” [...] [Today] cultural contexts created by news and entertainment media [...] largely define the limits of the possible in politics. These two views combine in the conviction that culture, in both the social and spiritual senses, takes precedence over politics or economics.⁶⁵

But if culture is understood in its broadest sense as “the riverbed of politics, setting the course along which it flows”, then that course can be channeled in different ways by human action very much dependent on a particular economic policy as well, something which has been called political economy, which may produce

different dispensations of wealth and power but also profoundly shape family life, individual character, and the civic landscape. A political program therefore has to be an economic program, not just in the superficial sense of dealing with subjects like taxes and regulation but in the deeper sense of relating the nation’s economic way of life to its cultural fabric and the very conditions of its existence.⁶⁶

In American history elections rarely were about fundamental issues going to the very definition of the American identity and structure of life. Abraham Lincoln’s election in 1860 as well as of F.D. Roosevelt in 1932 were such elections. They happen when Americans face certain dramatic and causing detrimental consequences changes and when such changes are conceptually defined as problematic. When a particular politician is able to provide an answer to them in such a way as to capture the imagination of the electorate, a fundamental change

⁶⁵ D. McCarthy, “A New Conservative Agenda”, *First Things*, March 2019, p. 20.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*.

might happen. Such changes might be internal, as in 1860, some external, they may be unrelated but sometimes they are acutely intertwined as they were during Trump's elections. Trump's challenge was so unnerving, and he was not given even a benefit of the doubt because the American establishment took for too long certain ideas for granted as if they were universal, immemorial truths. A rebellion against such a sclerotic paradigm took two radical forms. One was Trump's victory but another one was some kind of American socialism (represented by Bernie Sanders, also visible in the Democratic Party) gaining ground during 2016 and 2020 elections.

The United States faces now another epochal moment of choice. The social compact created after the Great Depression and in the years after the World War II and sustained for too long in the post-communist "end of history" illusion collapsed. The "welfare state" is in deep crisis, there is a noticeable decline of the stable middle class, a split between the affluent "hubs" and the rest of America and finally a corresponding collapse of cultural unity with widespread pathologies hitting the weak and the poor. But until 2016 both the Democrats and the Republicans were running their policies as if post-1945 social compact was still valid and thus, they concentrated on their global interests towards which they began to steer the United States. This liberal cosmopolitanism, similar in its philosophical and anthropologic roots to other ideological utopianisms, suddenly began to function "as surrogate of religion [...] [forgetting the biblical wisdom that] the end of history is in God's hands, not ours."⁶⁷

Suddenly Americans found themselves to be totally divided, with the political class, the academy, the media and the corporate America totally unaware of the depth of this conflict defined by themselves either as marginal or reactionary revolt against the bright future. At the same time, they were building America as a global economic player not realizing that the terms of this competition radically changed, and the very interests of the United States began to be threatened with liberal establishment for too long in denial. If globalization was without costs in 1990s it became dramatically costly in the 21st cent. America became deindustrialized while political, business and cultural elites responded to a growing crisis with policy programs amounting

to shoring up its own privileges with respect to intellectual property and bureaucratic know-how, while fragmenting and buying off the urban service class with identity politics. For the unproductive, the elite prescribes what might be called "palliative liberalism," involving wage subsidies, tax credits, and other measures short of restoring inherent dignity and power to work. [...] Palliative liberalism [...] aims not to repair labor-capital relations but to euthanize, as humanely as possible, millions of economically unneeded and politically retrograde Americans. [...] The relief that church and family once provided is now supplied by fentanyl – another low-priced consumer product from China.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ R.R. Reno, "Saving Cosmopolitanism", *First Things*, January 2018, p. 66; see also: M. Rose, "Our Secular Theodicy", *First Things*, December 2017, pp. 37–43.

⁶⁸ D. McCarthy, "A New Conservative Agenda", *op. cit.*, pp. 21–22.

