The Populist Path to National Renewal

by Conrad Black (July 2017)

Populism is generally taken to mean a political movement that challenges the incumbent political elite and may overwhelm it. If in doing so, or at a subsequent stage, the movement becomes violent or departs from the confines of the orthodox constitutional system altogether, it ceases to be populist and becomes revolutionary or anarchic. In long-running democracies, economic fluctuations and occasional vagaries of talent of the political leadership assure that there will be populist political activity that will try to win big political prizes by constitutional means and by exploiting and evoking public discontent with the political class.

Though the United States has been fertile populist ground, its populist movements have never seriously threatened to overthrow the existing method of choosing governments. The United States was born of a revolution, but it was preeminently an act of secession, challenging remote British rule and establishing local self-government. It did not overturn the socioeconomic organization of the country. Even the Civil War, an insurrection, was conducted in defense of the institution of slavery.

The United States ranks with the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and parts of Scandinavia as the only countries that have been autonomous for over a century, where there has been no serious revolutionary violence directed at the continuity of governmental institutions. In France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Russia, China, Japan, and Turkey, the history is long and replete with upheavals and complete breakdowns of government, as well as many unsuccessful, but not merely frivolous, attempts to dispense abruptly with the existing institutions and people of government.

However inflammatory American political rhetoric may become by the standards of other stable democracies, it operates within the existing political and constitutional practices. Though the anti-Trump forces did their rather unimpressive best to conjure up the vision of mob rule and street bullying, the efforts sank “like a hot rock,” in an infelicitous phrase of the Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, which he has walked briskly back into amnesia. (The senator was envisioning dropping Trump, not having his wife in Trump’s cabinet.)

Beneath the appearance of shot-from-the- hip, self-inflicted verbal wounds, the Trump campaign, while appearing to be populist in its spontaneity and boosterism ("It will be huge!") was very carefully calibrated. With any sort of perspective, the real key to the 2016 election lies in two facts. The first is that Mrs. Clinton, with great difficulty, kept the Democratic Party of Roosevelt, Truman, Stevenson, Kennedy, Johnson, Humphrey, and Bill Clinton out of the hands of the wild-eyed Left.

The second key fact is that Donald Trump managed to crush the heirs of post-Reagan Republicanism, the Bushy procession of indistinct opposition, who had the flexibility of Eisenhower without the charm of Ike or the prestige of a victorious five-star theater commander in history's greatest war; and the nondescript aspect of Nixon without his feral, sometimes sublime political cunning, or his hammerlock on the suburban bourgeoisie for whom life is a virtuous struggle. By the narrowest of margins, Mrs. Clinton kept control of the Democratic Party out of the hands of Senator Bernie Sanders, who would have caused the election of any of the seventeen Republican contenders for the nomination. With somewhat more leeway, but narrowly enough, Trump threw out the post-Reagan Republican bathwater without fumbling the gurgling infant into the arms of the agile paleo-conservative smoothie, Senator Cruz.

For only the third time in a hundred years, the political center moved in an election (as in 1932 and 1980), but remains, as it did then, well within the thirty-yard lines. What occurs at such times is, when referred to at all, generally called "fusionism." Relatively powerful populist enthusiasms, i.e., those not embraced by a majority of the powers that be in either party, are carried to victory by a

contender. Then, some aspects of this outlier perspective are eventually homogenized in revisions to laws, regulations, and practices.

In the main English-speaking countries, parties tend to carry on in this way for generations. The American Whigs cracked up because they could not find a position on slavery that would counter the confidence trick of Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, and Jackson for the Democrats as the party that would preserve Southern society (slavery), while reassuring the North that they alone would keep the South in the Union. The Compromise of 1850, crafted by the greatest of the Whigs, the three-time presidential candidate Henry Clay, and the greatest of the pre–Civil War Northern Democrats, Stephen A. Douglas, effectively guaranteed a civil war in each territory as it determined whether it would seek admission to the Union as a free or slave state, and provided for the relentless hounding of fugitive slaves in a manner that offended most conscientious Americans (especially after it was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in the egregious *Dred Scott* case).

