

William Alexander Schwartz

The Rise of the Far Right and the Domestication of the War on Terror



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William Alexander Schwartz
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Dedicated to my dad, for whom I'll forever wonder what he'd make of all this, and to my mom, for all her loving support.

»» *Our task is that of ruthless criticism, and much more against ostensible friends than against open enemies, [...].*

— *Karl Marx in Gottfried Kinkel (1850: 1)*



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A Note from the Editor

Forum Humangeographie is co-edited by the professors of the Department of Human Geography at the Goethe University in Frankfurt, Germany. This contribution to the series by William Schwartz is based on his master's thesis that he completed under my primary and Marc Boeckler's secondary supervision in 2021. When discussing this extraordinary thesis, Marc and I agreed to encourage the author to publish it in *Forum Humangeographie*. We think that this piece of work is extraordinary, first, in its quality, and second, in the challenge it poses to its readers.

Schwartz draws on the classic study *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* and its analysis of »the birth of a law-and-order society« (Hall et al. 1978: 321) in 1970s Britain to critically assess the way in which present-day interpretations of 'the far right' in the United States have been sequentially constructed, first by law and policing practices, and later reflected by public discourse throughout the 2010s. He does so in a way that is well-crafted, accessible, and grounded in both theory and a detailed analysis of this particular historical conjuncture. This is what originally prompted us to grade the thesis as »very good.«

Unlike other very good master's theses that I have had the honor to read and assess in the past, this manuscript was thought-provoking in an almost uncomfortable way. Up until reading it, I had unhesitatingly accepted the hegemonic notion that the 2016 United States presidential election brought together various religious, economic, and cultural conservatives with white supremacist neo-Nazis in such a way that was dangerous to democracy, truth, reason and the lives and wellbeing of those who the now former president and his supporters regarded as their 'enemies.'

This paper urged me to take pause and question that simplifying categorization. Maybe the seemingly clear-cut unity between the sexist and racist remarks by the former president, his tax cuts for the super-rich, the support he received from far right groups, and the general demographic and geographic composition of his supporters was more complex than the liberal left media had portrayed it to be. Maybe. And maybe not. Maybe the connections between his supporters and the '*actually existing far right*' drawn up in the media that Schwartz analyzes reflect real connections and everyday practices in virtual space, at rallies, in town hall meetings, churches, at shooting ranges, in workplaces and elsewhere. Maybe the real connection consists of what Adorno (2017, 2019a, 2019b) would have referred to as the prevalence of authoritarian character structures that are open to manipulation of the worst Nazi and neo-Nazi kind (after all, we are based in Frankfurt). And maybe the Left is more fragmented than Schwartz seems to suggest, especially when it comes to the fundamental issues of wealth, labor, and the class struggle.

Having hinted to some of the objections I have with Schwartz's analysis (and which I have discussed with the author), I praise the manuscript at hand as a thought-provoking position that urges us to take seriously the way in which the likes of Marx, Gramsci and Hall et al. have analyzed concrete political conjunctions and their hegemonic representations in their full complexity.

Bernd Belina, Frankfurt am Main, January 2022

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Prologue

» *But every class struggle is a political struggle.*
— Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* (1846: 19) «

Never did I set out to write a condemnation of the political left-wing, and yet here I am. In fact, my original intention was quite the opposite. I began this endeavor as a critical reflection and strategic intervention from *within* and *for* ‘the political left-wing,’ which at the time, I understood to be a political project *of* the working class.

My initial interest in the subject matter of this publication began in the mid-2010s, at a peculiar moment in time that gave cause for both optimism and alarm. On the one hand, signs of class struggle resurfaced in the form of a widespread discontent with ‘economic inequality’ that coalesced into the rise of ‘populism’ across the Western world. And yet, on the other hand, these encouraging developments seemed to be overshadowed by a *Rechtsruck* [rise of the far right] with all of its sinister connotations engulfing those very same political landscapes across the West, including in Germany, where I had been living, and the United States, my country of origin. It wasn’t until these broader societal developments synergized with my own personal experience that I began the task of questioning and reassessing some of my most fundamental political preconceptions—a process as challenging as it was rewarding.

It is precisely this *biographical* angle that I would like to both address and limit to the scope of this prologue. Since the translation of idiosyncratic experience—especially when tendentious in nature—is neither easy for the addresser, nor for the addressed, and cognizant of the weight of my critique, this prologue is carried out with utmost sensitivity to these facts. Besides simply providing an opportunity to record the personal changes and challenges that led up to and accompanied the development of this work, the main aim of this prologue is to assuage those most apprehensive of readers and prepare them for the analysis that follows. This will be done by: (i) outlining my *politicization* into the political left-wing; (ii) locating my *point of entry* into the particular subject matter of this work; (iii) reviewing my *familiarization* with some of its core themes; and lastly, (iv) highlighting my *depoliticization* and subsequent *re-politicization* as it relates to the class struggle.

Politicization

Since the world we are born into is a social one, it is inextricably a *political* one. As such, in this world, *nothing exists outside of politics*. All the more so, in a world marked by the exploitative politics of *class*. With that said, while we are all born into this political world, this does not in itself translate into our having a *political consciousness*,

furthermore, any *political practice*. Rather, alongside our class interests, we also possess a *prehistory*, one that intrinsically structures (and in some cases hinders) the development of our conscious and organized political activity. Karl Marx famously described such a predicament in the opening pages of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852):

»Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.« (5)

In a later letter to *J. Bloch In Königsberg* (1890), Friedrich Engels reiterated this point of the extent to which our political prehistory can interfere in our ability to *make history*:

»We make our history ourselves, but, in the first place, under very definite assumptions and conditions. Among these the economic ones are ultimately decisive. But the political ones, etc., and indeed even the traditions which haunt human minds also play a part, although not the decisive one.« (1)

As with many other downwardly mobile middle-class youths who came of age in the political doldrums of a post-9/11 United States, in my particular case, those ‘assumptions’ hinged on an innate *distrust* and decisive *circumvention* of any politics proper. Whatever ‘politics’ was made out to be, as my younger self had come to know it, seemed not only ineffectual in its ability to serve the interests of the population, but—and perhaps most striking in the American context—it appeared to serve as an actively divisive and polarizing force. A force all the more unwelcome given the massive social shifts that had been underway in that very same period. Even as a young person with his head in the clouds, the changes in the economy, technology, geography, custom and convention were impossible to miss. Taken together, these developments appeared to be moving in a singular direction: towards the indiscriminate erosion of social bonds and human dignity. But to what end? In lacking the analytical tools to make sense of this predicament in its wider context, my younger self naturally gravitated towards the shortsighted and commonsensical explanations that pervaded both the dominant culture, and curiously enough, the ‘counterculture.’ These just-so stories loosely explained society’s problems as the result of *individual* shortcomings, whether stemming from some unrestrained hedonism or a mindless zombie-like consumerism. While from point of view corporate profiteering was by no means innocent (rather nakedly complicit in the exploitation of these human frailties), its sinister involvement was nevertheless cast as secondary, as if only occurring *after the fact*.

While my youthful observations may have contained kernels of truth, lacking any class analysis or working-class experience, I was left to wrestle with these developments as they existed on the surface, that is to say, *empirically*. With the wider reality of class

relations and imperatives of capital accumulation hidden from view, my critique of ‘society,’ had in fact been little more than a critique of *individual behavior*.

From this limited perspective, politics as it had existed, not only seemed to be a political dead-end, but appeared to be a net loss en route to any enduring enrichment of our society *as a whole*. As such, and as my determined younger self saw it, the sole and logical conclusion was to rebuild the deteriorating social bonds, if not only to cushion those in existence from any further disrepair. This was a task, so I understood, which could only be realized *outside* of politics and by *whatever* desperate means necessary. One, which in essence, sought to build *unity for its very own sake*. From this utterly abstract premise, I directed my energies into a string of ‘social’ and ‘community’ projects, which, while sincerely grasping for *answers*, somehow managed to neglect a concerted engagement with the fundamental *questions* they assumed to be answering.

This all irrevocably changed after a friend introduced me to the work of Marx and Engels. As their writings on class, history, and dialectical materialism seeped into the corners of my consciousness, this in turn flipped my entire conception of politics on its head: from what had been a hinderance, to the narrow passage through which positive social change might be realized. It was particularly the concept of the class struggle and its logical conclusions that forced me to reassess my initial unease regarding the polarizing and divisive nature of present-day life. As I would soon learn, life in a class society was de facto a divisive and polarizing affair. Because the existence of social classes entailed exploitative class relations from which contradictory interests stemmed, this inevitably produced the very antagonism I had once sought to bypass in my previous efforts to build unity for its own abstract sake. Upon this new embrace of politics, parting ways with unity in general, I began embracing it in its more limited form—*the unity of the working class*. It was this unity which would be required to abolish exploitative relations inherent across all class societies.

Operating under this new framework, I naturally turned towards the historical expressions of the class struggle for guidance, and thus, evermore onto the terrain of *politics* that lay at its heart. There, I began to familiarize myself with the legacy and significance of working class struggles over the past century. Struggles, which had often occurred under the banner of the political left-wing. It was from this perspective that I came to interpret (or *misinterpret*) this ‘wing’ as a shorthand indicative of the working class and its particular interest (i.e., freedom from exploitation). A shorthand in direct opposition with the political right-wing, which was representative of the bourgeoisie and its particular interest (i.e., the *conservation* of its class rule). It was from this point on, that I unhesitatingly regarded the political left-wing as the *natural* political expression of the working class within the political class struggle.

No longer distrustful, nor circumventive of the political form, I began to embrace it as the necessary infrastructure for attaining and exercising class power in the interest of

working people *against* the narrow interests of those exploiting them. Thus, after years of resisting the theatre of politics, by 2014, I formally entered stage left.

Shortly after embracing this new and determined mode of thinking and acting, the following spring, I found myself intuitively drawn to the Vermont Senator and self-identifying democratic socialist, Bernie Sanders and his entrance into the 2016 United States presidential election. Far from any revolutionary ideal, his relentless attacks on ‘the political establishment’ opened up the opportunity for the working class to reassert itself as a political force within American politics. Aside from attacking his Republican Party rivals, running from *within* the Democratic Party, his campaign took aim at the latter and its ‘abandonment’ and ‘neglect’ of the working class. Not only did I find this project to *resurrect* the ‘traditional’ (i.e., working-class) political left-wing inspiring, but it provided my newfound curiosity and affiliation with the latter an outlet for action and education. Close attention to the campaign exposed me to the absurdity of American politics, including the outsized role which the media had played in its narration, and the extent to which electoral politics had become dominated by moneyed interests. And yet, at the same time, through its active politicization and mobilization of an increasingly disenchanted voting public, the campaign revealed the virtues of a ‘class-based politics’ and its potential for unifying an otherwise divided public around the material interests they held in common. Against all odds, the relative success of this ‘outsider’ candidate and his largely ‘self-funded’ and ‘anti-establishment’ campaign which unrelentingly attacked the ‘status quo,’ while not winning the party’s nomination, managed to launch itself out of obscurity and onto the world stage. There, alongside the likes of SYRIZA in Greece, ‘Corbynism’ in the United Kingdom, and the insurgent candidacy of Jean-Luc Mélenchon in France, the ‘revival’ or ‘return’ to an ‘old,’ ‘authentic’ and ‘traditional’ political left-wing seemed increasingly within reach.

It was through this exposure and adoption of the ideas of Marx and Engels, and the practical experience garnered from a freak political campaign, that together served as the dynamic basis outlining my politicization and subsequent political affiliation with the political left-wing.

Point of Entry

On the evening of October 8th, 2019, I attended the Yom Kippur service at the Westend-Synagogue in Frankfurt. There, as reflected in the *derasha*, the heavyhearted atmosphere was made palpable in the rabbi’s warnings of a rising antisemitism, xenophobia and nationalism, that were not only said to have been unfolding in Germany, but around the world. As would tragically be the case, the very next morning news broke of a shooter targeting synagoguegoers just a stone’s throw away from my former place of residence in the former East German town of Halle (Saale).

My immediate reaction was predictable: shock, sadness, confusion. The anxieties expressed in the words the previous evening were proven all too real when put into cold-blooded action. Yet, as I obsessively hit refresh on my web browser, the stream of imagery of heavily militarized police forces arriving on the scene to tackle the nauseating display of antisemitism did little to quell my unease. Though not immediately articulable, I found myself overwhelmed and underprepared for the questions that would soon follow.

What was the relationship between this particular event, which had presented itself as the result of *extreme right-wing politics*, and the *politics* of class struggle? Moreover, how did a left-wing political project factor into this equation? Why had such a tragic situation even taken place? And how could it be comprehended and translated into a political practice that would address the root of the problem without further enhancing the agencies of social control?

These questions became only more confounding and unwieldy once the violent act was framed in today's open-ended vernacular of 'antisemitism,' 'racism,' 'xenophobia,' 'misogyny' and 'nativism.' On the one hand, this particular example of *Rechtsterrorismus* [right-wing extremism] was all too real as it played out on the streets of my former neighborhood, and yet, on the other hand, under the guise of its ultimate indefensibility, the *specter* of this *Rechtsterrorismus* took on a life of its own. One detached and outside the event as it had existed in its concrete form. The concept instead, went on to act as a container not only indexing this particular act of terror, but a whole host of other modern-day *evils* that had beset German society. As the event in Halle made all too clear, if left unchecked, such extreme right-wing *ideology* not only threatened to infect the minds of the impressionable but was now proven liable to *materialize* at any given moment, anywhere, with *verifiably* devastating consequences.

Perhaps it was my experience and sensitization vis-à-vis the global War on Terror, but as far as I had understood it, the *invocation* of 'terrorism'—with all its dreadful connotation—moreover, the *demand* for an 'adequate' state response to such a violence—entailing its own set of dreadful repercussions—could only ever be fully leveraged on the terrain of the bourgeois state and its agencies of public signification and social control. To quote the words of my friend Larry Pinkney, all such a politics achieved was to assist the ruling class in »pimping the pain of the people« towards its own narrow ends.

Thus, it was this tragedy and the political dilemma which followed, that directed my attention, albeit initially more emotive than analytic, toward theorizing a left-wing political strategy as it related to the ever-confounding twin existence of right-wing extremism in *theory* and *practice*.