Meanwhile, the rigid class – or even caste – system began to solidify, with the upper class focusing on their privileges and the lower classes having a feeling, for the first time so clearly visible in American general consciousness, that there is no chance of climbing higher, increasingly depriving lower classes of a sense of basic dignity. Liberal elites neglected for too long a problem which had its origins in the 1960s when the federal government decided to solve once and for all, by expert social engineering, plethora of social ills such as racial injustice and poverty.⁶⁹ But this problem, if not new has become more acute today because at least in the 1960s an American cultural cohesion existed. But the major problem was then and now more or less the same. The issue was not hunger or abject hardship – the welfare state and modern technology can alleviate them. But the War on Poverty and other federal programs created since then failed because the US government began to treat people left behind by economic change “as liabilities to manage rather than as human assets to develop [...] This dignity deficit [...] [became] particularly acute among working-class men, most of whom are white and live in rural and ex-urban parts of the United States”.⁷⁰ This huge mass of millions of the white working class together with a growing number of the urban poor felt totally abandoned by contemptuous liberal elites.⁷¹

What McCarthy called “palliative liberalism” has yet been dying. The establishment had tried to manage discontent, but restoration of a viable political community turned out to be futile and Trump’s victory as well as sudden popularity of socialist ideas testified to that. The problem is that the liberal elites’ interests are best secured by a

completely atomized America, one in which states have not seceded, but individuals have. A heap of loose economic actors who have lost their cultural bearings allows itself to be managed benignly [...]. At the end of the eighteenth century, the French *ancien régime* paid the ultimate price for failing to mend its ways. Had nineteenth-century Britain not adjusted the balance of power and interests between landed lords, commercial magnates, and the growing urban working class, a similar fate would have awaited it. America’s fundamental political choice now is between mild nationalism, resurgent socialism, or suicide by liberalism, whether of the libertarian or palliative sort.⁷²

However clumsily and chaotically, Trump tried to suggest such mild nationalism but failed. But if such moderate nationalism is to work it should first of all demolish intellectual pieties which have been the orthodoxy of globalization,

⁶⁹ See e.g. A. Bryk, “Akcja Afirmatywna, doktryna różnorodności a plemienna koncepcja społeczeństwa liberalnego”, *Krakowskie Studia Międzynarodowe* 2004, No. 2, pp. 31–110.

⁷⁰ A.C. Brooks, *The Dignity Deficit: Reclaiming Americans’ Sense of Purpose*, Foreign Affairs, March/April 2017, p. 109.

⁷¹ See on this contempt: Sh. Steele, *White Guilt...*, *op. cit.*; G. Loury, *One by One from the Inside Out: Essays and Reviews on Race and Responsibility in America*, Free Press, New York 1990.

⁷² D. McCarthy, “A New Conservative Agenda”, *op. cit.*, pp. 21–22.

e.g., competitive global rules of trade and principle of open immigration. Trump was correct to claim that not economic efficiency of the American productivity should be its driving logic but the logic of citizenship with higher wages for workers and its additional demographic benefit. Economic nationalism creating steady working force and social stability is not contrary to free-market economics and history testifies to it, not only of the United States. Any way forward

requires refocusing on the American citizen as the basic unit of the economy. This is the essence of a nationalist political economy, which we very much need if our country's tradition of personal independence and limited government is to endure, a tradition in which government's primary economic role is not to provide welfare but to safeguard the conditions that make productive work possible.⁷³

Trump's presidency put this issue at the very center of a political debate in the United States.

From businessman to people's tribune

Economic decline since the 1960s has been slow and at the beginning not visible because exactly at that time America began to expand its messy welfare network. This decline has not been experienced solely by minorities.⁷⁴ Cultural and social problems were then also less visible although D.P. Moynihan showed its consequences in relation to the black community already in 1965.⁷⁵ Economic decline accelerated with the rise of globalization in the 1990s and has been experienced especially by millions of white working American and lower middle classes till today forming two major classes – the aforementioned lower strata and the “upper class” divided not only by economic and residential factors but also fundamentally cultural and social.