The first serious outburst of domestic populism was formalized by the founding of the Republican Party from groups that simply could not abide any longer the degeneration of the great American experiment, “the new order of the ages,” into a squalid series of compromises with those who could justify the ownership of human beings by other human beings, in a time when all the great nations of the West, led by Great Britain and France, had abolished slavery. The first year that the Republicans could nominate a candidate, 1856, they put forward an eccentric and controversial explorer and colonel, John C. Fremont.

The second populist activity of this period, in the same year of 1856, was the last stand of the old party of American bigotry. Because they met in secret halls where admission was achieved by saying the password “I don’t know,” the group became very aptly named the “Know Nothings,” though the official name was the American Party, which received the support of the continuing Whigs. Former President Millard Fillmore was the American Party’s presidential candidate, on a platform which was reduced to platitudinous nativism and implicitly supported banning Roman Catholics and the foreign-born from public office, as well as twenty-one years of residency for the achievement of citizenship.

The Republicans and Know-Nothings ran against James Buchanan, a dough-faced (slavery-appeasing) Democrat, former Secretary of State (in which position James K. Polk, the last strong Democratic president before the Civil War, judged him incompetent), and minister to Great Britain. Buchanan won, 45 percent (1.84 million votes) to 33 percent (1.36 million votes) for Fremont’s Republicans and 22 percent (875,000 votes) for Fillmore—174 electoral votes to 114 Republican to 8 for the American Party. The great American experiment had made its last throw at the dishonorable compromises of eighty years. Buchanan was bound to fail as president; he had the personality of a helpless compromiser and none of the qualities required. The Know Nothings were doomed and unmourned. The first exercise in non-reactionary populism, the Republicans, was bound to win, soon.

The third American populist quest of this time was the Southern insurrection itself. In the decade bought by the Compromise of 1850, the U.S. population increased from 23 to 31 million, mostly in the North, so that in 1861 the demographic balance was 22.4 million free people in the North,

to 5.1 million plus 3.5 million slaves in the South. The South nonetheless interpreted the election of Lincoln, the Republican candidate in 1860 who sought only to restrict slavery to where it already existed, as justifying its secession from the Union.

The South was spoiling for a fight. They had not seen a serious and purposeful Northern president since the Adamses, and John Quincy had been ejected from the White House by Andrew Jackson more than forty years earlier (and, though intelligent, worthy, and principled, he was no strongman). This is the danger of appeasement—the South had forgotten that there were strong men in the North. Lincoln had warned the South for two years that Republican victory would not justify secession, that secession would not be tolerated by the North, and that, while both sides were equally brave, the South could not defeat the North in a war because Southerners were not adequately numerous.

Between December 9, 1860, and February 1, 1861, South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, and Louisiana all seceded, claiming the new president was a regional candidate, an enemy of slavery, who would continue what was considered to be a war against slavery. Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina, and Tennessee voted in their legislatures to secede if there were any effort to coerce a seceding state to remain in the Union. Referenda were held, even after the legislative votes for secession, in Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia, that yielded 25 to 35 percent negative votes, even though no serious federalist argument was allowed.

Secession, of course, brought civil war and ultimate Union victory. Only with the deaths of 750,000 Americans, the

smashing of five states to rubble and ashes, and the assassination of the nation’s greatest leader, did this Southern stab at populism end.

For a hundred years afterwards, only the whites voted in the South, despite the emancipation of the slaves, and huge numbers of European immigrants arrived in the great port cities of the North and moved westwards, generally provided for by the Democratic bosses in those cities. As the Democrats had held office for fifty-two of the sixty years prior to Lincoln, the Republicans did so for forty-four of the fifty-two years starting with Lincoln, losing the South en bloc, as they had before the war, but prevailing as the party of native-born Americans and the conservators of the Union in most of the North. Counterintuitively, federal expenses on pensions to Civil War veterans and their families steadily increased for forty years, as the Republicans bought votes to counter the Democratic strength in the proliferating Irish, German, Italian, and East European communities. From 1876 to 1892, the Democrats won the presidential popular vote four times, and trailed by only 6,000 out of nearly ten million cast in 1880, but were only elected twice. As originally adopted, the Constitution credited the South with 60 percent of the African-American slave population for purposes of calculating members of Congress and the Electoral College. Now 100 percent of African Americans were counted, but practically none of them voted. The South was decisively beaten on the battlefield, but not politically.