Familiarization

As hinted in the previous chapter, I do not bring up my Jewish heritage in an attempt to accumulate ‘victim points,’ nor as some cynical cloak intent on denying modern-day manifestations of antisemitism on the political right-wing. Unfortunately, traces of this particular ideology can be found across the entirety of the left-right political spectrum. Rather, I do so because not only did it shape ‘my politics’ before I was ever conscious I had one, but very early on my affiliation with it familiarized me with one of the thorniest of subject matters in modern political life: living in the long shadow of the Holocaust. However, this particular familiarity was not the result of a *wholly* Jewish identity, but rather emerged out of the very combination of my parents, who beyond my father being an American Jew and my mother a German Catholic, had also differed on a number of other social fronts (i.e., progressive/conservative; atheistic/practicing; urban/rural; university educated/not university educated). Of course, from *within* the nuclear family, these divergent social characteristics hardly registered. However, *outside* this insulated nucleus, they could hardly *not* register, and quite understandably so given the social context under which my paternal family had been socialized: conservative Jews a mere generation removed from this horrific chapter. Not only was marriage outside the faith met with sharp disapproval in the conservative Jewish tradition, but all the more so as it related to the likes of a *German gentile*. A predicament which at one moment was as understandable as it was unfair for everyone involved. Even as my mother and her in-laws made a difficult situation work, out of these fraught circumstances I had always been troubled by a persevering question: How and why had some human beings on one side of my family participated in the mass destruction of human beings on the other side of my family? However, already in my earliest attempts to answer this question, its segmentation into *moralistic* terms of ‘Jew’ vs. ‘German,’ ‘victim’ vs. ‘perpetrator,’ ‘good’ vs. ‘evil,’ seemed to do more to obscure the complexity of the Holocaust than explain it in its wider social context. As I understood it, this approach appeared to flatten the events into sets of transhistorical and essentialized language, and in so doing subvert the very forward motion of the initial line of questioning that asked how and why such an event had happened so as to prevent it from happening in the future. Rather than understand social phenomena in its full complexity, such moralistic interpretations seemed to foreclose upon any rigorous analysis by shrouding events in language as emotive as it was analytically empty. This is all to say that, prior to my politicization, I was always wary of such moralistic discourses. Whether regarding the ‘Islamic extremism’ and ‘Islamic extremists’ implicated in the ‘War on Terror,’ or the ‘right-wing extremism’ and ‘right-wing extremists’ implicit in the notion of ‘the rise of the far right,’ it was this particular upbringing that reinforced my skepticism toward such matters in the first place.

It was this more intimate *familiarization* with the nuances of the subject matter interrogated in this publication that constituted the substratum of ‘my politics’ before I was ever *conscious* I had one.

Depoliticization and Re-politicization

As outlined above, it was, in part, this combination of experiences that formed the basis of my *politicization* going into this scholarly endeavor. A basis that would soon be thrown into question following another set of experiences.

As it would happen, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, I found myself stranded in Minneapolis after Germany closed its borders. Stuck in my hometown, on May 25th, 2020, like thousands of others, I watched the chilling smartphone video of George Floyd as he was suffocated to death under the knee of a Minneapolis police officer. Like with the attack in Halle, by virtue of my relative proximity, once again I found myself intimately involved in yet another tragic event with global reverberations. As the video circulated across the internet, within a few hours following Floyd’s death, I and several hundred others ‘broke’ quarantine and gathered to the site of the murder. For the first thirty minutes, there was an absolute silence, in part, out of respect, and in part, likely the result of social fatigue following months of ‘social distancing.’ Standing in this silence, as the minutes slowly crawled by, my intuition became increasingly distraught to say the least.

On the one hand, it was truly a sight to be seen. Such a lively presence on a street filled with individuals who appeared to be opposing the destruction of yet another human life by agents of the ruling order. This, in a country where the domain of politics had often been limited to intermittent election cycles. The show of people was even more astounding given the months of apocalyptic media prophesying, ‘social distancing’ and ‘lock-downs.’

And yet, on the other hand, I was overcome by a great sense of unease regarding the very terrain on which any such politics—one antagonistic to the ruling order—could ever realistically unfold.

As the ubiquity of ‘Black Lives Matter’ signs suggested, rather than approach the event in its *class* nature, the dominant mode of interpretation that afternoon appeared to be one grounded in an *empirical* reading of the situation as it played out in the graphic and emotionally-stirring video that had gone viral. From this perspective, the social content of a subject suspected of a crime in a poor and gentrifying urban neighborhood murdered by agents of the bourgeois state was collapsed into the imagery of Floyd, a ‘black’ man, brutally murdered at the hands of a ‘white’ police officer. From this *racial* lens, disconnected from its social context, this state violence *appeared* to be the result of ‘white supremacist’ and ‘racist’ *ideas* planted in the *mind* of the police. From this

idealistic vantage point, the problem was not state violence per se, but *racist* state violence. With this subtle adjustment, the very *materiality* of this bloodshed, was dissolved into the language of *racial inequity*. The problem was the *inequitable* distribution of this violence. If the problem was indeed an inequity, and if that inequity was the result of racism, and if racism was a sickness of the mind, whatever the politics of Black Lives Matter was, it was indelibly anchored in the realm of *ideas*. As such, it had little if anything to do with a working-class political project grounded in the *material* reality of exploitative class relations from which state violence and racism stemmed. Rather than oppose the ruling order, in this moment, it was the politics of Black Lives Matter that helped to renovate it.

This only became more apparent in the nights immediately following Floyd's death. There, large swaths of South Minneapolis, a predominantly working-class and immigrant neighborhood, were thoroughly vandalized and set alight, all ostensibly done in the name of 'social justice.' As a local newspaper would later report, that summer the metropolitan area (in which South Minneapolis served as 'ground zero') incurred an estimated \$550 million in property damage—the second highest amount in United States history following the 1992 Los Angeles riots.¹

Still more, that summer as the riots spread from city to city, media outlets once quick to exaggerate the 'property damage' of past protests, were now quick to solidarize with destructive events. Exercising their influence on public perception, over the summer of 2020, media outlets portrayed the destruction of working-class communities in a positive and 'socially just' light, as *CNN* exemplified in its chyron »FIERY BUT MOSTLY PEACEFUL PROTESTS AFTER POLICE SHOOTING« while the city of Kenosha, Wisconsin was literally up in flames.²

But it wasn't just the corporate media which lent its support. In the heat of the 'public health crisis,' just as government and public health officials attempted to 'flatten the curve' by 'locking down' public life, by June, these same officials encouraged citizens to leave their homes and take to the streets to oppose a 'Far Greater Public Health Threat' than COVID-19, that of 'systemic racism.'³

As if this sudden turn of events wasn't already striking, in that very same moment, the very same officialdom blanketly cast citizens who took to the streets in protest of the

1 See 'Minneapolis Foundation raising \$20 million for riot-hurt small businesses,' *Star Tribune*, 18 May 2021.

2 See 'CNN ridiculed for 'Fiery But Mostly Peaceful' caption with video of burning building in Kenosha,' *The Hill*, 27 August 2020.

3 See 'Blaming protesters for COVID-19 spread ignores the bigger threats to health,' *The Verge*, 3 June 2020; 'Suddenly, Public Health Officials Say Social Justice Matters More Than Social Distance,' *Politico Magazine*, 4 June 2020; 'Over 1,000 health professionals sign a letter saying, Don't shut down protests using coronavirus concerns as an excuse,' *CNN*, 5 June, 2020; and 'Systemic Racism Poses A Far Greater Public Health Threat Than Protests Against Police Violence,' *The Intercept*, 11 June 2020.

unprecedented emergency measures and breach of civil liberties as ‘Heavily Armed Protestors’ and a threat to public health and security.⁴

However, what made any working-class political potential of Black Lives Matter *most unlikely*, was the very popularity of its politics with those most powerful segments in society. According to *The Economist*, by the end of 2020, Black Lives Matter, and other likeminded organizations, who *appeared* to antagonize ‘the powers that be,’ were flooded with what the magazine estimated to be 10.6 billion dollars in financial support from the likes of Google, Facebook, Apple, Netflix, Johnson & Johnson, Bank of America, and Amazon, and countless other multinational corporations, banks, and foundations.⁵

Whatever the *solidarity* between Black Lives Matter, its allies on the political left-wing, and the economic, political, cultural, media, and health establishments represented, was in no way representative of the working class.

It was at this point I realized, I myself had fallen victim to my own *idealistic* illusion—one that posited the political left-wing as a *transhistorical* representative of the working class, and the political right-wing as its ultimate enemy. In this instance, it was the tradition of *the political left-wing* of dead generations which weighed like a nightmare on my living brain. It took the combined experiences in Germany and back home for me to recognize that far from representing the working class, it was the political left-wing, at this particular historical conjuncture, that acted as its *class enemy*. It was this wing, as it *actually existed* (i.e., the Democratic Party, Democratic Socialists of America, Black Lives Matter, Antifa, the Communist Party USA, etc.), under the pretext of ‘the rise of the far right’ and its endless derivatives (e.g., ‘white supremacy,’ ‘fascism,’ ‘antigovernment extremism,’ etc.), that naturally, and in its own self-interest, formed a *hegemonic alliance* with the dominant fractions of capital (i.e., Amazon, BlackRock, Comcast, Google, etc.) and the repressive arms of the state (e.g., lobbying to expand hate crime and domestic terrorism legislation, restricting civil liberties, etc.), and in so doing *came to represent the interests of the ruling class*. From its perches in academia, nonprofits, the public sector, the media, the arts, it was the political left-wing which had now carried out the *reactionary* role previously fulfilled by its counterparts on the political right-wing: ensuring the identitarian segmentation of working-class solidarity and rallying support for the expansion of state power. However, these developments weren’t the result of the political left-wing as a whole, but were led by its most vocal constituents. It

4 See ‘Armed protesters are dangerous, un-American extremists,’ *The Los Angeles Times*, 10 May, 2020; ‘Heavily Armed Protesters Gather Again At Michigan Capitol To Decry Stay-At-Home Order,’ *NPR News*, 14 May 2020; ‘Armed protesters entered Michigan’s state Capitol during rally against stay-at-home order,’ *Vox*, 30 April 2020; ‘Armed protesters demonstrate against Covid-19 lockdown,’ *The Guardian*, 30 April, 2020; and ‘The Irony of America’s Armed Anti-Lockdown Protesters,’ *The Atlantic*, 13 May 2020.

5 See ‘Six months after mass protests began, what is the future of BLM?,’ *The Economist*, 10 December 2020.

was the growing dominance of its petty bourgeois constituency that predisposed the political left-wing to such a *reaction*. By virtue of their existential *relation to power* (i.e., their employers, financiers, grants programs, etc.), and their intermediary *class location* (i.e., between the working and ruling classes), it was particularly these two facets which guided the organization and activity of this social grouping and facilitated its laundering of the *particular* interests of its backers as the *general* interests of the ‘the nation’ as it did through the gospel of ‘social justice.’

Following this uncomfortable revelation, the task was now that of *depoliticization* in its narrow sense—cutting ties with the political left-wing, in an effort to consciously *re-politicize* myself on the side of the working class in its ongoing class struggle.

It is this political journey that accompanied and shaped the analysis and outlook of this publication. In effect, that which follows, attempts to outline the tracks that had long been laid so as to ensure the ideological conformity and closure that occurred throughout the summer of 2020. It is my hope that these biographical insights provide some more nuance to what might otherwise be mistaken as a trivialization, if not a tacit endorsement of any of the real threats on the *actually existing* far right (e.g., neo-Nazi, white supremacist violence). None of this is about scrubbing clean *antisocial* behaviors nor exonerating those complicit in class warfare against the oppressed. Rather, it is about the *politicized* segments of the working class that have been actively propagandized and cast as adherents of a nebulous and deeply sinister ‘far right’ which mainstream commentators, and the president of the United States himself, have said threaten the very ‘democratic values’ underpinning free society.

Just as thousands of innocent lives were lost on 9/11, the barbarism of this fact did not need to translate into the institutionalization of an unforgivably destructive global War on Terror—no matter how virtuous its intentions of *liberating* ‘the world’ from *evil* may have been. Let us be wise to this recent chapter in world history as it relates to our present investigation of the *domestication* of this war—now dressed up in the rhetoric of a ‘social justice’ promising to deliver ‘the nation’ from *hate*. While liberty and justice are principles worth defending, and evil and hate causes worth defending against, let us not be blinded by their moral authority and the ruling-class campaigns that exploit them toward their own narrow ends.

With all this said, I would like to close this prologue with three quotes by three thinkers that serve as a theoretical bridge from this more *personal* perspective toward our more *political* outlook in the analysis that follows:

» In Marxist terms, one doesn't advocate class struggle or choose to participate in it (common bourgeois misconceptions). The class struggle, representing the sum of the contradictions between workers, broadly defined, and capitalists, simply is, and in one way or another we are all already involved, often—as we come to discover—on the wrong side. On learning about it and where we fit into it, we can now decide to stop acting as we have been (the first decision to make) and what more or else we can do to better serve our own interests. What can be chosen is what side to take in this struggle and how to conduct it.

— Bertell Ollman in *Dance of the Dialectic: Steps in Marx's Method* (2003: 20) «

» But if we consider the entire extent and depth of the class struggle it is then clear that for the writer the question is not to know whether he takes part or no. The question is to know how and for who he takes part; if he represents the unconscious and more or less perfected plaything of social forces of which he is ignorant, or a conscious factor. "Who do you write for?" means in the first place: "Do you know who you write for?" It next means: "Do the social consequences of your writing correspond to the intentions that animate you while writing?" And for this reason I think that we must maintain and tirelessly repeat the question: "Who do you write for?"; we must even respond in the place of those who don't themselves respond.