This newly created, predominantly white lower class is not only less educated or less likely to marry and have and bring up children in two-parent household, but in large part politically and socially alienated. As a consequence, percentage of working-age men outside the labor force – meaning neither working

⁷³ *Ibidem*, pp. 23–25.

⁷⁴ This decline captured public opinion mainly within the context of the black degradation, but it was Michael Harrington's book *The Other America*, published in 1962, which exposed Americans to the fact of shocking poverty especially in the rural, white areas.

⁷⁵ A sociologist serving as Assistant Secretary of Labor under President Lyndon B. Johnson, Daniel Patrick Moynihan warned that a dissolution of the black family would devastate blacks, nullifying any economic benefits distributed by government. See *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, Office of Policy Planning and Research, US Department of Labor, Washington, D.C. 1965 (commonly known as the Moynihan Report); an extensive consequences of Moynihan's predictions in the United States till today are provided by J.T. Patterson, *Freedom is Not Enough: The Moynihan Report and America's Struggle over Black Family Life from LBJ to Obama*, Basic Books, New York 2010.

nor seeking work – more than tripled during the last 50 years, from 3.3% in 1965 to 11.6% in 2017.⁷⁶

Disintegration of family life, with two thirds of them unmarried, normalized promiscuity and other pathologies together with their withdrawal from community life, religious activities and caring for family members has rapidly expanded.⁷⁷ This isolation and idleness produce additional pathologies of substance abuse and rising suicide rate with mortality among middle aged white Americans without college diploma sharply rising.⁷⁸ Other social institutions and community forms of organization disintegrated as well.⁷⁹ It is true that the upper class also experiences all the aforementioned pathologies, still its members have been able to cope with them in an incomparably better way with resources to neutralize their negative consequences at its disposal.

The modern liberal culture of “emancipation” got its present extreme form in the wake of the devastations of the 20th cent., which destroyed a sense of any absolutes and identified any strong truth as a totalitarian temptation.⁸⁰ For this reason, liberal culture of late modernity, erroneously equating power with authority, destroys all meanings, thus everything is permitted, and nothing makes sense. This constitutes the very mirror image of economic globalization, which favors predominantly the strong against the weak and vulnerable. The strong, rich “progressives” may play with different “styles of life” as expressions of unlimited personal freedom, but they can also cope with consequences of their choices, navigating through life without any rules and roles, capable of turning such choices to their own advantage. A destruction of marriage is just one example where drastic consequences of this difference have especially showed itself till today.⁸¹ Abortion for the poor is another one, for instance blacks in the ghettos, being a useful tool of disposing of problems which may endanger privileges of the privileged. The consequences of such emancipation for the weak have been devastating alleviated solely by a wider distribution of wealth, a palliative given to people who live in chaos of moral decay. This rising inequality is very much generated by the sexual revolution, especially a subversion of parents’ authority.⁸²

⁷⁶ See N. Eberstadt, *Men Without Work: America's Invisible Crisis*, Templeton Press, West Conshohocken, PA 2016.

⁷⁷ The first extended study of such a disintegration was provided by Ch. Murray, *Coming Apart...*, *op. cit.*

⁷⁸ A. Case, A. Deaton, “Rising morbidity and mortality in midlife among white non-Hispanic Americans in the 21st century”, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, December 8, 2015, Vol. 112, No. 49, pp. 15078–15083.

⁷⁹ A pioneer study here is R.D. Putnam’s *Bowling Alone...*, *op. cit.*

⁸⁰ See Ch. Delsol, *Esej o człowieku późnej nowoczesności*, transl. by M. Kowalska, Znak, Kraków 2003, p. 105.

⁸¹ See a devastating account of the marriage collapse: D. Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem*, Harper Collins, New York 1996.

⁸² See the first comprehensive account of this process: D. Mack, *The Assault on Parenthood: How Our Culture Undermines the Family*, Simon & Schuster, New York 1997.