The extreme narrowness of the competition between the parties was only broken by the next foray into populism by a national party. This was the triumph of the chimerical panacea of bimetallism, sponsored by the golden-tongued thirty-six-year-old Nebraskan orator, editor, and ex-congressman William

Jennings Bryan, who equaled Clay's record of running three times unsuccessfully for president (1896, 1900, 1908). In 1896, the Democrats, in addition to bimetallism, demanded sharply lower tariffs, a judicial attack on industrial monopolies, an enhanced legal status for labor unions, and even flirted with a tax on high incomes (which would not even be constitutional for another seventeen years). It was an imaginatively radical platform.

But bimetallism was a simplistic idea and the Republicans had no difficulty portraying it as a menace to sound money, especially after, by tragic luck, the Ohio supporter of big business, William McKinley, was assassinated in 1901, making the greatest contemporary populist of all, Theodore Roosevelt, president. Roosevelt attacked John Pierpont Morgan's financial empire rather symbolically (yet named one of Morgan's partners, Robert Bacon, Secretary of State), made a great issue of conservation, passed some reform measures in accuracy of labeling and marketing of food and drugs, and swaddled himself in a new nationalism by building the Panama Canal and making the United States a great naval power, sending the Great White Fleet around the world. Sound money populism, pitched to the rising middle class and bolstered by robust patriotism in the world, easily defeated the populism of monetary tinkerers from under-populated, silver-producing states. Bryan led the Democrats into a cul-de-sac, as they lost in 1896 by 600,000 votes, by 850,000 with Bryan again in 1900, and in 1908, though Bryan had cooled off considerably, Roosevelt's (temporarily) chosen successor, William Howard Taft, defeated Bryan by 1.3 million votes; even tepid populism wasn't making it. (Theodore Roosevelt denounced Bryan as a yokel, "a yodeler . . . a human trombone.")

So perished American populism again, though it was buried by

imaginative Rooseveltian counter-populism. There had been third-party movements when neither of the main parties addressed occupational discontents: the Popular Party of 1892—disgruntled farmers and workers led by the former congressman (and the sometime-Republican and Democrat) James Weaver—took 8.5 percent of the vote, but did not change the election result, and the party vanished. The Socialist Party in 1912 won a little over 6 percent for the perennial candidate Eugene V. Debs, and in 1924, when the Democrats took 103 ballots to choose John W. Davis, an almost non-political candidate, as a compromise between factions, a briefly revived Progressive Party led by Robert La Follette of Wisconsin garnered 16 percent of the vote. But again, it did not alter the result of the election and the Progressives vanished when the liberal (Roman Catholic) Governor Alfred E. Smith of New York was the Democratic nominee in 1928. Third parties never win in the United States, even when led by an ex-president (Van Buren in 1848, Fillmore in 1856, Theodore Roosevelt in 1912). Populism only has a chance when it takes over an existing party, as the Republicans took over the Whigs in 1856, Bryan took over the Democrats in 1896, Theodore Roosevelt the Republicans in 1901, and Donald Trump the Republicans in 2016.