— Georges Politzer in *Who Do You Write For* (1934) «

» To begin with, the whole history of embedded liberalism and the subsequent turn to neoliberalization indicates the crucial role played by class struggle in either checking or restoring elite class power. Though it has been effectively disguised, we have lived through a whole generation of sophisticated strategizing on the part of ruling elites to restore, enhance, or, as in China and Russia, to construct an overwhelming class power. The further turn to neoconservatism is illustrative of the lengths to which economic elites will go and the authoritarian strategies they are prepared to deploy in order to sustain their power. [...] **The first lesson we must learn, therefore, is that if it looks like class struggle and acts like class war then we have to name it unashamedly for what it is. The mass of the population has either to resign itself to the historical and geographical trajectory defined by overwhelming and ever-increasing upper-class power, or respond to it in class terms.** [emphasis added]

— David Harvey in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005: 201-202) «

1 Introduction

» *Our Nation faces a threat to our freedoms, and the stakes could not be higher. We are the target of enemies who boast they want to kill all Americans, kill all Jews, and kill all Christians. We've seen that type of hate before, and the only possible response is **to confront it and to defeat it** [emphasis added].*

— U. S. President George W. Bush in Address to the Nation on Homeland Security (November 8th, 2001) «

» *The primary terrorist threat inside the United States will stem from lone offenders and small cells of individuals [...] specifically white supremacists extremists—will remain the most persistent and lethal threat in the Homeland.*

— U.S. Department of Homeland Security in Homeland Threat Assessment (October 2020) «

» *And now, a rise in political extremism, white supremacy, domestic terrorism that **we must confront and we will defeat** [emphasis added].*

— U.S. President Joe Biden in his Inaugural Address (January 20th, 2021) «

» *We have seen growing evidence that the dangers to our country can come, not only across borders, but from violence that gathers within. There is little cultural overlap between violent extremists abroad and violent extremists at home. But then there is disdain for pluralism, and disregard for human life, and their determination to defile national symbols, they are children of the same foul spirit and it is our continuing duty to confront them.*

— U.S. President George W. Bush at an event commemorating the 20th anniversary of the September 11, 2001 attacks in Pennsylvania (September 11th, 2021) «

» *Hegel remarks somewhere that all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce. [...] Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionizing themselves and*

things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honored disguise and borrowed language.

— Karl Marx in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852: 5)



Today in the United States, the notion that »political extremism, white supremacy, and domestic terrorism« pose the greatest threat to democratic values, and by extension, to the nation itself, has slowly entered into *common sense*. The antecedent of this development is the object of our present study which we will explore in four and interrelated parts plot out the *how, where, when* and *why* of what we posit as the *domestication of the War on Terror*.

In chapters 2-4, we set out to introduce and update the theoretical insights first put forward in the seminal Marxian study *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (Hall et al. 1978). After revisiting the work more generally, we direct our focus to what it describes as the *social production of news* and its concepts of *primary* and *secondary definers*. From there, we switch gears and observe the changes in the media landscape since the publication of *Policing the Crisis*. In doing so, we narrow our focus to: (i) the personalization of media outlets; (ii) the concentration of media ownership; (iii) the rising importance of headlines; and lastly, (iv) the blurring of fact and opinion. Taken together, we then *operationalize* these developments in such a way that allows us to approach the unfolding of social developments at the level of *news headlines* as they appear across the media spectrum.

In the second part of our analysis, throughout chapters 5-11, we explore a sequence of three *distinct* events in the United States starting in mid-2015 and their *mediated convergence* by the year's end: (i) the entrance of then candidate Trump into the Republican Party primaries and the rise of his campaign in the polls; (ii) an op-ed appearing in *The New York Times* outlining the rising threat of right-wing extremism; and lastly, (iii) a mass shooting by a self-identifying white supremacist at a historic African American church in Charleston, South Carolina. After distinguishing the important difference between *politics* and *the politician*, the foremost of these events is analyzed through the identification of *public images*, what Hall et al. describe as »a cluster of impressions, themes and quasi-explanations, gathered or fused together« (118), that *implicitly* portrayed candidate Trump and his supporters in a negative light. Turning to the second event, based on Hall et al.'s *the 'rising crime rate' equation* (13), we examine the core arguments presented in *The New York Times* article using what we forward as *the 'growing right-wing terror threat' equation*. There, we systematically disassemble and

interrogate the *chain of argument* forwarded in the op-ed and reveal it to be highly misleading and riddled with definitional problems. The last event, the shooting in Charleston, is approached by tracing the media's response to the tragedy in two interrelated instances: (i) a *debate* orchestrated *by* and *for* the media concerning the definition of 'terrorism' as it relates to the domestic population; and (ii) the debut of a *news cycle* that warned of an imminent 'race war' which introduced the term 'white supremacy' into the American newsreader's lexicon. Only after the emergence of these media events, do we observe how the chain of argument, originally concerned with 'antigovernment extremism,' was retrofitted to accommodate the evolving news cycles surrounding the racially motivated church shooting. A point from which it was subsequently propagated across *all* major news outlets in the days and weeks following the tragedy. In chapter 11, returning to the media's reporting on the Trump campaign, which by the end of 2015 was now *explicitly* portrayed as 'demagogic,' 'racist' and 'fascist,' it is at this particular historical conjuncture that we conceptualize the convergence of these three disparate events as establishing the public face of the *rise of the far right phenomenon*. By phenomenon, following Hall et al., we wish to evoke the complex of both *actions* and *reactions* (21) that together, comprised 'the rise of the far right.' It is from this perspective—in the wake of the very *real* violence and emotions conjured up in the Charleston shooting where this dubious chain of argument was adapted, propagated, and eventually projected onto the rise of the Trump campaign, that we reassess the rise of the far right phenomenon as part and parcel of what the sociologist Stanley Cohen originally conceptualized as a *moral panic* (20) of which Hall et al. refined. In this framing, chapters 12-15 direct our attention to what we call *the 'right-wing' label*, the terminology that acted as a common denominator binding the disparate events in to a full-fledge moral panic. Put into historical context, after revealed to have progressively lost its coherence over time, we show how by mid-2010 this terminology, in part through its anachronistic usage, underwent a redefinition by primary and secondary definers with a political purpose: to demarcate dissenting voices, regardless of their location on the left-right political spectrum.

Part three moves away from the public face of the rise of the far right phenomenon and towards that which is hidden from view—its prehistory. This is done by returning to the 'hard evidence' underpinning the dubious chain of argument which critically served to galvanize and validate public concern regarding the supposed 'rise of the far right.' In chapters 15 and 16, turning *away* from the secondary definers in the media and *towards* the primary definers, we direct our attention to those responsible for logging and reporting the numbers: those law enforcement officials out on the beat. After conducting what we forward as *the social production of law enforcement*, we examine the state of policing in the United States in the decade leading up to the publication of the hard evidence in question. There, we observe how the confluence of: (i) declining in budgets; (ii) the introduction of so-called force multipliers; (iii) changes and increases to their workload; (iv) changes in the socioeconomic landscape; (v) concentrations of impact across of

specific geographies and demographics; and (vi) the relationship between the police and those being policed; had intimately shaped policing, and thus the *quality* and the *quantity* of the crimes recorded. Underfunded, undertrained, and overworked, among other factors, in this context, we observe how the work of state and local law enforcement agencies in this period became increasingly dependent on federal funding and training programs, and so, increasingly reliant on federal definitions and directives. Cognizant of this particular subordination to federal *lawmakers* which greatly structured the work of *law enforcement*, we are pressed to examine the role of the *law* itself. In chapter 17, we do so beginning with a review of a 2009 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) threat assessment that was ‘coordinated’ with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) under the title: ‘Rightwing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment.’ Appearing a full six years prior to *The New York Times* op-ed and its dubious chain of argument and admitting to having ‘no specific information’ (DHS 2009a: 2), the report nevertheless went on to warn how »lone wolves and small terrorist cells embracing violent rightwing extremist ideology are the most dangerous domestic terrorism threat in the United States« (7) and that »rightwing extremists [...] continue to be a primary concern to law enforcement« (3). Shortly after its classified release to select lawmakers and law enforcement agencies, most likely due to its portrayal of military veterans and American citizens as potential terrorists, the assessment was leaked to the public where it was met by sharp disapproval from veteran groups, the Republican Party, and the public more broadly. After releasing a public apology and ending official attention on the matter, we argue that attention to the threat of right-wing extremism was in fact not terminated, but instead, was effectively channeled into two preexisting strains of the law: (i) *hate crime* law; and (ii) *countering violent extremism* legislation. From this vantage point, over the course of the 2000s and into the 2010s, we identify a growing contradiction between on one hand, the profiling of Muslim Americans in the name of counterterrorism, and on the other, the protection of Muslim Americans in the name of antidiscrimination. By the mid-2010s, as this contradiction reached its apex, we observe how government agencies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), representatives from academia, and the political left-wing all found a *common cause* in antagonizing the scourge of ‘right-wing extremism’ as a means of reconciling the former—a development, which by 2014, would materialize in the reestablishment of the Domestic Terrorism Executive Committee. In chapter 18, we observe what had ostensibly been an attempt to counter the Islamophobia and the Islamic extremist Folk Devil, which were portrayed as the result of right-wing *partisan* politics, helped construct what we term *the right-wing extremist Folk Devil*, and in so doing, diverted responsibility away from the bourgeois state and its global War on Terror and onto right-wing individuals and ideology. In the following chapter, we turn to the natural architect and benefactor of this particular Folk Devil: the political left-wing. Turning our attention to the petty bourgeois elements inside the political left-wing, that intermediary grouping positioned between the working class and the ruling class, we

examine their particular role in *mediating* between the divergent class interests and *organizing* them into a hegemonic alliance ostensibly intent on realizing ‘social justice’ and protecting ‘democracy.’

Finally, in chapter 20, we attempt to take the crisis of democracy expounded by President Biden at the outset of this paper seriously. By ‘zooming out,’ drawing on the work of Marx and Engels, we place our previous analysis into the context of the ongoing *class struggle*, beginning where Hall et al. left off (with the rise of Thatcherism in the United Kingdom). There, in a period that led up to what we refer to as the *Washington Consensus*—one which marked the demolition of labor movements in the West and Soviet communism in the East—we briefly review how one particular bourgeois commentator interpreted the event as the ‘triumph of the West, of the Western idea’ (Fukuyama 1989: 3) that was said to have ushered in ‘the end of history.’ Emphasizing the concerted *repression* of the class struggle in that period, in what follows, we attempt to advance our own competing interpretation of this very period. Where at the beginning of the century, amid the class struggle, the working class had won itself political *suffrage*, and thus a degree of democratic representation *within* the bourgeois state, we posit the Washington Consensus as a political formation set out to undo this hard fought achievement. Through its implementation of a vast network of unelected and unaccountable regulatory and governing bodies (i.e., trade organizations, central banks, NGOs, etc.), drawing on the work of David Harvey, we observe how in western democracies, these institutions progressively subordinated the democratic will of their citizens, to that of the market. A development through the prism of the class struggle, reveals itself as the will of the ruling class and its particular interests (i.e., capital accumulation, the subjugation of labor) increasingly dictated over the will over the interests of those it rules (i.e., freedom, democracy). It is from here, that we go on to argue it was not *history* that had ‘ended’ in the 1990s, but *bourgeois politics* and the democratic basis that underpinned it. Only decades later and emerging from the political fringes, are we able to see how the contradictory tendencies of *freedom* and *repression* inherent in the class struggle eventually found their form in ‘the populist moment’ (branded as ‘the rise of the far right’) on the one hand, and the domestication of the War on Terror (branded as ‘social justice’) on the other.

To be clear, as covered in the initial chapters, the line of argument in this publication makes no illusions of the media’s social function and structural relation to power, nor the role which simple headlines play in narrating our social reality. It is from this premise that we approach the rise of the far right phenomenon and attempt to situate its ideological role in relation to the ongoing class struggle. What this investigation is *not* about, is the ideology, individuals, organizations, and actions that represent what we refer to as the *actually existing* ‘far right’ (e.g., white supremacist ideology, self-identifying white supremacists, white supremacist organizations, white supremacist violence, etc.). Rather, it is about the *reaction* to the rise of the far right *phenomenon* that guides

our focus, and specifically, the moral panic which aroused it and its significance. It is from there, that we attempt to analyze the impoverishment, broadening and weaponization of the right-wing label as a label-cum-ideology deployed in such a manner that not only inhibits the formation of working-class political consciousness and action, but moreover, seeks to legitimize the use of state force against those *it* deems to be the enemies of free society.

2 Revisiting *Policing the Crisis*

» *The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance.*

— Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels in *The Germany Ideology* (1846: 21)



Never has the propagation of news played a more widespread and influential role in how we make sense of global events than in our current age. The interdisciplinary author collective consisting of Stuart Hall, Charles Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke and Brian Roberts were well aware of the importance of its role in structuring how newspaper readers in the 1970's saw the world.