As R.R. Reno once wrote, this was an “attack on the basic moral competences of ordinary people”, an instance of a class war with the poor under a banner of fighting discrimination, having to do not only with economic injustice but with moral deregulation, including sexual deregulation. This constitutes an official public ideology propelled by a ubiquitous coercion to non-judgmentalism.⁸³ It is this moral deregulation which separates the strong and rich from the weak and the poor what becoming the most acute problem of justice in a liberal society today. This neglected dimension of justice is one of the causes of the so called “populist revolution”, an anti-oligarchical and egalitarian impulse with common people hating social engineers of the “progressive” state getting into every nut and corner of their life.⁸⁴

This sorting out of classes by means of economic, cultural and first of all moral deregulation began in the 1960s with the countercultural revolution aimed at a destruction of a traditional American ethic of self-discipline, hard work, individual striving and a sense of social mobility open to all. Instead, it made “liberation” from all constraints and obligations its preeminent goal of personal achievement and creativity. The strong have benefited from this upheaval, the weak have been devastated. This oligarchical class starting out has been very much connected with college education translating into a chance of social advancement with the rest being left to their own world, marrying within the same class and living in areas surrounded largely by others in the same stratum.⁸⁵

Such a divide has never before existed in America and it challenges the very essence of its cultural code, threatening social stability more profoundly than traditional political conflicts, a sign of dramatic dislocations. For many this conflict is comparable in its intensity to the conflict before the Civil War, even if its causes might be different. True, many of the problems visible in contemporary America are connected with causes having a much more complex and longer history but there is no doubt that globalization magnified such problems to an unprecedented, pathological dimension. A bitter personal literary account of this huge “silent”, abandoned America, a place of bleeding “open wound”, was given by James David Vance in a devastating book *Hillbilly Elegy*.⁸⁶ Vance wrote that

⁸³ See M. Eberstadt, “The New Intolerance”, *First Things*, March 2015, pp. 33–39.

⁸⁴ See R.R. Reno, *Resurrecting the Idea of a Christian Society*, Regnery, Washington, D.C. 2016, esp. pp. 39–64, 113–138.

⁸⁵ This process of oligarchisation is visible in all liberal-democratic societies; see J. Kotkin *The Coming of Neo-Feudalism: A Warning to the Global Middle Class*, Encounter Books, New York 2020. Kotkin argues that an epoch of an unprecedented wealth and opportunities and their more or less dispersion visible since the middle of the 20th c. is coming to an end. A new era is coming. It resembles more the feudal era characterized by a growing concentration of wealth and property, reduced upward mobility, demographic decline and increased dogmatism, economic as well as cultural.

⁸⁶ J.D. Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis*, Harper Press, New York 2016; the Polish edition: *Elegia dla bidoków. Wspomnienia o rodzinie i kulturze w stanie krytycznym*, transl. by T.S. Gałązka, Marginesy, Warszawa 2020.

he “did not achieve in life anything great”, but that is not true, since as one of the reviewers remarked he “succeeded in something, about which the other writers could only dream about. He captured the spirit of America of our times. This America, which stopped dreaming. Because, to tell the truth, there is not much anymore to dream about”.⁸⁷ No other book on contemporary America has noticed the new substantial pathological phenomenon so vividly described by Vance as he depicts horrendous abyss between lower classes and a richer, oligarchical upper class. Here we have the essence of the United States metamorphosis into a kind of neo-caste society with the new ruling class abandoning the rest and orienting themselves to the global scene.⁸⁸

This abandoned America was growing but it was also silent, so the privileged few pretended for too long it did not exist. Once crisis was noticed by the “upper class”, it was done with disdain, derision or barely concealed hatred towards “other America”. After Trump, this “better” America has been as usual busily tending to their own affairs and prattling about justice, tolerance etc., with a host of idiosyncratic minorities defined as saviors of humanity.