The Roosevelt–Taft split brought back the Democrats with Wilson, who was barely reelected over a reunited Republican Party in 1916. After a brief cameo appearance as a world idol and the first person to inspire the masses of mankind with the vision of enduring peace and a start at world government, Wilson suffered a disabling stroke and the country flopped back to the Republicans in a landslide in 1920, espousing Prohibition and isolationism. The ultimate Goodtime Charlie, Warren Gamaliel Harding, followed by the legendarily taciturn Calvin Coolidge and Herbert Hoover, the renowned engineer and former dispenser of aid to war-starved Europeans, presided

over a rollicking time of irresponsible government. Recession was successfully fought off with tax cuts, but tariffs rose, immigration was slammed almost shut, and an immense equity-debt bubble was actively encouraged, producing the epic crash of 1929 and the Great Depression that ensued. The policy prescription adopted was the worst that could have been found: even higher tariffs, tax increases, and a reduced money supply. This handed the government for five straight terms to the Democrats under Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S Truman, who governed as liberals and were effective war leaders also, but Roosevelt the great patrician was no populist. Truman the small businessman and municipal judge came closer, but was essentially Roosevelt's heir.

Roosevelt was frequently reviled as a radical, but he salvaged 95 percent of the capitalist system, and his Republican successor, Eisenhower (whom he had promoted militarily), retained almost all of his domestic program. The world had definitively opted to fight economic reversals with public-sector spending at every encounter, and while the economic cycle was moderated, all currencies began a gradual descent in buying power, and eventually possessed a value that, far from being measured in two precious metals, or against gold alone, was measured only in other currencies. The value of money, as a concept, has been on an inexorable eighty-year slide; and the workfare programs ingeniously developed by Roosevelt to absorb unemployment rates of up to 30 percent in the early Thirties (when there was no direct relief for the unemployed) gradually degenerated into a rather indiscriminate practice of taxing money from people who have earned it and redistributing it to people who haven't, generally in return for their votes, without requiring any work from them as Roosevelt had, while coloring the whole process, somewhat misleadingly, as social justice.

After the generally very successful Roosevelt–Truman period and the peace and prosperity of the Eisenhower era, the Republicans and Democrats were, in presidential politics, about even, as the virtual draw in the 1960 presidential election between Kennedy and Nixon indicated. (Because it still held most of the South as a one-party state, the Democrats had the edge in the Congress, for a few more years.) Eisenhower, who was often an imaginative leader, as in his Atoms for Peace and Open Skies proposals and his Interstate Highways program (modeled on what he had seen in Germany as military governor there), was not an especially activist president and was less of a natural advocate of change than the Democrats who bracketed him. He famously regarded the Democrats, an informal coalition of Northern urban liberals and Southern conservative segregationists, as "Extremes of the left, extremes of the right, with political chicanery and corruption shot through the whole business." (He was referring to the party of Roosevelt, Truman, Adlai Stevenson, Kennedy, Johnson, and Sam Rayburn, all politicians of considerable distinction; what he might have thought of Obama, the Clintons, Al Sharpton, and Bernie Sanders is a real challenge to the imagination.)

The country revolted against the Democrats for miring the United States in the Vietnam War, where over a million draftees fought an elusive enemy with less than America's full capacity to wage war, and for an objective short of outright victory in a cause that was not obviously sufficiently important to the national interest to justify such an effort. Richard Nixon extracted the country from the war while preserving a non-communist government in Saigon, and he astutely triangulated relations with China and the Soviet Union. But he inexplicably allowed a nonsensical escapade of campaign activists to destroy his administration and force him out of office. Given the Democrats' desertion of Indochina,

which was their war originally, it was the strangest and most tragic scenario in American history—one no one could have imagined, and the presidency fell momentarily back into the hands of the Democrats. Jimmy Carter, an unworldly and somewhat feckless altruist, was responsible for the only occasion since 1896 when either party failed to win consecutive terms in the White House.

The Carter years saw an extreme spike in oil prices and an economic slowdown, and what the president described as a "malaise" (of which his opponents considered his presence in the White House to be the chief symptom). With double-digit unemployment, inflation, 20 percent interest rates as part of the Federal Reserve policy of cracking inflation by inducing a back-breaking recession—one of America's all-time great fusionists emerged. Ronald Reagan had almost taken the nomination from the incumbent, the admirable if ungalvanizing Gerald Ford, in 1976. The office, in the mysterious American way, now sought the man. Ronald Reagan was a unique combination of traditional values, skepticism about state intervention, supply-side economics, and a Truman–Eisenhower view of an escalated Cold War, without McCarthyism or paranoia. When asked his plan for the Cold war, he responded: "We win and they lose."