Based out of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, it wasn't until the appearance of 'mugging,' a term within which the imagery of *race*, *crime* and *youth* had been condensed, hit British newsstands (e.g., 'As Crimes of Violence Escalate, a Word Common In The United States Enters the British Headlines: Mugging. To our Police, it's a frightening new strain of crime,' *The Daily Mirror*, 17 August 1972), when the author collective first became vigilant of this supposedly 'frightening new strain of crime.' Only after observing the panic which ensued, were they compelled to investigate what they would go on to term the *mugging phenomenon*, a mode of analysis that attempted to approach 'mugging' in terms of both *action* and *reaction* and through a variety of social contexts. From there, their initial curiosity regarding the role of the media unfurled into what became a six-year endeavor that would go on to result in their now seminal work, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (Hall et al. 1978). As the bulkiness of the title suggests, the authors far exceeded their original scope expressed in their study of 'muggings' as they began to line British papers. What began with the investigation of the media's presentation of this supposedly novel crime, naturally segued into exploring the 'chain of argument' (13) constituted by the 'hard facts' that underpinned the series of news stories on this crime *du jour*. In short, this led the authors to the conclusion:

»the crimes which both police and the media were describing as 'novel' were not new; what was new was the way the label helped to break up and recategorise the

general field of crime – the ideological frame which it laid across the field of social vision.« (32)

If the only new thing about mugging was its label, and since it had already existed in the British news readers vocabulary by way of reports sketching the breakdown of urban metropolises in the US, then as the authors suggested, the ‘mugging’ label indeed had a ‘career,’ which brought together a whole ‘complex of social themes’ among which stood-in to signify:

»the involvement of blacks and drug addicts in crime; the expansion of the black ghettos, coupled with the growth of black social and political militancy; the threatened crisis and collapse of the cities; the crime panic and the appeal to ‘law and order’; the sharpening political tensions and protest movements of the 1960s leading into and out from the Nixon–Agnew mobilisation of ‘the silent majority’ and their presidential victory in 1968.« (23)

These revelations, the misinterpretation of statistics and the career of the mugging label, marked a turning point in their investigation, shifting their emphasis away from the original *act* of ‘mugging’ as reported on by the media, to the *reaction* that was carried out by a number of key institutions that greatly contributed to the shaping and orchestration of a ‘moral panic,’ a moment that the authors described:

»When the official reaction to a person, groups of persons or series of events is *out of all proportion* to the actual threat offered, when ‘experts’, in the form of police chiefs, the judiciary, politicians and editors *perceive* the threat in all but identical terms, and appear to talk ‘with one voice’ of rates, diagnoses, prognoses and solutions, when the media representations universally stress ‘sudden and dramatic’ increases (in numbers involved or events) and ‘novelty’, above and beyond that which a sober, realistic appraisal could sustain, then we believe it is appropriate to speak of the beginnings of a *moral panic*.« (20)

This turn in their analysis required yet a deeper inquiry into the roles and relations between the supposedly ‘disinterested’ experts and the ‘moral entrepreneurs’ who helped stoke and structure the course on which this specific moral panic unfolded. This too, required further excavation to understand what lay behind this complex of relations that might explain why such a moral panic appeared *when* and *where* it did. This required the authors to illuminate the historical character of these various institutions and their relations to the development of the law and the state which the authors went to great lengths to elucidate how they themselves were ultimately the result of contradictions found at the heart of the economic organization of British society. From this towering perspective then, the author collective could finally expose how the underlying crisis of the postwar capitalist order in Britain, on the one hand resulted in the reinvigorated

working-class militancy and on the other hand facilitated the dawn of what they called the 'law-and-order society' characterized by its 'authoritarian tilt.'

Only by moving *in* and *through* this web of contradictory relations and their scales of abstraction, were Hall et al. able to situate the mugging panic as part and parcel of a wider mugging phenomenon which itself had functioned to *displace* the underlying economic crisis which British capital had found itself in. By orchestrating a moral panic and conjuring the racialized image of the urban, black, youth 'Folk Devil,' the British state secured the necessary consent to enforce draconian legal measures and enhance its repressive apparatuses. With the adoption of this increasingly authoritarian posture, the British state not only reoriented its domestic economy towards a new era marked by finance capital and global trade but managed to contain the class struggle in light of these drastic changes. The securing of this authoritarian consensus was paramount and served as a necessary prerequisite to accommodate the deindustrialization and increased competition that directly correlated with the deterioration of living standards for large segments of the working class.

It wasn't until years later that this process outlined in *Policing the Crisis* would be fully recognized by scholars and the politically minded, first as 'Thatcherism' and later as 'neoliberalism.' It was through this multifaceted approach that sought to investigate the day's events within their *social totality* that provided the authors with this critical foresight. This wide perspective allowed them to locate the otherwise imperceptible shifts underway in Britain throughout the 1970s. By peering behind the 'mugging' label they were able to expose the nature of the avowedly 'neutral' agencies of public significations and social control. But to have ever arrived at such findings, they first needed to establish and interrogate the social production of news as we will summarize in the following sections.

2.1 Revisiting the Social Production of News

Rather than 'naturally' occurring, what we understand as *news* is, as Hall et al. remind us, »the end-product of a complex process which begins with a systematic sorting and selecting of events and topics according to a socially constructed set of categories« (56). Because this 'process' is undertaken on a regular and continuous basis, a number of 'organizational factors' (e.g., budget, format, geography, audience) inevitably begin to determine this selection process. In light of the practical limitations these factors pose, unavoidably the question arises: *what* news is to be covered?

It is at this point where, as the authors note, 'the professional ideology' (Ibid.) begins to guide the 'sense' of journalists as they consider what constitutes a 'good' news item. This becomes most relevant in their active 'selection' and 'presentation' of those *most valuable* of 'news values' (Ibid.). In essence, news values can be understood as the *raw materials*, the various aspects which make any given news item, simply put, 'newsworthy'

(e.g., dramatic events, celebrity encounters, an assassination of a foreign leader). The attainment of these most sought after of news values, thus greatly shapes what is considered 'newsworthy.' This *ideological* factor produces two important effects. Firstly, it encourages journalists and media outlets to sensationalize particular aspects of a story so as to augment its inherent 'newsworthiness.' And secondly, it helps determine which stories get reported on, or as the authors put it, »events which score high on a number of these news values will have greater news potential than ones that do not« (57).

Equally important to these organizational and ideological factors, is the moment in which news stories are constructed. Again, this is not some naturally occurring process, but a highly structured one. Here, the media is tasked with the identification and contextualization of events, which according to Hall et al.:

»involves the presentation of the item to its assumed audience, in terms which, as far as the presenters of the item can judge, will make it comprehensible to that audience. If the world is not to be represented as a jumble of random and chaotic events, then they must be identified (i.e., named, defined, related to other events known to the audience), and assigned to a social context (i.e., placed within a frame of meanings familiar to the audience).« (Ibid.)

In other words, the construction of the news story represents the moment in which particular events become *imbued* with 'meaning.' To gain meaning, events must be situated alongside other already known 'social' and 'cultural' facts. Without these preexisting 'maps of meaning,' it would be impossible for journalists to lucidly identify and contextualize those most *newsworthy* facets of social experience—those which the authors encapsulate as 'changefulness,' 'unpredictability,' and the 'conflictual nature' of things. The authors refer to this critical process as one of 'signification.' Critical, because besides the interplay of *professional* assumptions as described above, for news to be made comprehensible, it relies on an even more generalized assumption by its audience, specifically and importantly, the notion of 'the *consensual* nature of society.' This basic assumption is both necessitated and reinforced by the signification process. The latter, as the authors explain:

»*both assumes and helps to construct society as a 'consensus'*. We exist as members of one society *because* – it is assumed – we share a common stock of cultural knowledge with our fellow men: we have access to the same 'maps of meanings'. Not only are we all able to manipulate these 'maps of meaning' to understand events, but we have fundamental interests, values and concerns in common, which these maps embody or reflect.« (58)

Simply put, therein lies the generalized assumption of 'fundamental interests' found across those societies in which these social and cultural maps find rooting. In unpacking this 'consensual viewpoint,' extracting its intrinsic political content, Hall et al. state:

»It carries the assumption that we also all have roughly the same *interests* in the society, and that we all roughly have an equal share of power in the society. This is the essence of the idea of the political consensus. 'Consensual' views of society represent society as if there are no major cultural or economic breaks, no major conflicts of interests between classes and groups. Whatever disagreements exist, it is said, there are legitimate and institutionalised means for expressing and reconciling them.« (Ibid.)

Because society is *social*, and therefore *political*, knowledge is continually contested and greatly inflected by its most dominant voices. Further extrapolating on the matter, Hall et al. go on to argue that in 'modern', 'democratic,' and 'organized capitalist societies,' such consensual outlooks most commonly find their form in the notion of the 'national consensus.' Returning then to the media, when events are situated into these maps of meaning, they are done so with an underlying assumption that there is a fundamental *national body* with fundamentally *national interests*.

However, by no means is this monolithic impression of society meant to suggest homogeneity across the media and public opinion. Rather, in returning to the notion of the consensual society, Hall et al. note:

»there will be differences of outlook, disagreement, argument and opposition; but these are understood as taking place within a broader basic framework of agreement – 'the consensus' – to which everyone subscribes, and within which every dispute, disagreement or conflict of interest can be reconciled by discussion, without recourse to confrontation or violence.« (59)

In other words, such a consensus delineates the *spectrum* and *degrees* in which divergent ideas can coexist. So, it is within the framework of the national consensus that the media not only discerns otherwise 'random' events but attempts to explain them through this viewpoint with all of its implicit political contentions brushed aside.

It is this combination of factors and assumptions, be they organizational or ideological, professional or societal, that form the basis on which the media situates all events. Such aspects become all the more important given the nature within which such events unfold. Because the majority of reported events take place outside of firsthand experience, the media, as Hall et al. importantly attest, »represent the primary, and often the only, source of information about many important events and topics« (Ibid.). Moreover, because of the nature of those most newsworthy of events—that which is 'new' and outside the ordinary—the media is given the responsibility to 'make sense' of otherwise random and chaotic instances. This *explicative* role of the media then becomes of utmost importance. Because such events escape 'our commonly held expectations,' they in turn, threaten the consensual basis on which contemporary society rests. As the authors note:

»the media’s mapping of problematic events within the conventional understandings of the society is crucial in two ways. The media define for the majority of the population what significant events are taking place, but, also, they offer powerful interpretations of how to understand these events. Implicit in those interpretations are orientations towards the events and the people or groups involved in them.« (60)

Thus, here we are confronted with the important role of the media to smooth over the ambiguities and contradictions that emerge in what presents itself as an otherwise consensual and frictionless society.

2.2 Primary Definers

As mentioned at the top of this chapter, the media does not simply make news, rather it *selects* and *presents* particular news items from a nearly infinite continuum of *potential* news stories. So far in our analysis of the social production of news, we have neglected the highly important role of what we might perceive as the bedrock of news—its source material.

With the pressures and constraints of minute-to-minute news production (i.e., resource allocation, staffing, scheduling), news organizations become structurally inclined towards *reliable* institutional sources. In part, due to their capacity to produce regular and reportable content (e.g., sports events, court cases, congressional hearings) and secondly, due to the ‘underwritten’ rules of ‘impartiality’, ‘balance’ and ‘objectivity’ implicit in what is generally understood as the *free* press, these factors, so Hall et al., »give rise to the practice of ensuring that media statements are, wherever possible, grounded in ‘objective’ and ‘authoritative’ statements from ‘accredited’ sources« (61). What all this translates to, is a particular dependence on accredited representatives and institutions—whether, symbolic of ‘the people’ (i.e., politicians, public officeholders) or ‘organized interest groups’ (i.e., corporations, trade unions, advocacy groups). Additionally, while not a representative or institution *per se*, ‘the expert’ (e.g., academics, individuals with *experience*) are also routinely invoked based on their ‘objectivity,’ ‘authority’ and their purportedly ‘disinterested’ pursuit of knowledge. In each of these cases, one of the primary reasons why these ‘institutional spokesmen’ are sought out assumes they hold ‘more accurate’ or more ‘specialized knowledge’ due to their proximity and access to ‘high-quality’ information or ‘high-status’ positions.

Thus, combined with the pressures of new production, this results in what Hall et al. call »a systematically structured over-accessing to the media of those in powerful and privileged institutional positions« (Ibid.). It is exactly this exclusive status of these contributors that the authors designate as *primary definers*. From this position, these institutional spokesmen establish the ‘initial definition’ or ‘primary interpretation’ of a given news item. The role of the primary definer then, according to the authors:

»‘commands the field’ in all subsequent treatment and sets the terms of reference within which all further coverage or debate takes place. Arguments *against* a primary interpretation are forced to insert themselves into *its* definition of ‘what is at issue’ – they must begin from this framework of interpretation as their starting-point.« (Ibid.)

The primary definer, in short, defines and frames the problem from which all further disputation on the matter at hand is based, and consequently, defines who or what is relevant or irrelevant, on or off topic given the terms of ‘debate.’

As suggested, the appearance of the primary definer, unproblematically, allows the *free* press to routinely and impartially reproduce the definitions forwarded by those most powerful voices in society. Thus, the concept of primary definers provides us with a necessary, moreover non-conspiratorial explanation for understanding the media’s intimate relationship to the ‘ruling ideas’ of the ‘ruling class.’ It is here, where we can begin to connect how the owners and controllers of ‘mental production’ vis-à-vis their armies of think tanks, policy institutes, lobbyists, NGOs, academics, *astroturfed* social movements, consequently ensure, according to Hall et al., »that theirs are the most powerful and ‘universal’ of the available *definitions* of the social world« (Ibid.).

2.3 Secondary Definers

So far, while we have focused on the determinative aspects that structure the social production of news, the media does not simply *forward* the ideas of the ruling class, but also actively shapes and reconstitutes them in their own image. In this ‘creative’ role, in the words of Hall et al., »the media themselves must perform on the ‘raw materials’ (facts and interpretations) which the powerful provide, in order to process these ‘potential’ stories into their finished commodity news form« (63). In this more active capacity, the media takes on the role of what Hall et al. term as ‘secondary definer,’ that gives expression of its relatively *independent* and *free* character. Part of this *freedom* is its ability to oversee the selection and presentation process. Of course, while primary definers provide them with the bulk of their *raw material*, not every news item or aspect is taken up in the final instance of production. Rather, *particular* organizations exercise a *particular* ‘selectivity’ conducive to their *particular* capacities and audience. It is these facets, which provide news organizations with their ‘social personality’ or what the authors also refer to as their ‘public idiom.’ With this *personalized* idiom, news organizations take these ‘definitions of the powerful’ and ‘code’ them into a *particular* ‘language’ or ‘modes of address.’ This personalization not only results in the definitions of the ruling class finding diverse expressions across the media, but using this particular imagery and rhetoric, *news more effectively resonates with its particular audiences*. In this instance, media outlets effectively manage to ‘translate’ and ‘naturalize’ dominant ideas into a more universal and intimate language. This is also the process which situates those

otherwise chaotic events into those maps of pre-established social knowledge. Moreover, it is this same process which allows the media to 'objectify' certain events or issues into ones of public importance. This 'agenda-setting function,' and its 'concentration of media attention,' Hall et al. clarify, »confers the status of high public concern on issues which are highlighted; these generally become understood by everyone as the 'pressing issues of the day'« (64). Relatedly, another 'autonomous' role of the media can be found in its editorializing. In such moments, a news organization is free to 'speak its own mind' and opine either through its public idiom (expressed as 'we'), or alternatively through taking, what Hall et al. refer to as 'the public voice,' moments in which the media speaks out on behalf of 'the public.' In such instances, through the editorializing process, these mediators of the powerful can leverage support for preexisting or new *calls for action* by invoking the public voice and the 'demand' of 'the majority,' a process the authors helpfully unpack:

»In either form of editorialising, the media provide a crucial mediating link between the apparatus of social control and the public. The press can legitimate and reinforce the actions of the controllers by bringing their own independent arguments to bear on the public in support of the actions proposed ('using a public idiom'); or it can bring pressure to bear on the controllers by summoning up 'public opinion' in support of its own views that 'stronger measures are needed' ('taking the public voice'). But, in either case, the editorial seems to provide an objective and external point of reference which can be used either to justify official action or to mobilise public opinion.« (66)

In the same moment in which media outlets leverage the public voice, they effectively bypass those very same constituencies for which they claim to speak. This of course marks the important and active role of the media in influencing public opinion. As mentioned earlier, by establishing the primary definitions, primary definers hold considerable sway in determining which issues are regarded as relevant and irrelevant. However, the media also plays a crucial role in reinforcing such cues as the authors importantly elucidate:

»In societies where the bulk of the population has neither direct access to nor power over the central decisions which affect their lives, where official policy and opinion is concentrated and popular opinion is dispersed, the media play a critical mediating and connecting role in the formation of public opinion, and in orchestrating that opinion together with the actions and views of the powerful. The media do not only possess a near-monopoly over 'social knowledge', as the primary source of information about what is happening; they also command the passage between those who are 'in the know' and the structured ignorance of the general public. In performing this connective and mediating role, the media are enhanced, not weakened, by the very fact that they are, formally and structurally,

independent both of the sources to which they refer and of the ‘public’ on whose behalf they speak.« (Ibid.)