One dominating element of this emerging neo-caste society is a promotion of culture obsessed with identities as the only point of reference of one’s existence. This culture of identities is sustained by the entire network of state-sponsored regulations, anti-discrimination laws, “religion” of non-judgementalism and nihilistic tolerance.⁸⁹ But identities which promised fulfillment and a sense of belonging created a society of alienated individuals breeding self-hatred because this incessant search for utopia brings only disillusionment. The “woke” ideology and “cancel culture” movement reflect this existential crisis while at the very same time pretending to liquidate it. The most visible political edge of this movement was aimed against Trump, but its aims are revolutionary. Currents of this revolution form a striking alliance, for a long time seen as being impossible to be organized. It combines forces which want to destroy Western civilization with the global oligarchy, the new ruling class in a sense defined by Codevilla.⁹⁰ Both aim at destroying the existing Western civilization in the name of dynamic and ever-changing human condition, understanding human freedom as a right to unlimited autcreation searching for a perfect consumer of values and goods.⁹¹

⁸⁷ M. Nogaś [in:] J.D. Vance, *Elegia...*, *op. cit.*, p. 3 of the cover [excerpt from the review].

⁸⁸ A good analysis of this process of emergence of the new ruling class see: A.M. Codevilla, *The Ruling Class...*, *op. cit.*

⁸⁹ See D. Murray, *The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Race and Identity*, Bloomsbury Continuum, New York 2019; also Ch. Caldwell, *The Age of Entitlement: America Since the Sixties*, Simon & Schuster, New York 2019.

⁹⁰ A.M. Codevilla, *The Ruling Class...*, *op. cit.*

⁹¹ This left post-modern understanding of the truth as service to oneself constitutes the end stadium of a process which Leszek Kołakowski defined as the essence of radical secularization, disenchantment or demythologization, ‘emancipation’ *sensu proprio*. The revolution of 1968 was its most recent stage and its consequences, with the “cancel culture” forming its American variant,

This ironic alliance of the countercultural forces with oligarchical interests constitutes a new phenomenon because from the Middle Ages to more or less the middle of the 20th cent. revolutionary movements were battling ruling classes and did not seek friends among them. The 1968 revolution also had at the beginning such an assumption not realizing the consequences of its emancipatory axioms. But today's movements, like "cancel culture", have a much more nuanced, intertwined and thus problematic relations with the modern ruling classes while forming an alliance with them. The present ruling classes are not evil. They are not animated by any deep seated emotions of their moral superiority from which might flow their conviction that they have a hereditary right to rule. They are also not convinced that although they are privileged, they have a duty to take responsibility for the lower classes in a universe of common humanity, a medieval *noblesse oblige* rule still professed by a generation of Churchill or Roosevelt. Contemporary ruling classes are mainly

concerned with holding on to power, and shortsightedly regard the revolutionary movements as allies against their socio-political competitors. [...] Today it makes sense to consider the violent masses, and to some extent even the purified elite, as in effect pawns of the ruling classes [...]. The logic of millennialist revolution is very much alive [but] history teaches that the names of the evils – of the supposedly oppressed and their oppressors, as well as their grievances – are interchangeable and irrelevant. [...] Protagonists and pawns are part of a revolutionary avalanche that must flow by its own logic. The fires and desecrations, [...] have nothing to do with any truth or with the details of any particular event or accusation. [...] Alas, the millennialists and their mob do not need specific grievances against specific targets. The civilization itself is the only real target; its existence and the mob's lack of complete mastery over it are the only grievances that really matter.⁹²

That is why Trump's victory in 2016 mobilizing abandoned classes in the name of American patriotism and "goodness" of its civilization as well as challenging a logic of globalization as beneficial to the United States was a shock and shameful perplexity for the liberal elites. But his victory also constituted an acute sense of perplexity and disorientation for the republican elites. They realized that their electorate was not with them but with this maverick politician, who knew something about America they did not even bother to think about.