Reagan was the perfect fusionist because he was a genuine American traditionalist and patriot, but also a professional showman, real Hollywood tinsel; he always knew how to present. His detractors called him a "good communicator," but he was a hypnotic public speaker, a benign demagogue. He had the glitz and the magic, and the human touch; would Washington, with a bullet in his chest, have said to the waiting doctors in the hospital, "I hope you're all Republicans"? Such a felicitous political chief and effective government executive started

with 90 percent of Republicans, Norman Rockwell's middle America and Richard Nixon's silent majority, and added working-class Democrats in millions.

In Reagan's last election, against the perfectly inoffensive Walter Mondale, not someone easily portrayed as dangerous, as Goldwater and McGovern had been, and Donald Trump almost was, Reagan took forty-nine states and won by 17 million votes. There was a populist ingredient in his mighty coalition, but it was subsumed unrancorously into a tidal wave of agreement to let America be America—a suite of purposeful and congenial attitudes on top of a sharp tax-cut and a well-designed defense upgrade. Ronald Reagan ran the broadest Church in the biggest tent in American history, at least since James Monroe ran unopposed in 1820. When he warned, in his famous address on behalf of Barry Goldwater in 1964, that a vote for Lyndon Johnson was "the first step into a thousand years of darkness," reasonable people thought it good campaign knock-about polemics. When he called for a Constitutional amendment against abortion, his pro-choice supporters were happy to regard it as the understandable views of an amiable septuagenarian.

Nixon wrote of Reagan's successor, George H. W. Bush, that he was "a good man with good intentions" but had "no discernible pattern of political principle . . . no political rhythm, no conservative cadence, and not enough charismatic style to compensate." The great Reagan coalition started to unwind quite quickly. Bush led the nation and a vast coalition with great distinction in evicting Iraq's Saddam Hussein from Kuwait, but reneged on his promise of "no new taxes," irritating the Reagan conservatives without, as Nixon warned, replacing them with centrist independents. The Democratic candidate in 1992 was the politically agile moderate young

governor of Arkansas, William J. Clinton, and Bush had allowed a large chunk of maverick Republicans to gather around the eccentric Texas billionaire Ross Perot's third party candidacy. Perot complained about the deficit, taxes, and drugs, and in the unique American manner of very wealthy men who are politically disgruntled, became a populist figure who was useful to Clinton in siphoning off various categories of Republicans. Perot took 19 percent of the vote, almost 20 million ballots, putting Clinton across with 43 percent of the vote to 37 percent for Bush.

The ensuing eight years with Clinton were a time of policy moderation and unchallenging foreign policy as the United States was the world's only Great Power. Clinton maintained his principal sources of political support in good heart, such as minorities and the young middle class. The observant could see the first signs of slippage among working-class Democrats, some of whom Clinton had won back from Reagan. As passing years would demonstrate, though Clinton prudently eliminated the deficit, he encouraged the housing bubble by promoting commercially unviable mortgages legislatively and by executive order. This was a political free lunch, as the percentage of families who owned their homes rose and money from grateful developers and building trade unions flowed to the Democrats, but a debt bubble comparable to the 1920s over-margined equities market grew right under the noses of the Federal Reserve and Treasury. Clinton was also reckless about the expansion of the current account deficit and did nothing to reduce oil imports and prices.

There were moral and ethical issues that grew to alienate large sections of opinion. The President's own extramarital peccadilloes offended many. But more damaging to the Clintons eventually were the antics of the Clinton Foundation and the

appearance of what seemed, two terms later, when Mrs. Clinton was secretary of State, to be a pay-to-play casino where there may not have been costs to the taxpayers or direct inducements to public office holders, but appearances, for a family which coveted a return to the White House, were far from optimal. There also soon arose allegations that the president and his national security team had responded inadequately to various terrorist provocations, that escalated vertiginously early in the term of the next administration.