It is from this position of purported independence, that the media can, albeit impartially, manage the flow of ‘*counter-tendencies*’ and ‘*counter-definitions*’ as they force their way into public debates. However, for representatives of such ‘countervailing forces’ to be even formally included in such affairs, they generally require the backing of an ‘organized majority’ or ‘substantial minority’ to *certify* their relevance. However, even if these certified spokespeople exist, they can still be ‘defined out of the debate’ by the terms first set by the primary definers. Alternatively, these voices, what could be understood as dissident, can be systematically stigmatized and condemned as ‘extremist’, ‘irrational,’ ‘illegal’ or ‘unconstitutional,’ and thus expelled from public debate entirely. This is most likely the case when antagonistic groups are ‘fragmented,’ ‘relatively inarticulate’ or simply reject the predefined terms upon which the debate rests. As the authors make clear: »Any of these characteristics make it easier for the privileged definers to label them freely, and to refuse to take their counter-definitions into account« (67).

In this analysis, Hall et al. clearly elucidate the structural conditions which predispose the media to consistently reproduce the definitions of the powerful along with its chilling effects on whatever might be understood as *public* debate to begin with. While we will be returning to these themes and concepts in our later analysis, for now let us turn to some of the more recent changes in society as they relate to the social production of news since *Policing the Crisis* was first published.

3 The New Media Landscape

Of course, since the release of *Policing the Crisis*, societies around the world have undergone unprecedented changes whether economic, technological or cultural in nature—changes which in turn have greatly impacted the social production of news as well as *the social consumption of news*. In so far that our present undertaking is primarily concerned with the media landscape as it existed in 2015 and the years prior, we will attempt to work within this timeframe as we explore these developments. Some of the most pronounced of these changes include the introduction of the 24/7 news cycle, the shift away from print and television towards computers and smartphones, and the emergence of social media (along with its *democratization* and *globalization* of media discourses). Rather paradoxically, we would argue that the combined effect of these changes, by 2015, resulted in a global media landscape that became as fragmented as it did homogenous, moreover, one which only heightened the role of headlines and degraded the distinctions between fact and opinion, as we shall layout in the following sections.

3.1 The Personalization of the Media

In part due to the lower overhead for online and social media news production, the social production of news has increasingly adapted to the internet and in doing so has greatly facilitated the proliferation of more agile and personalized news organizations. The *Pew Research Journalism Project* has drawn attention to this fact in its extensive report on ‘The Growth in Digital Reporting’ (2014), summarizing for us how:

»At a time when print newsrooms continue to shed jobs, thousands of journalists are now working in the growing world of native digital news—at small non-profits like Charlottesville Tomorrow, big commercial sites like The Huffington Post and other content outlets, like BuzzFeed, that have moved into original news reporting. In a significant shift in the editorial ecosystem, most of these jobs have been created in the past half dozen years, and many have materialized within the last year alone, according to this new report on shifts in reporting power.« (2)

The report went on to explain how these developments not only resulted in »dozens of highly publicized national and international organizations, but also hundreds of smaller digital news entities, mainly filling targeted news niches« (Ibid.). It is out of this ferment that a young crop of outlets like *Politico*, *Business Insider*, *BuzzFeed News* and many others (that we will later be continually drawing from) first came into being backed by a steady flow of venture capital.

At the same time legacy news outlets began to diversify and diffuse across an endless stream of platforms. These brought about new ways in which content was presented and interacted with by readers. Already by 2012, Neil Thurman and Steve Schifferes outlined this trend towards personalization in their publication ‘The Future of Personalization at News Websites,’ which described the phenomenon as emerging:

»as an increasingly popular strategy for news publishers, who hope that it can increase their sites’ “stickiness”, and allow them to capture data about users, thus reducing their dependence on the external suppliers of such information. Recent examples include The Washington Post’s Trove, a site that “aggregates news and enables users to personalize their news stream based on their interests” and The New York Times-backed News.me, which “uses artificial intelligence to . . . learn what [people] like to read . . . [and] provides articles and links . . . of interest.”«

What these examples suggest is that by 2015, it is reasonable to assume a considerable shift to the increasing diffusion and personalization of news as it pertains to the social production of news. This not only resulted in the widespread proliferation of news, but the intimacy with which end-users interacted with their news sources. In all, and rather oxymoronically in light of the following chapter on the concentration of the news media, these changes resulted in an increasingly fragmented news landscape.

3.2 The Concentration of Media Ownership

Another major development and global trend that has transpired in the sphere of media production had been the rising concentration of its ownership. Nowhere was this trend more apparent than in the 2015 report by *Reporters Without Borders*, ‘Media Oligarchs Go Shopping,’ which illustrated how already by that year only six companies had controlled ninety per cent of the media outlets based in the United States (5). A later article in the business magazine, *Forbes*, even identified this trend bypassing the metric of *companies* for that of *individuals* in its article ‘These 15 Billionaires Own America’s News Media Companies’ (1 June 2016). There, it revealed how in the preceding years, a string of celebrated and influential newspapers, magazines and websites, of both local, national and international stature, had undergone massive shifts in their ownership models. Among some of the more notable examples, the article showcased the 2013 purchase of *The Washington Post* by Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, the 2008 purchase of the largest share of *The New York Times* by the business magnate Carlos Slim, and the 2014 return of Michael Bloomberg to his media empire, Bloomberg LP, following his time in office as the mayor of New York City. As *Reporters Without Borders* forcefully argued, such developments, whether explicitly or implicitly, unmistakably leave their mark on the culture of their respective newsrooms, often bending news output to correspond with the views and political agendas of their particular owners and shareholders. Of these growing trends, they warned:

»When oligarchs go shopping for media outlets and use them for personal purposes or place them at the service of their business conglomerates, when governments use state media to wage information wars, or when the press departments of religious movements pretend to create media outlets that are in fact just vehicles for proselytizing, then the public debate as we have conceived it since the Enlightenment is in danger.« (56)

3.3 The Rise of Headlines

Another significant trend in the new media landscape is the importance which headlines have assumed. To be sure, like news, headlines are exposed to the same organizational and ideological constraints as in the social production of news more generally. This process already begins with their formal function which greatly determine their composition. Simply put, their primary function is to capture the attention of potential readers (a phenomenon which online is popularly referred to as ‘clickbait’). Thus, all while indicating, so Hall et al., »why [an] item is important and problematic« (86), to effectively draw in potential readers, headlines routinely go about dramatizing these very *indications* so as to enhance the apparent newsworthiness of a given article, and in so doing, draw in a larger pool of readers. As such, headlines become the very sites where new stories, moreover controversial issues, often appear in their most exaggerated, stark and extreme forms. This, most immediate and visible effect, only reinforces the media’s agenda-setting-effect, where headlines provide a crucial buoy in the objectification of those issues which manage to stay afloat on the surface of newspapers and webpages for a given amount of time. Moreover, the headline sets the tone and language through which such subject matters become addressed in the future.

Especially since the release of *Policing the Crisis*, by 2015 headlines increasingly had come to play an outsized role in the way news was being consumed in the United States. Like news organizations, news consumers also possess finite capacities (i.e., time, interest, language, comprehension, familiarity with issues) which go on to structure any given reader’s particular intake of news. Faced by the sheer quantity of potential news as it exists in the world of the 24/7 news cycle, and the vast expanse of the internet and social media, these consumers face their own ‘selection’ process. As such, it is reasonable to assume that in the contemporary media landscape, headlines, whether consumed throughout the course of such a filtering process or as a primary mode of news consumption, by 2015, *came to serve as a crucial source of news independent of their corresponding contents*. Already by 2014, this trend was observed by the *American Press Institute*, who in their study ‘The Personal News Cycle: How Americans choose to get their news’ (2014), revealed how »4 in 10 Americans report that they delved deeper into a particular news subject beyond the headlines in the last week.« Put differently, the institute reported that a total of *sixty per cent of news was consumed exclusively via headlines*. This is by no means an arbitrary metric, as a representative of the Association for

Psychological Science explained in *The New Yorker's* 'How Headlines Change the Way We Think' (17 Dec) later that year:

»a headline changes the *way* people read an article and the way they remember it. The headline frames the rest of the experience. A headline can tell you what kind of article you're about to read—news, opinion, research, LOLcats—and it sets the tone for what follows.«

This insight, »what we see, hear, feel, or experience in our first encounter with something colors how we process the rest of it,« the article went on to note, is by no means new, but has been a longstanding psychological certainty. But because of the increasing importance of the headline, this commonplace fact is even more resonant. Not only does it frame the 'first encounter' of the news that is read, but as the article went on to write:

»By drawing attention to certain details or facts, a headline can affect what existing knowledge is activated in your head. By its choice of phrasing, a headline can influence your mindset as you read so that you later recall details that coincide with what you were expecting.«

As we will later see, such subtle repercussions of headlines played a critical role in nourishing the news discourse as it relates to the rise of the far right phenomenon.

3.4 The Blurring of Fact and Opinion

Once again, occurring on the consumer front, the last of these changes we wish to address entailed the erosion between *fact* and *opinion*, which by 2015, while yet officially researched, is fair to assume had already been underway. As the *Reporters Without Borders* report stated in its 2015 release: »It is getting harder and harder for the public to distinguish content that is sponsored or dictated by interests from real reporting produced in an independent and honest manner that is as close as possible to the journalistic ideal« (56). Access to independent journalism, the report went on to argue, »should not become a choice between different sources of propaganda or PR content« (56).

Although first released in 2018, the study 'Americans and the News Media: What they do—and don't—understand about each other' by the *Media Insight Project* also gave plausibility to the notion that such a tendency was likely already heightening by 2015. Expressing a growing 'confusion' among the general public regarding the 'basic concepts of news' (2018), the study went on to report that a staggering fifty per cent of the reading public:

»say they are only a little familiar with the term "op-ed," or don't know what it is. Just 28 percent of people say they are highly familiar with the term — which refers

to content on the opinion pages of newspapers written by columnists and guest writers.« (9)

Moreover, it went on to report that 3 in 10 readers did not know the difference between an 'editorial' and a 'news story' and that fifty-seven per cent of those surveyed had:

»little or no idea what the term "native advertising," means, which is also known as "sponsored content" and refer to paid marketing content that resembles other editorial content in the publication. Just 18 percent say they are very or completely familiar with the term.« (9)

Thus, where the weight of headlines had already detached news from its actual content, this blurring of fact and opinion only encouraged the subjectivistic tendencies replete in this most recent iteration of the social production of news.

4 Operationalizing the New Media Landscape

Because of the combined changes in technology, economy, and culture have not only affected the personalization and homogenization of the media but the importance of headlines and the erosion between fact and opinion since the original publication of *Policing the Crisis* in the years leading up to the rise of the far right phenomenon; and because these combined changes have resulted in an ever more diffuse and ephemeral propagation of media discourses elaborated and refined as they ricocheted across an increasingly *interconnected* and *self-referential* 24/7 media landscape; and lastly, because of *our own* limited capacities to realize this present undertaking; in what follows we will unproblematically draw from a vast array of headlines from across the media as an empirical *shorthand* for analyzing their part in the initial propagation of the rise of the far right phenomenon. Following Hall et al., this broad selection of headlines, excluding those which we will quote or refer to independently, will be exclusively cited through in-text citations consisting of the headline, its publisher and publication date as last accessed on the 1st of October 2021. This approach is not entirely without warrant, as Hall et al. had already forwarded: »Headlines are frequently an accurate, if simple, guide to themes implicit in a story« (1978: 86). Additionally, it is important to note, because of the nature of headlines and the erosion of fact and opinion we will be working indiscriminately with both modes of journalism. It should also be noted that in what follows, we will overwhelmingly be drawing from a broad array of online resources whose online presence has become co-constitutive in shaping anglophone media discourse as it relates to domestic affairs in the US. Thus, besides simply sampling US-based news outlets, we will also draw from international outlets including the *BBC News*, *The Guardian*, *Al Jazeera*, among others. While the samples of written media we will use are not representative of the entire media landscape which also consists of countless blog posts, social media accounts, talk radio, television, podcasts and pop culture more generally, they do however crucially *interplay* with these other media sources and provide a concise and useful *snapshot* into the discourses as they permeate throughout the media ecosystem and society at large.

With this newfound sensitivity towards the social production of news and social consumption of news as it had come to exist by 2015, let us now turn to the sequence of *mediated* events that coalesced into the *public* face of the rise of the far right phenomenon that same year. Where *Policing the Crisis* began with ‘a mugging gone wrong’ on the 15th of August 1972, outside of Waterloo Station in London, we begin our investigation with three distinct events that originated within 24 hours of one another in June of 2015, the first of which takes us to New York City.