are still with us. For a very long time this process did not shatter the natural law idea, that is the idea that a difference between good and evil did not depend on our own will. Even agnostics and atheists, let alone deists were ready to accept this until Nietzsche "did [...] draw the final consequences from [the claim] that God was dead: there is no natural law, we alone decide what is good and evil. He said what others [Hobbes, Spinoza, Hume] maybe, thought, but had no courage to say straightforwardly [...] therefore he laid the foundation for the new civilization; the name of this foundation was the abyss [...]. If the Kingdom does not exist, then life is a defeat – always, in every case. This is Nietzschean message, and also its premise – rarely expressed *explicite*, but unavoidable – of a civilization totally secularized or demythologized", L. Kołakowski, *Jezus ośmieszony: Esej apologetyczny i sceptyczny*, transl. by D. Zańko, Znak, Krakow 2014, pp. 54–56.

⁹² A.M. Codevilla, "Millenarian Mobs", *Claremont Review of Books*, Summer 2020, pp. 10–12.

They understood that if they wanted to form a viable movement for the deeply polarized United States losing the global contest, they would have to reformulate its platform and find leaders understanding why they were rejected and restoring a sense of service to their potential electorate.

Trump's victory hit at the liberal-left progressive dogma and complacency of the "Never Trump" conservatives. Because of their refusal to engage in a dialogue, any alternative could not be subject to a rational analysis since both sides use different language and begin with different anthropologies. Trump's liberal-left critics use a language which sovietologists once used in relation to the communist language, the so called "wooden" language.⁹³ The user of it does not have an intent to describe reality but create a metaphor to secure a dogma, he performs a ritual saturated with fear that "orthodoxy" distorting reality in the light of uncompromising axioms might be shattered, an approach blocking any alternative vision.

As an American writer David Mamet wrote at the end of Trump's term, "the resistance movement" and hysteria characterizing it

began in the first hours of his presidency and has continued unabated by either reason or fatigue. There are no [alternative] voices on the left [...]. A comparison of Trump Psychosis with adoration of Hitler – though perhaps appropriate mechanically, that is, in terms of power exerted on the mob – is inexact in terms of utility. For the apotheosis of Hitler united the Germans behind a shared vision [...]. But the revanchist Left is not opposed to Trump as the avatar of the Right [...]. They cannot object to his policies *per se* because the policies, one by one, are demonstrably superior in practice to any the Left has employed [...]. Their objections are all *ad hominem* [...]."⁹⁴

Trump was hated because he subverted dogma and in addition, he did not care what the liberal-left said of him. The liberal-left criticism of Trump may be irrational, total or brutal, but he was not afraid to subvert its dogmatic underlying assumptions with reasoned arguments met with derision and upheaval, not counterargument. Still, Trump seemed to love such a polarization, constantly ridiculing his critics.⁹⁵

⁹³ The "wooden language" phrase was probably coined for the first time by Georges Clemenceau in 1919. George Orwell's *1984* defined it in a literary form giving it wide circulation. Francois Thom characterized the "wooden language" by four characteristics: abstraction and the avoidance of the concrete, tautologies, bad metaphors and a division of the world into good and evil, a classical Manichaeian belief. See *Civil Society and the Security Sector: Concepts and Practices in New Democracies*, eds. by M. Caparini, Ph. Fluri, F. Molnár, LIT Verlag, Münster 2006.

⁹⁴ D. Mamet, "The Code and the Key", *National Review*, May 14, 2020, <https://www.nationalreview.com/magazine/2020/06/01/the-code-and-the-key> [accessed: 5.06.2021].

⁹⁵ This unabated hatred of Trump was only slightly justified by his crudeness, brutality and venality. He had an instinctual ability, "bordering on genius, to naming the weaknesses of enemies labelling them like 'Low-energy Jeb', 'Little Marco', 'Crooked Hillary', but at the same time he had an ability to create weaknesses in his supporters", R. Brookhiser, "WFB Today", *National Review*, March 5, 2018, <https://www.nationalreview.com/magazine/2018/03/05/wfb-today/> [accessed: 5.06.2021].