Bill Clinton was followed for two terms, and again by a narrow margin (ultimately 537 votes among almost six million votes cast in Florida in 2000), for the Republican candidate, Governor George W. Bush of Texas, son of the former president. His administration was overshadowed by the terrorist crisis that erupted when sky-jacked airliners brought down the World Trade Center Towers in New York and damaged the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. Bush generally handled the terrorist threat well, but the reinvasion of Iraq, partly to eliminate weapons of mass destruction, of which no current evidence was unearthed, and which were tolerated to be developed by neighboring Iran, substantially eroded public confidence in the regime. And with most of the conventional ground forces military capability tied up throughout the second Bush era in Iraq and Afghanistan, trying to cope with an incomprehensible tribal guerrilla conflict in both countries, the public approval rating of the administration reached dangerously low levels, just as the housing debt and sub-prime mortgage crisis blew up at the start of the 2008 election campaign. President Bush’s response that “The sucker could go down” (in reference to the economy), as the banking systems of almost every advanced Western country except Canada collapsed and had to be shored up by massive deposits and relief measures from the central banks, denuded his regime of almost all public support.

The forces of public anger and disillusionment that feed populist agitation had built to very appreciable levels and were available for the bold election of America's first non-white president, Barack H. Obama. President Obama retained a reasonably buoyant level of personal popularity, but for his last term, two thirds of Americans thought the country was in decline. The workforce shrunk by 15 million, and a widespread perception arose that over-generous trade deals, high corporate taxes that drove out manufacturers, and the toleration of twelve million illegal migrants flooding for over twenty years across the Mexican border have sandbagged the American worker. The federal debt rose in eight years by 125 percent from where it had been on inauguration day, 2009, after 233 years of American independence. The economic growth rate was sluggish throughout Obama's second term despite mountainous pump-priming. A precipitate withdrawal from Iraq helped produce the most virulent terrorist organizations in history, people little concerned to save their own lives as they killed others. Sixty percent of the population of Iraq was now under the effective domination of Iran, which was effectively permitted by treaty to take up nuclear weapons in ten years (if it chooses to wait that long, a practically unverifiable matter). Russia, which Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger had effectively expelled from the Middle East in the Seventies, made a most untimely comeback and became a power of great importance there with only fifty combat aircraft and token ground forces as Obama and his advisors waffled and promised a "Red Line" of intolerance of Syrian gassing of its own citizens and then backed down.

Hillary Clinton had served as Secretary of State in the first Obama term. Thus, a member of the Bush or Clinton families had been president, vice president, or Secretary of State without interruption for thirty-two years (1981–2013), and Mrs.

Clinton and former Florida Governor Jeb Bush both sought their parties' presidential nominations in 2016. The Bushes became a dynasty because George Bush was the first president since Theodore Roosevelt who had sons with political aptitude. The Clintons only became a dynasty because Hillary Clinton was the first president's wife since Eleanor Roosevelt who had any political aptitude. And the country was saddled with these worthy-enough but not meritocratically exalted families indefinitely. In this atmosphere, public discontent and populist susceptibilities achieved historic proportions.

The country had changed administrations every two terms starting in 1992 and removed control of the Congress from each of the three administrations. The state of the Union, domestically and in the world, appeared to most to have deteriorated steadily from the second Clinton term on, for the first time in American history, while these two families handed the greatest offices in the land back and forth between them. Washington, flattered by the entertainment community and protected by a docile and unrepresentatively leftish media, exuded complacency.

Only one person came forward to challenge the whole cast of characters, to call the Bushes incompetent, the Clintons dishonest, Obama a failure, the press toadies, the pollsters flacks and lackeys, and the whole system a sleaze factory in which a bipartisan group of self-serving and inept insiders were just gaming the system for their own incumbencies and the devil take the country and its voters. The flamboyant and clangorous billionaire developer, casino owner, and sports and television impresario Donald Trump seemed an unlikely pied piper. He was prone to support absurd causes, such as denying that Obama was born in the United States, and was known to read and take half-seriously the most spurious media, such as

the *National Enquirer*, but he promised to build a southern border, to promote economic growth, to repatriate jobs with an incentive tax structure that would stop mollycoddling Wall Street deal-makers, to reopen unsuccessful trade agreements, to end the freeloading of America's so-called allies and the insolences of its enemies, and to redefine the national interest in a coherent line between George W. Bush's trigger-happy adventurism and Barack Obama's pacifistic, Panglossian quest to have America's allies and enemies change roles and places.