5 Donald Trump's Announcement Speech

On June 16th 2015, entering a makeshift stage in the atrium of his Trump Tower in Manhattan, the real-estate mogul and reality TV star, Donald Trump, went about announcing his run for the 2016 United States presidential election on the Republican ticket. Rather than addressing his immediate competitors in the GOP or his rivals in the Democratic Party, without naming a single individual politician, the unconventional candidate directed the brunt of his attacks at the *entirety* of the political establishment. As transcribed by *Time Magazine*, the candidate was quoted in saying: »Politicians are all talk, no action. Nothing's gonna get done. They will not bring us—believe me—to the promised land. They will not« (16 June 2015). According to Trump, their breach of duty left ordinary people asking: »What's going on? I just want a job. Just get me a job. I don't need the rhetoric. I want a job.« Assuring the American public that politicians »will never make America great again,« and acknowledging the plight of their situation, he went on to explain:

»They don't even have a chance. They're controlled fully—they're controlled fully by the lobbyists, by the donors, and by the special interests, fully. Yes, they control them. Hey, I have lobbyists. I have to tell you. I have lobbyists that can produce anything for me. They're great. But you know what? It won't happen. It won't happen. Because we have to stop doing things for some people, but for this country, it's destroying our country. We have to stop, and it has to stop now.«

The statement was made even more poignant given the Supreme Court's recent 2010 Citizens United ruling which authorized corporations to contribute 'independent expenditures' and participate in 'electioneering communications' (*Federal Elections Commission* 2021). In such an electoral system dominated by corporate lobbying and 'dark money,' vowing to self-finance, Trump reassured the American public: »I'm using my own money. I'm not using the lobbyists. I'm not using donors. I don't care. I'm really rich« (*Time Magazine*, 16 June 2015).

Aside from addressing the failures of the entire United States political class, the remainder of his speech stressed issues ranging from unemployment to trade, debt, taxes, immigration, education, healthcare, foreign policy, social security, civil liberties and infrastructure. However, it was specifically the promise of jobs that became a centerpiece to his speech. Noting how »the greatest social program is a job,« and that if he were to be elected, he'd be »the greatest jobs president that God ever created« promising American workers: »I'll bring back our jobs from China, from Mexico, from Japan, from so many places. I'll bring back our jobs, and I'll bring back our money.« Again, stressing the

dysfunctional state of the United States economy towards its own citizens, and referencing the activity of the nation's economic competitors, he contended:

»They come in, they take our jobs, they take our money, and then they loan us back the money, and we pay them in interest, and then the dollar goes up so their deal's even better. How stupid are our leaders? How stupid are these politicians to allow this to happen? How stupid are they? [...] There is so much wealth out there that can make our country so rich again, and therefore make it great again. Because we need money. We're dying. We're dying. We need money. We have to do it. And we need the right people.«

Exclaiming how China, Japan and Mexico had been »laughing at us, at our stupidity. And now they are beating us economically [...] they're killing us economically,« he then explained how in the same moment money was leaving the country, he asserted: »The U.S. has become a dumping ground for everybody else's problems.« In a statement that would later spark widespread controversy across the media in the following hours, days, weeks and months, Trump shifted his attention to the southern border where he told his audience:

»When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.«

Later in his speech, anticipating the excessive attention that would be placed on his personality, paraphrasing an encounter with 'a very nice reporter,' who had asked: »But Mr. Trump you are not a nice person, how can you get people to vote for you?« To which he responded to saying:

»This is going to be an election that's based on competence, because people are tired of these nice people. And they're tired of being ripped off by everybody in the world. And they're tired of spending more money on education than any nation in the world per capita, than any nation in the world, and we are 26th in the world, 25 countries are better than us in education. And some of them are like third world countries. But we're becoming a third world country, because of our infrastructure, our airports, our roads, everything.«

Before ending his speech, the candidate put forward a number of pledges including the overhauling of the public healthcare system, immigration policy, education standards, and foreign trade deals, as well as reducing the nation's debt, saving 'Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security,' rebuilding the nation's infrastructure, strengthening the military and taking care of veterans. Lamenting the death of the 'American dream,' he concluded

his speech with the promise: »if I get elected president I will bring it back bigger and better and stronger than ever before, and we will make America great again.«

5.1 The Media's Reaction to Trump's Announcement Speech

Within the first hours following the announcement, news coverage of the day's event had reduced it to little more than a *political sideshow*. That same day, national headlines like *Politico's* 'Trump says he's running for president, really' expressed incredulity, while the popular 'data journalism' website, *FiveThirtyEight*, calculated for its audience 'Why Donald Trump Isn't A Real Candidate, In One Chart.' Other outlets, expressed contempt like the popular 'liberal' website *The Daily Beast's* 'Garish Tastes, Awful Hair: Donald Trump Is America,' the 'progressive' online news site *Salon's* 'The Puckered Sleazebag Takes The Plunge,' and the 'conservative' *National Review's* 'Witless Ape Rides Escalator.' Other 'center-left' outlets likened Trump's political bid to a comical performance, like *The New Republic's* 'Donald Trump Is America's Most Gifted Political Satirist,' and *The Atlantic's* 'Carnival Barker' Joins the 2016 Circus.' Some mainstream outlets published disparaging headlines like *Time Magazine's* 'Trump Launches Presidential Campaign With Empty Flair' or *The Economist's* biting satire, 'Wisdom from The Donald.' Meanwhile, *The New York Times's* headline, 'Choice Words From Donald Trump, Presidential Candidate,' was decidedly more ambiguous. Other national headlines mimicked Trump's language like *CNN's* 'Donald Trump Thinks Pretty Much Everyone Is A Loser.'

If the primary theme of reporting had portrayed the new candidate in the running as a joke, then the secondary theme narrowed in on one very specific portion of his speech. In its interpretation of the day's events, *NBC News* summarized them as 'Donald Trump Announces Presidential Bid By Trashing Mexico, Mexicans.' In a similar manner, the 'politically independent' polling aggregator, *RealClearPolitics*, penned 'Trump: Mexico Not Sending Us Their Best.' That same day, saw the 'liberal' outlet, *The Guardian* publish 'Donald Trump's tirade on Mexico's 'drugs and rapists' outrages US Latinos' only to be mirrored by the 'right-wing' broadcaster *Fox News's* 'Trump says Mexico sending 'rapists' across border.' The online 'women's magazine,' *Bustle*, captured the day in its moralizing and equally ominous headline 'Donald Trump's [sic.] Said Some Messed Up Stuff.'

Smaller newspaper outlets like the Palm Springs' *Desert Sun* and *The Atlanta Journal Constitution* captured the days event in their respective headlines 'Candidate Donald Trump, the man who hates our windmills' and 'How to style your hair like Donald Trump.' In its take, *The Hollywood Reporter* made it crystal clear to its audience that 'Hollywood Mocks Donald Trump's Announcement That He's Running for President.' To close off the day, out of all the headlines, the tech website *CNET* proved itself to be the most informative, foreseeing 'Donald Trump's Run For President Is The Meme To

End All Memes.’ By the following day, this had effectively become the case, as the media relished the spectacle that was ‘The Trump Show’ (e.g., ‘The Trump Show hits New Hampshire,’ *Politico*, 17 June 2015), with *Bustle*’s compilation of ‘16 Laughable Donald Trump Hair Memes,’ *The Huffington Post* continuing with theme ‘Donald Trump Is Running For President. Here Are 11 Animals Who Share His Hair’ and *Rolling Stone*’s listing of ‘The 47 Funniest Things About Donald Trump.’

As these examples suggest, the lion’s share of headlines in the immediate aftermath of Trump’s announcement looked to fixate on two points: his *personhood* and his *language*. This is important to point out at this stage, because these journalistic avenues would persevere throughout the following weeks and months.

As would repeatedly be the case, the press consistently eclipsed Trump’s *campaign* by the overwhelming attention to his *character*. But for now, what is important is that before the Trump campaign had even begun, it was universally depicted across the media as little more than a *crude joke*. By June 22nd, *The Daily Beast* made this explicit in its headline, ‘Trump’s Running—but the Joke’s on You,’ and by July 17th, in ‘A Note About Our Coverage Of Donald Trump’s ‘Campaign,’ *The Huffington Post* self-righteously informed its readers:

»After watching and listening to Donald Trump since he announced his candidacy for president, we have decided we won’t report on Trump’s campaign as part of The Huffington Post’s political coverage. Instead, we will cover his campaign as part of our Entertainment section. Our reason is simple: Trump’s campaign is a sideshow. We won’t take the bait. If you are interested in what The Donald has to say, you’ll find it next to our stories on the Kardashians and The Bachelorette.«⁶

Even by the 12th of October this attitude lingered on in articles like in *Vanity Fair*’s ‘The Serious Problem with Treating Donald Trump Seriously.’ If the campaign was indeed simply a joke and not to be taken seriously, then the media, by its own logic was forced to reckon with what the Trump campaign then in fact was, or why it had yet to collapse under its own weight.

In one of its earliest explanations, the media unproblematically forwarded a ‘conspiracy theory’ that placed the entire *authenticity* of the Trump campaign into question:

Donald Trump: Progressive champion? (*MSNBC News*, 17 June 2015)

Is Trump a Double Agent for the Left? (*National Review*, 21 June 2015)

Is Donald Trump a Democratic Plant? (*The Washington Post*, 7 July 2015)

⁶ By December 7th, 2015, The Huffington Post rescinded their initial position in their follow-up article titled ‘A Note on Trump: We Are No Longer Entertained.’

Donald Trump Is No Conservative (*The Atlantic*, 13 July 2015)

Why Donald Trump Didn't Run as a Democrat (*RealClearPolitics*, 21 July 2015)

Behold the Vast Trump-Clinton Conspiracy Theory (*Foreign Policy*, 22 July 2015)

Trump in '04: 'I probably identify more as Democrat' (*CNN*, 22 July 2015)

Most of Donald Trump's Political Money Went To Democrats (*NPR News*, 28 July 2015)

Brent Budowsky: Is Trump a Clinton plant? (*The Hill*, 6 August 2015)

Interestingly enough, this first wave of the media's *theorizing* implicitly acknowledged the peculiar nature of the candidate's *politics*—one which in their own words was one more aligned with what might have *historically* been found in the Democratic Party.

In a variation on this 'inauthentic' trope, the emphasis shifted away from his politics and towards the candidate himself. If in this instance, the central concern became: who is *Donald Trump?* and what does *he* want? The media's answer was as simple as it was clear, he was a 'poseur,' a 'scam artist,' a 'charlatan,' in one word, a *fake*:

Will the real Donald Trump please stand up? (*Politico*, 26 July 2015).

Donald Trump is a coward: Why the rich, luxurious poseur has never had the guts to really run for president (*Salon*, 28 July 2015)

Weicker: Donald Trump a bigoted 'con artist' (*Connecticut Post*, 17 August 2015)

Kirsten Powers: Donald Trump, evangelical scam artist (*USA Today*, 1 September 2015)

Mark Twain invented Donald Trump: The literary roots of the right's greatest con man (*Salon*, 13 September 2015)

Trump Is a Charlatan (*RealClearPolitics*, 20 September 2015)

In what was perhaps an even less complex theory, certainly more nihilistic, another round of articles posited that the presidential candidate out on the campaign trail was in fact simply 'trolling':

How Donald Trump is trolling the Republican Party (*Vox*, 12 July 2015)

Donald Trump Trolls Critics on Instagram (*Time Magazine*, 13 July 2015)

Donald Trump Is The World's Greatest Troll (FiveThirtyEight, 20 July 2015)

Donald Trump: Master Troll (GQ, 26 August 2015)

How Donald Trump Uses Instagram to Troll Jeb Bush (The Atlantic, 31 August 2015)

How the Tea Party Got Hijacked by Trump's Troll Party (The Daily Beast, 16 September 2015)

To be clear, none of this is to suggest a concerted ploy to frame Trump as a joke, a secret Democrat, a fake, or a troll. Rather, as we will soon explore, the media's collective unconsciousness was symptomatic of broader trends that have been increasingly pervading modern conceptions of politics more generally since the turn of the century. However, for the present moment, it is the very *one-dimensionality* and simplicity of these earlier explanations which we want to underscore. Only upon additional degrees of complexity, would the Trump campaign's initial *political ambiguity* and *comedic value* begin to fade as the candidate threatened to remain in the headlines for the long run.

6 Politics and the Politician

If until now the tone of this paper has been received as peculiarly defensive or dignifying of Trump, this is certainly not the intention. Rather, it is exactly the excessively offensive and demeaning reporting, by a media purporting to practice objective and unbiased fact-based journalism, on—not the content of the candidate's *politics*—but the fixation on his very *character* (whether understood by way of his personality, psychology, hair, tone, rhetoric, or choice of words) that has demanded deeper contemplation and a shift in our attention *away* from the candidate and *towards* his nearly universal depiction across the media, liberal or conservative leanings aside.