In fact, this vitriolic “resistance” was not focused on any of his policies, good or bad as they might be. Trump was a usurper in the deepest metaphysical sense for a simple reason that he had “the temerity to hold himself superior to the zeitgeist, [that is] the Decline of the West [...]. Trump’s presidency has lengthened the American experience by some number of years. [...] Trump is loathed because he is feared, and he is feared because he named the monster. The Monster is the zeitgeist, that is to say, the Left.”⁹⁶

Trump’s presidency thus signified the very essence of a bitter cultural conflict which goes beyond mere politics. If such democratic verdicts as Trump’s election, or in Europe Brexit, victories of Viktor Orbán, Matteo Salvini or Jarosław Kaczyński, are defined as comparable with Putin’s, Erdogan’s or even Hitler’s rise to power, the language habitually used in the liberal-left mainstream, including the media, the academy and the leadership (*sic!*) of the largest corporations, then common citizenship based on a recognition of a modicum of the same values and public loyalties is barely possible. In other words, the liberal establishment and the large segment of the people not only do not understand each other but despise and hate each other wishing the other side to disappear, the very essence of the culture war.

Thus, for the liberal left Trump’s victory was not a political issue, but a metaphysical catastrophe. It was an existential threat since it constituted an impudent rejection of their exclusive right to define the reality. Trump, just like, e.g., Jarosław Kaczyński, by his very presence constituted a sign that such a vision might be anthropologically and axiologically wrong. At the very same time it was a blatant rejection of a claim of this liberal elites, economic and cultural, that they possess unique knowledge on how to organize for good a visible disorganized world, a secularized Christian eschatology, as cardinal John H. Newman called it. For the liberal elite it was their expertise which was to be substituted for democracy’s right to hold politicians and experts to account. This reduced democracy to a ritual confirming a choice certified earlier by the self-proclaimed cognoscenti. Enmity towards allegedly irrational democratic choices to be neutralized was a *sine qua non* condition of creating a rational, global world of prosperity, justice and human rights. Suddenly America began to be defined as just a part of the global cosmopolitan rational scheme, and its present shape as an obstacle to perfect deconstruction. That is why Trump’s slogan “America First” elicited such a horror as subverting this allegedly universal liberal-left global program. It is striking that this program united both neoliberal, global corporate capitalism and the cultural liberal-left. The latter focus on “emancipation” from all institutions of the *ancien régime* corresponded nicely with the neoliberal, global, corporate capitalism. Both aim at creation of a world of ideal consumers of goods and subjectively chosen values organized by incessant exchange of equal rights. This is a vision of the universal consumerist cliques and identity “tribes”, the essence of

⁹⁶ D. Mamet, *op. cit.*

identity liberalism focused on maximization of individual autonomy as the only aim of a political community.

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Donald Trump and America Divided against Itself

Donald Trump became the president of the United States because he was able to see the deep division of the American society into 80% of the population comprising the lower and middle classes and the caste-like oligarchic elite, which is made up of the richest 1% and 19% of the upper-middle class population. These 20% justifies its privileged social position by referring to meritocracy, the ideology of identity liberalism and to globalism, delegitimizing any opposition as a manifestation of ignorance, pathological aggression or social maladjustment (“the deplorables” of Hillary Clinton). Trump turned to the remaining 80% of society, angered not only by the effects of globalization implemented by the liberal elites as the only possible and rational economic policy, but also despised by the liberal upper middle class and forced by political elites to submit to the dictates of the ideology of emancipatory liberalism of personal autocreation, leading to the breakdown of social and family ties and the destruction of authorities. Trump won the support of angry voters because he raised issues that were very close to much of the electorate but were absent from the dominant discourse of political elites, both in the Democratic Party and the Republicans. This was his “populism”, which was in fact democratic and conservative patriotism or mild nationalism. Nevertheless, this provoked vehement opposition from both the liberal left, part of the federal administration (“deep state”) and cancel culture, and from some republicans (“Never Trumpers”). However, the “resistance movement” that emerged after Trump’s election was able to appeal only to ideological arguments, including the perception of America’s and the West’s civilizational heritage as a structure of immanent oppression that Trump wants to renew and strengthen. Thus, a narrative was born presenting Trump as a usurper in a metaphysical sense, an enemy of the only legitimate moral and social order, i.e., the order of identity liberalism with its axioms of emancipation and moral autocreation of individuals. The violation of this quasi-religious order is to cause an escalation of violence and oppression motivated by hatred, racism, xenophobia and religious fanaticism. Such a narrative, referring to the theory of the “end of history” by Francis Fukuyama, was not confirmed either in the politics or in the legislation of the Trump administration, demonstrating flaws in the liberal-left understanding of the so called “populism”.