The entire political class proclaimed Trump's absurdity and unsuitability, but he kept winning the Republican primaries. As some of his reflections on illegal immigration were politically incorrect, the hue and cry was sent up that he was a racist. When an eleven-year-old off-mike tape of very coarse reflections on women Trump made in conversation with a lesser member of the ubiquitous Bush family was released, he was reviled as a sexist. Hillary Clinton had troubles of her own; she muddied the waters by describing "half" Trump's scores of millions of supporters as "deplorable." When she finally won her nomination, well after Trump had mopped the floor with the entire Republican establishment as well as the far right, there was no Democratic campaign left except the portrayal of Trump as a racist, misogynistic ogre who incarnated vulgarity, greed, and philistinism.

Trump was running against Washington, not in the genteel manner of Reagan, who was running against Washington even after he had lived in the White House for six years, but in the nasty strictures of someone who really was storming Babylon and was capable of tossing out chunks of the bureaucracy as Jackson did with his "spoils system" in 1829. Trump was running against almost every person in Washington

D.C., and about 93 percent of them voted against him. Attacking Trump was the only Democratic argument. Trump reviled the Clintons as crooks and Bill Clinton as a serial rapist. It was low and unedifying, though entertaining in its crudeness. Trump was not always pandering to rich friends in Wall Street and Hollywood passing the hat for him. (Trump went up a point in the polls when the entertainer Madonna promised oral sex for every man who voted for Hillary Clinton.) Trump didn't need rapsters and witless starlets to pull the crowds for him.

The more the entrenched forces who had excluded the angry and had mismanaged America attacked him, the more the people came. Trump used the social media and the talk show giants, Rush Limbaugh, Laura Ingraham, and Ann Coulter, as substitutes for the traditional media. Ms. Coulter reflected in her splendid upper-class New England–New York accent, a little like Eleanor Roosevelt's, that America could not be subjected to watching her "wallow around in those neon pantsuits" for the next few years.

The consensus was almost unanimous: Trump could not win. His victory was an upset comparable to that of Harry Truman against Thomas E. Dewey in 1948, except that all the right people supported Truman, however condescendingly, and no one supported Trump, except the people.

The initial reaction showed the profundity of the surprise at the people's verdict: unfounded electoral challenges (there was nothing like the Chicago Daley machine's theft of ballot boxes and Lyndon Johnson's resurrection of legions of dead voters in Texas in 1960). The only skullduggery was the Clinton vote larger than the voters' list in some African-

American districts of Milwaukee. There were television spots asking members of the Electoral College to change their minds and spare the nation a Trump barbarity. There were a few electors who switched, but most away from Hillary.

If any Bush, Clinton, or Obama is heard from as a coming candidate for the headship of the nation again, it will be on a straight meritocratic basis and after the appropriate interval when spurs are won and the country is exposed to other families—the old-fashioned way, like the Adamses, Harrisons, and Roosevelts.

What has occurred is the supreme triumph of populism in American history and in the modern democratic world. Even Andrew Jackson had been a prominent general, albeit in Gilbert and Sullivan wars and in crushing the natives almost as brutally as Mussolini did the Ethiopians, and he had briefly been a senator and congressman, and ran once (and was the leading vote-getter in a four-way race) before he was elected president. Trump is the only person ever elected president who has never held a public office or a high military position, the oldest and wealthiest person ever elected to the office.

Among the great Western nations, only the United States has the constitutional and psychological ability to conduct a full exercise in populism. Some of the campaign against it as demagogy has been justified, though not the charge of mob rule. Yet in the last year, it was the only avenue to national renovation.

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