In his book *The Fall of Public Man* (1977), Richard Sennett examined the progressive privatization of the public and its effects on our social world, moreover its impact on the face of American politics. In it, Sennett argues, how at the very same moment the figure of the *politician* began to outshine that of the latter's *politics*, had been the very same moment in which *politics* had become an increasingly *unpolitical* affair. »This obsession with persons at the expense of more impersonal social relations,« he explained, »is like a filter which discolors our rational understanding of society [...and] obscures the continuing importance of class in advanced industrial society« (4). This process of *personalizing* politics had as Sennett put it, an 'anti-ideological effect' (25). Confronting this tendency to observe politicians in such terms (i.e., 'what kind of a person he or she is'), Sennett probed:

»How can a view of social ills or the vision of a better society ever signify in and of itself, and motivate sustained action, if its believability depends on how much an audience at a given moment sympathizes with the character of the man who champions the cause? Under these conditions, the system of public expression became one of personal representation; a public figure presents to others what he feels, and it is this representation of his feeling which arouses belief.« (25-26)

Another facet of this personalization facilitated the outgrowth of another tendency to christen certain behaviors and character traits as those 'respectable' and 'authentic' in nature across society. In excavating the class component latent in these effects, Sennett writes:

»This superimposition of private upon public had a particularly strong appeal among bourgeois audiences, but to the extent that others lower in the social scale could be made to believe in its terms, there could occur class domination through the imposition of bourgeois canons of "respect" for a genuine personality.« (26)

With this, the author made clear these notions of *respect* and *authenticity* in politics had their root as an 'anti-ideological weapon' (Ibid.), taken up by the bourgeoisie at the turn of the century amidst the turbulence of what then had been an open class struggle. Not only a *weapon* of the ruling class, but it is also the 'belief' in such a personalized politics, that according to the author, »can destroy the working class's sense of itself and its own interests« (237). For Sennett, it is the very notion of 'personality,' that he describes as »the enemy of a truly political community« (Ibid.). This diversion of politics to the politician also suggested alterations in the use of language. In other words, this shift in politics signaled a shift in political discourse. In this environment, language became less a means towards an end, than it did an end in itself. Rather than based on the external reality of the public, language increasingly became the sheer domain of the politician as a means to reify the virtuosity of their *internal character*.

From this perspective, let us return to the ways in which the media, in this ritual fashion, uninterruptedly homed in on the *figure* of Trump and his *language* as the campaign continued to solidify.

7 **OK, This Trump Thing Isn't Funny Anymore: Explaining the Rise of the Trump Campaign**

By July, as the Trump campaign rose in the polls, so did the anxiety of those in the media, as was made transparently palpable in the headlines of the day like *Vox's* 'Donald Trump is in 1st place in another GOP poll. I repeat, Donald Trump is in 1st...' (14 July 2015), *Vanity Fair's* 'HERE'S WHY DONALD TRUMP REALLY COULD BE ELECTED PRESIDENT' (22 October 2015), and *The Economist's* 'Political satire Jokes about Donald Trump aren't funny anymore' (11 December 2015). Recalling *The Daily Beast's* 'Trump is Running — But the Joke is On You' (22 June 2015), by the 27th of August, the website went on to confess: 'OK, This Trump Thing Isn't Funny Anymore.' *Slate* marked the new unease with its headline: 'It's Time to Stop Writing Donald Trump's Political Obituary' (10 August 2015). These changes in tone were also echoed in *The New Republic's* 'How Donald Trump Evolved From a Joke to an Almost Serious Candidate' (27 October 2015), which bitterly acknowledged: »We have exited the joke phase of Trump's candidacy. We are now taking him at least semi-seriously.« But if the media had previously zeroed in on Trump's character and use of 'choice words,' and if a handful of headlines simply attempted to invalidate the polls as inconsequential (e.g., 'Are Trump's poll numbers too good to be true?,' *Politico*, 24 June 2015; 'Donald Trump Is Not the Frontrunner. Smarter Polls Would Prove It.,' *The New Republic*, 20 July 2015; 'Donald Trump Is Winning The Polls — And Losing The Nomination,' *FiveThirtyEight*, 11 August 2015), with the release of this new information, *the popularity of the campaign nevertheless demanded a proper accounting for*. Such undertakings found expression in headlines like *Yahoo! News's* 'He's not going away': Here's the fuel behind the Donald Trump rocket ship (1 August 2015), that set out to *explain* the 'fuel' propelling the campaign forward. In essence, the media had to answer *BuzzFeed News's* question: 'Why Is Donald Trump So Popular?' (11 September 2015).

In this instance, the simple portrayal of the candidate as a joke, secret Democrat, fake or troll simply lacked the *explanatory power* to cope with the campaign's rise in the polls. At the same time, because of the media's structural relation to power as laid out in our chapter on the social production of news and its inability to breach the consensual understandings underpinning society, the explanations that followed demanded the utmost *creativity*. Put differently, because of this structural relation, it was necessary for the reporting on the Trump campaign (at this stage in the news discourse) to circumvent the taboo nature of *the political economy* which not only undergirded politics, but consensual society itself. As such, confounded by the mounting polling data, and unwilling to look *beyond* Trump's personality and confront the *politics* of the Trump campaign, the media necessitated the deployment of what Hall et al. have called 'public images' to

delicately sidestep the issues of political economy and yet make sense of the predicament as it existed in the polls. Due to the importance of this concept for what follows, moreover, for the sake of clarity, allow us to quote Hall et al. at length:

»A ‘public image’ is a cluster of impressions, themes and quasi-explanations, gathered or fused together. [...] where hard, difficult, social, cultural or economic analysis breaks down or is cut short, the resolution is achieved by orchestrating the whole feature so as to produce a kind of composite description-*cum*-explanation – in the form of a ‘public image’. But the process is somewhat circular, for these ‘public images’ are frequently already in existence, derived from other features on other occasions dealing with other social problems. And in this case the presence of such ‘public images’ in public and journalistic discourse feeds into and informs the feature treatment of a particular story. Since such ‘public images’, at one and the same time, are graphically compelling, but also stop short of serious, searching analysis, they tend to appear *in place of analysis* – or analysis seems to collapse into the image. Thus, at the point where further analysis threatens to go beyond the boundaries of a dominant ideological field, the ‘image’ is evoked to foreclose the problem.« (1978: 118)

From this reading to paper over the ‘anti-establishment’ politics ‘fueling’ the Trump campaign, the media was inherently inclined to conjure up *alternative explanations* that could both simultaneously *acknowledge* and yet *offer closure* to these developments as they unfolded. With this newfound appreciation for the advent and function of public images, we might retroactively interpret those earlier depictions of Trump as a *joke*, *secret Democrat*, *fake* or *troll* as variations of public images—regardless of their rudimentariness. But as already mentioned, just as the situation on the ground became more complex (i.e., rising poll numbers), so such images on their own would become obsolete and so demand further elaborations with evermore degrees of complexity.

7.1 The Psychology Image

The first of these more complex public images we turn to is that of *the active psychologizing of the candidate*. In this repertoire, that we will call *the psychology image*, the media managed to shift attention away from the Trump campaign’s *politics*, moreover its *popularity*, and instead, repeatedly addressed *the candidate’s* psychological state. Here, a stream of articles, oftentimes innocuous, like CNN’s ‘Trump’s comb-over and the psychology of male hairstyles’ (11 August 2015), NPR’s ‘Is Donald Trump Nice Enough?’ (NPR News, 28 August 2015), or *Psychology Today’s* headlines ‘The Personality of Donald Trump’ (17 September 2015) and ‘Understanding Primates – and Donald Trump’ (21 September 2015), all served to redirect public debate *away* from the Trump campaign’s politics and *towards* the politician’s comb-over, emotionality, mental health and the quality of his personality.

As it happens, such a psychiatric mode of inquisition is not without historical roots. Referencing the famed psychoanalyst Thomas Szasz, who recognized 'the social role of psychiatry as an arm of the state,' in a rather uncharacteristic moment for *Psychology Today*, in its article 'The Political Uses of Psychiatric Labels' (27 July 2017), the author Mark Ruffalo penned:

»Instead of labeling those with whom we disagree with mental disorders, we would be better served to have substantive discussions about policy and the issues of debate. Resorting to psychiatric labels to describe politicians and their behavior not only applies psychiatric diagnosis imprecisely (of course, it makes no sense to talk of psychiatric diagnosis of a nonconsenting patient—diagnosis always requires consent, as Szasz points out), it also serves to excuse the behavior of our political opponents, explaining it in terms of psychopathology instead of policy.«

Similarly, in her article 'The Political Abuse of Psychiatry Against Dissenting Voices' (27 February 2020), the *Hogg Foundation for Mental Health's* Julia Sufrin has remarked how: »United States history is scattered with examples of the application of psychiatric diagnoses to reinforce power relations in society.« While we must forego further detail regarding these particular matters, what we wish to illustrate here are *the ways in which media outlets have seized upon the repertoires of historically indoctrinated imagery to underpin the construction of new public images.*

To fulfill and officiate such imagery, the media had to enlist the support of *the expert*, who in this instance took on the form of psychologists and therapists who haphazardly diagnosed the candidate (we can most likely assume without his consent) right there, on a national stage: 'Trump: A Psychosocial Analysis' (*Psychology Today*, 4 September 2015), 'Is Donald Trump Actually a Narcissist?' Therapists Weigh In! (*Vanity Fair*, 11 November 2015), and 'How does Trump do it? Understanding the psychology of a demagogue's rally' (*The Guardian*, 8 December 2015).

Another variation on the psychology image followed *CNN's* line of questioning that asked, 'What explains Donald Trump's arrogance?' (10 August 2015), to which the media hastily and unproblematically responded by attributing a narcissistic personality disorder to the presidential candidate:

Donald Trump's festival of narcissism (*The Washington Post*, 16 June 2015)

Donald Trump: Narcissist in Chief (*Sojourners*, 9 July 2015)

Donald Trump Is a Narcissist Who Needs Our Pity (*Esquire*, 13 July 2015)

The Truth About Donald Trump's Narcissism (*Time Magazine*, 11 August 2015)

Donald Trump and the Political Benefits of a Narcissistic Personality (*The Atlantic*, 20 August 2015)

Donald's Trump's Narcissism and the American Dream (*Psyched*, 6 September 2015)

Opinion | The Narcissist in Chief (*The New York Times*, 6 September 2015)

Bobby Jindal: Donald Trump is a narcissist, egomaniac (*CNN*, 10 September 2015)

Trump and the Meaning of Egoism (*The Huffington Post*, 28 September 2015)

Donald Trump and the Narcissistic Illusion of Grandiosity (*PsychCentral*, 4 October 2015)

Donald Trump's Very Strange Brand of Narcissism (*Time Magazine*, 4 December 2015)

Trump: The Ultimate Ego (*The Huffington Post*, 22 December 2015)

Donald Trump Isn't the Biggest Narcissist in the GOP Field. Ted Cruz Is. (*Politico*, 23 December 2015)

Other headlines lobbed even more overtly pejorative accusations of mental illness like in *Salon's* 'Donald Trump, mad king of the GOP: What his surging popularity reveals about Republican extremism' (14 August 2015), *New York Magazine's* 'Donald Trump Is Going to Lose Because He Is Crazy' (26 August 2015), *Jacobin's* 'Donald Trump: American Psycho,' *WBUR News's* 'Diagnosing Trump Syndrome — The Affliction Of The 'Authentically Crazy' (23 October 2015). In one of the more cynical headlines, *Politico* innocently probed, 'Could America Elect a Mentally Ill President?' (29 October 2015). A headline in *The Washington Post* even likened the candidate to an 'incurable illness' ('L.A. prankster scatters fake signs around city, remakes Donald Trump as incurable illness,' 5 October 2015). Implicit in all of these images was not only the incapability to lead, but moreover the *danger* that lay dormant in the notion of a 'mad king' somehow gaining access to the nuclear codes. This predisposition was made all the more likely given the emergence of yet another image—one that cast the candidate as a *prepubescent* 'bully':

Donald Trump finally replies to claims that he bullied a 90-year-old woman who lives near his golf course (*Business Insider*, 22 June 2015)

Megyn Kelly calls out Trump the bully (*The Hill*, 7 August 2015)

Donald Trump is no bully. He's a crybaby (*The Washington Post*, 9 August 2015)

Donald Trump not a textbook bully, psychologists say (USA Today, 26 August 2015)

An Expert on Bullying Explains Donald Trump's Mean, Consequence-Free Rise (*The Cut*, 10 September 2015)

How to handle Donald Trump's bullying (*The Washington Post*, 15 September 2015)

Bullying Experts: Trump Is an Eighth-Grade Girl (*The Daily Beast*, 16 September 2015)

America loves a bully: The sadistic streak that explains the popularity of Donald Trump (and Bill O'Reilly and Ann Coulter) (*Salon*, 18 September 2015)

'Trump Bullies Like an 8th Grade Girl' (*The Huffington Post*, 21 September 2015)

Rosie O'Donnell: Donald Trump's Comments Were 'Most Bullying I Ever Experienced In My Life' (*The Huffington Post*, 25 September 2015)

Republicans need to stand up to Trump's bullying (*The Washington Post*, 23 November 2015)

Bully for Whom? (*The Wall Street Journal*, 27 November 2015)

In yet another variation on the psychology image, the press routinely portrayed Trump to be ensnared in a series of so-called 'bromances,' that casted his same sex relations in a decidedly *romantic* light. Whether appearing in *The Daily Beast's* 'Donald Trump and Bill Clinton: Behind the 'Bromance'' (5 August 2015), *BBC News's* 'Donald Trump and Ted Cruz forge an unlikely 'bromance'' (10 September 2015), *CBS News's* 'Bromance' Between Donald Trump And Tom Brady (16 September 2015) or *Politico's* 'Jeb Bush, Donald Trump bromance moment' (16 September 2015), by autumn, the homophobic undertones of the ostensibly *playful* term became explicit in the media's portrayal of a perilous romance between a potential commander-in-chief and an enemy strongman:

Donald Trump's revealing man-crush on Vladimir Putin (*Salon*, 1 October 2015)

Trump and Putin's crazy bromance: Two guys too weird for fiction who long to rule the world (*Salon*, 3 October 2015)

From Russia with love: Putin, Trump sing each other's praises (*Reuters*, 17 December 2015)

The disgraceful bromance between Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin (*The Washington Post*, 18 December 2015)

The Ideology Behind the Putin-Trump Bromance (*The Atlantic*, 18 December 2015)

Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin Bromance (*Esquire*, 18 December 2015)

Donald Trump's bromance with Vladimir Putin (*CNN*, 19 December 2015)

How does Vladimir Putin love Donald Trump? Let me count the ways (*Quartz*, 20 December 2015)

Why Donald Trump Loves Vladimir Putin (*Mother Jones*, 23 December 2015)

But like with the psychology image more generally, this more homophobic strain also had a history. An earlier *Slate* article, 'Fussy, Hysterical, Wine-Sipping Pols: A history of political gay-baiting' (16 September 2010), concisely unpacked this long running political tactic of defaming one's opponent as homosexual. In it, its author Margaret Johnson defined such *gay-baiting* as »the linguistic practice of publicly insinuating, with little or no evidence, that a rival might be gay, without ever using the word 'gay' or homosexual.« Tactics which she explained were by no means new:

»At least since the 19th century, opponents, journalists, and others have called attention to certain male political figures [...] The goal of this bait isn't necessarily to make voters believe the target is gay, only to make them think he possesses negative, stereotypically gay male qualities.«

Again, while we will not go into detail on this particular subject matter, important here is the *historical depth* from which yet another public image had drawn its dynamism.