Key words: Donald Trump’s Presidency, American Conservatism, liberal oligarchy, populism, identity liberalism, fragmentation of American society

Donald Trump i Ameryka podzielona przeciw samej sobie

Donald Trump został prezydentem USA, gdyż zdołał dostrzec głęboki podział społeczeństwa amerykańskiego: na 80% ludności obejmujące klasę niższą i średnią oraz przypominającą kastę elitę oligarchiczną, na którą składa się 1% najbogatszych oraz 19% ludności zaliczanej do wyższej klasy średniej. Te 20% swą uprzywilejowaną pozycję społeczną uzasadnia, odwołując się do merytokracji, ideologii liberalizmu tożsamościowego oraz globalizmu, delegitymizując sprzeciw jako przejaw ignorancji, patologicznej agresji lub nieprzystosowania społecznego (“pożałowania godni” – Hillary Clinton). Trump zwrócił się do pozostałych 80% społeczeństwa, rozgniewanego nie tylko skutkami wdrażanej przez liberalne elity – jako jedyna możliwa i racjonalna polityka gospodarza – globalizacji, lecz również pogardzanego przez liberalną wyższą klasę średnią i zmuszanego przez elity polityczne do poddania się dyktatowi ideologii liberalizmu emancypacyjnego, prowadzącego do rozbicia więzi społecznych i rodzinnych oraz zniszczenia autorytetów. Trump zyskał poparcie rozgniewanych wyborców, gdyż poruszył tematy, które były bardzo bliskie znacznej części elektoratu, jednak nie były obecne w dominującym dyskursie elit politycznych – ani Partii Demokratycznej, ani republikanów. Na tym polegał jego “populizm”, będący w rzeczywistości demokratycznym i konserwatywnym patriotyzmem. Wywołało to gwałtowny sprzeciw, zarówno ze strony lewicy liberalnej, części administracji federalnej (*deep state*) i *cancel culture*, jak i ze strony części republikanów – zdeklarowanych przeciwników kandydatury Donalda Trumpa

na prezydenta. Jednakże “ruch oporu”, który uaktywnił się po wygranej wyborczej Trumpa, był w stanie odwołać się jedynie do argumentów ideologicznych, w tym postrzegania dorobku cywilizacyjnego Ameryki i Zachodu jako struktury opresji, którą Trump chce odnawiać i wzmacniać. Zrodziła się tym samym narracja prezentująca Trumpa jako uzurpatora w sensie metafizycznym, wroga jedynie legitymowanego porządku moralnego i społecznego, tj. porządku liberalizmu tożsamościowego i emancypacji. Naruszenie tego porządku ma doprowadzić do eskalacji nienawiści i motywowanej rasizmem, ksenofobią i fanatyzmem religijnym przemocy, czyli “populizmu” w negatywnym sensie. Narracja taka, odwołująca się do teorii “końca historii” Francisa Fukuyamy nie znalazła jednak potwierdzenia ani w polityce, ani w prawodawstwie czasów administracji Trumpa, wskazując na niedostatki w lewicowo-liberalnym pojmowaniu tzw. populizmu.

Słowa kluczowe: prezydentura Donalda Trumpa, konserwatyizm amerykański, oligarchia liberalna, populizm, globalizacja, liberalizm tożsamościowy, fragmentacja społeczeństwa amerykańskiego