Whether or not the personality of Trump could be considered eccentric was the beside the point, implicit in the functional psychologizing of the candidate as a mentally unwell and dangerous homosexual-prepubescent-bully-narcissist, to put it ever-so crudely, naturally entailed exactly the kind of berating question posed in one *GQ* headline: 'What Kind of Person Would Vote For Donald Trump?' (4 August 2015). *To fitfully answer this question, the media inevitably had to turn the microscope away from candidate and towards his base.* This objective was made explicit in *The Boston Globe's* 'GOP's problem isn't Donald Trump; it's the voters' (18 July 2015), which established this *second act* of the psychology image which produced such articles as *Scientific American's* three-part series 'Decoding Trump-Mania: The Psychological Allure of Hating Political Correctness' (14 Aug-8 September 2015) alongside a host of others:

The Populist Appeal of Trump's Narcissism (*Psychology Today*, 14 August 2015)

Why People Are Drawn to Narcissists Like Donald Trump (*Harvard Business Review*, 26 August 2015)

I asked psychologists to analyze Trump supporters (*The Washington Post*, 15 October 2015)

DONALD TRUMP: PRESIDENCY ATTRACTS NARCISSISTS, BUT APPARENT AUTHENTICITY IS THE ACE UP HIS SLEEVE (*The Independent*, 28 October 2015)

Understanding the Psychology of a Demagogue's Rally (*The Guardian*, 8 December 2015)

A Fascinating Psychological Experiment Could Explain Donald Trump's Rise (*Vox*, 7 December 2015)

Keeping in line with the initial image, this variation maintained its sidestepping of the political economy by narrowing the 'appeal' to that of the *politician* over his espoused *politics*. In what followed, a litany of articles set out to *dissect* the strange appeal of this otherworldly creature:

What explains Donald Trump's appeal? (USA Today, 7 July 2015) Why Trump Appeals to People (Psychology Today, 12 August 2015)

Juliana Wilson: Pompous personality ?pushing [sic.] Trump's popularity (The Boston Herald, 12 August 2015)

What Do Donald Trump Voters Actually Want? (The Atlantic, 16 August 2015) Who Are Donald Trump's Supporters and What Do They Want? (VICE News, 19 August 2015)

Busting up the party: The visceral appeal of Donald Trump (MPR, 1 September 2015) Trumped Up Appeal? Dissecting The Donald's Surprising Popularity (WBUR News, 9 September 2015)

In this moment, supporters of the Trump campaign were not only portrayed as mysterious, if not bordering on deviancy, but they were increasingly, and ever so subtly, brought into closeness with terms like 'sociopathy' and 'insanity' (e.g., 'A Nation of Sociopaths? What the Trump Phenomenon Says About America,' *The American Prospect*, 9 September 2015; 'We Went to Donald Trump's Book Signing and It Was Insane,' *Fortune*, 3 November 2015).

Like in *The Washington Post's* 'Donald Trump is an aimless, angry leader' (10 August 2015), his supporters were repeatedly depicted in terms of raw emotion, namely that of

'anger.' Relocating the emphasis away from Trump's mental state to his base, the success of the Trump campaign could now be *simply explained in terms of psychology*. In short, people supported Trump because they were 'angry':

What are Donald Trump's angry voters so angry about? (*The Los Angeles Times*, 12 August 2015)

Iowa has an anger issue (*Politico*, 13 August 2015)

Anger and the 2016 presidential election (*CBS News*, 24 August 2015)

Fed-up and angry supporters let Trump defy political gravity (*PBS*, 6 September 2015)

What's behind Republican voters' support of Trump? Anger at Republicans (*The Los Angeles Times*, 9 September 2015)

How the Republican Party became a haven of resentment and rage (*The Conversation*, 17 September 2015)

Why is everyone so angry? (*The Christian Science Monitor*, 19 November 2015)

Welcome to the GOP's age of rage: Shocking new study shows how anger is fueling the Republican Party (*Salon*, 24 November 2015)

Soon the psychology images that diagnosed Trump as a mentally unwell, bully were unproblematically waged against his base. In reports that followed, anger was translated into aggression, which in turn was translated into so-called 'toxic masculinity,' a *pop psych* term that was repeatedly used to describe the portion of young men who it was *assumed* made up a sizable portion of his apparently unruly base:

It's not who he is, it's who he hates: The secret to Donald Trump's toxic appeal (*Salon*, 25 July 2015)

The Secret to Donald Trump's Toxic Appeal (*RealClearPolitics*, 25 July 2015)

Meet Donald Trump's Proud Bullies, Goons, And Thugs (*BuzzFeed News*, 28 July 2015)

Trump's gang of misfits (*Politico*, 17 August 2015)

Donald Trump and the Politics of White Male Anger (*Sojourners*, 21 August 2015)

Donald Trump's fans long for an uncomplicated alpha male to lead them (*The Los Angeles Times*, 28 August 2015)

Conservatives' crippling masculinity crisis: Cuckservatives, men's rights activism and the privilege the right refuses to acknowledge (*Salon*, 13 August 2015)

Donald Trump's alpha-male appeal (*Slate*, 13 August 2015)

Donald Trump's "Death Wish" fantasies: Guns, white vigilantism, and the right's toxic masculinity (*Salon*, 6 October 2015)

Donald Trump and 'Identification With the Aggressor' (*Psychology Today*, 20 October 2015)

Donald Trump and 'The Sickos' (*The Atlantic*, 29 October 2015)

Bill Clinton to Stephen Colbert: Donald Trump Has a "Macho Appeal" (*The Hollywood Reporter*, 6 October 2015)

The Election and the Death Throes of White Male Power (*The Cut*, 16 December 2015)

Schlanged? Donald Trump's Pathetic Frat-Boy Politics (*The Nation*, 22 December 2015)

Fox host: Men are sick of being feminized and Donald Trump is 'their last hope to get their masculinity back' (*Raw Story*, 22 December 2015)

Here, this variation on the psychology image constituted yet another example which reached for past images that had already bound themes of youth, masculinity, misogyny, and violence together. Not only was this imagery already widely connoted in a number of articles about the so-called 'war on women,' but it also served to channel the residual traces of emotions which erupted in the wake of mass shootings committed by armed and dangerous young, 'toxic' and 'misogynistic' white men (with an 'online' presence) in the previous years:

Time to profile white men? (*Salon*, 17 December 2012)

Why Won't We Talk About Violence and Masculinity in America? (*Miss Magazine*, 19 December 2012)

Masculinity, mental illness and guns: A lethal equation? (*CNN*, 19 December 2012)

Innocence In the Age of White Male Mass Shootings (*Gawker*, 12 January 2013)

Shooting sprees start with women (*Salon*, 21 January 2013)

Sandy Hook shooter Adam Lanza made 83k online kills before massacre (*The Daily Mail*, 2 December 2013)

Opinion | The War on Women (*The New York Times*, 11 January 2014)

Angry Young Men Are Making the World Less Stable (*The Atlantic*, 11 March 2014)

What Elliot Rodger Said About Women Reveals Why We Need to Stamp Out Misogyny (*Mic*, 24 May 2014)

Behind The Sexist Ideology That Preoccupied A Mass Murderer (*ThinkProgress*, 25 May 2014)

Elliot Rodger's fatal menace: How toxic male entitlement devalues women's and men's lives (*Salon*, 26 May 2014)

The California Shooting Spree Is Proof That Misogyny Kills (*Business Insider*, 26 May 2014)

Elliot Rodger's War on Women (*In These Times*, 26 May 2014)

Why It's So Hard for Men to See Misogyny (*Slate*, 27 May 2014)

Misogyny and Mass Murder, Paired Yet Again (*Newsweek*, 28 May 2014)

The Toxic Appeal of the Men's Rights Movement (*Time Magazine*, 29 May 2014)

Reports which themselves bled into a freestanding news cycle known as 'GamerGate,' which featured headlines warning of 'Feminist Critics of Video Games Facing Threats in 'GamerGate' Campaign' (*The New York Times*, 15 October 2014), 'What Is #GamerGate and Why Are Women Being Threatened About Video Games?' (*Time Magazine*, 17 October 2015), 'Gamergate is loud, dangerous and a last grasp at cultural dominance by angry white men' (*The Guardian*, 21 October 2014) and 'Gamergate: The Internet as a weapon of mass destruction' (*GeekWire*, 30 October 2014). Though short-lived, this media spectacle nevertheless helped *snowball* themes of dangerous, online, sexually disgruntled, misogynistic, armed, toxic, young and 'angry white men' into a formidable foe, one if whose bullying were to go unchecked, could very likely translate into mass tragedy. It was these themes which progressively percolated into headlines reporting on the young male supporters of the Trump campaign.

Like our previous examples with psychiatrizing and gay-baiting political opponents, tagging toxic masculinity onto social phenomenon, has also served as a discursive

maneuver for sidestepping and scapegoating social ills as if hardwired into the male psychology. As Michael Salter has written in *The Atlantic's* 'The Problem With a Fight Against Toxic Masculinity' (27 February 2019):

»When people use it, they tend to diagnose the problem of masculine aggression and entitlement as a cultural or spiritual illness—something that has infected today's men and leads them to reproachable acts. But toxic masculinity itself is not a cause.«

Retreating from such spiritual and moralistic retellings of social phenomenon, Salter goes on to clarify how the source of such reprehensible acts of male violence:

»doesn't emanate from something bad or toxic that has crept into the nature of masculinity itself. Rather, it comes from these men's social and political settings, the particularities of which set them up for inner conflicts over social expectations and male entitlement.«

However, as the media would frame it, standing between this supposed *inbred threat* and the vulnerable public, once again stood a trusty class of experts. These best and brightest, whether neuroscientists, philosophers or military strategists, scurried in to crunch the numbers and provide terrified onlookers with, as a later headline in *The Washington Post* put it, 'The real reasons Donald Trump's so popular - for people totally confused by it' (12 December 2015). Just as psychiatric experts had assessed Trump and his base, so were these more multifarious expert testimonials summoned to decisively square away this freak popularity armed with a supply of stultifying *hard truths* propped up by 'science,' 'research' and 'hard stats':

Science Knows Why People Love Donald Trump (*Big Think*, 17 August 2015)

Research explains the appeal of Donald Trump (*Fortune Magazine*, 11 September 2015)

Get Donald Trump out of my brain: The neuroscience that explains why he's running away with the GOP (*Salon*, 12 September 2015)

This French philosopher is the only one who can explain the Donald Trump phenomenon (*ThinkProgress*, 12 September 2015)

Why We Love Donald Trump's Face (*The New Republic*, 15 September 2015)

Who Are Trump's Supporters? The Hard Stats (*Newsweek*, 18 September 2015)

This one number explains Donald Trump's support (*The Christian Science Monitor*, 30 November 2015)

Military Strategist Explains Why Trump Leads—And Will Fail (*The Federalist*, 15 December 2015)

Your Brain Is Hard-Wired to Love Donald Trump (*Politico*, 16 December 2015)

The Daily Beast even went so far as to *taxonomize* these specimens in its article, ‘What an Actual Trump Voter Looks Like’ (8 September 2015). As opposed to the initial joke, secret Democrat, fake, and troll images, through the integration of historical imagery—whether the longstanding *psychiatric* and *homophobic* images or the more recent *sexist* manifestations (i.e., mass shooters, the ‘war on women,’ GamerGate)—not only provided these news stories with higher ranking new values reinforced by the *expertise* of disinterested experts, but they now endowed the stream of images with an ever-deeper complexity.

If the earliest images themselves implied the candidate was in fact *not a real candidate*, and if the psychology image upped the ante and portrayed this faux candidate as an unstable, self-obsessed danger to national security, what was effectively communicated through this unanimous imagery was that Trump was not only an unfit candidate for this presidential election, *but unequivocally the wrong choice (and quite obviously so) for the American voting public* (e.g., ‘George Takei: Of Course Trump Is Wrong — Problem Is, He’s Dangerous,’ *Big Think*, 21 August 2015). Even more, where the earlier images were simply scaffolded around the sole figure of Trump, as we observed with the psychology image, it expanded the media’s field of study and so began interrogating the supposedly *misplaced* support of his base. While this was first done in *pessimistic* terms, implying some sort of psychological defect as the explanation behind the voluntary support of an *obviously* crazed candidate, soon the reframing of the situation cast the initial questions regarding his support into a distinctly more *optimistic* light: Surely, if not *all* his supporters were themselves deranged, what explained their *mistaken* support? Whether driven by curiosity, sympathy, goodwill or paternalistic condescension by journalists, the reappraisal of his popular support went on to produce a series of distinctly optimistic images. Images whose explanations were not confined to the perpetuity of individual psychology, but those which could make sense of the misplaced support as the product of social and environmental conditions—conditions warranted to change and thus providing these additional images with an *exonerative* edge.

7.2 The Religiousness Image

Again, let us begin with an analytically weak example in what we will call *the religiousness image*. Here, the popular support underpinning the Trump campaign is explained by simple equivocating ‘religion’ as an answer in and of itself to his *undeserving* support:

Donald Trump’s incoherent, megalomaniacal religion: Why his courting of evangelicals reveals the depths of his ignorance (*Salon*, 21 August 2015)

Why are white evangelicals supporting Trump? It goes back to Jimmy Carter. (*Yahoo! News*, 21 August 2015)

Why Evangelicals Worship Trump (*The Daily Beast*, 21 August 2015)

Trump-ward, Christian Soldiers? (*The New York Times*, 25 August 2015)

The evangelical idolatry of Donald Trump (*Think Christian*, 27 August 2015)

Church says Donald Trump is not an 'active member' (*CNN*, 28 August 2015)

Kirsten Powers: Donald Trump, evangelical scam artist (*USA Today*, 1 September 2015)

True Believer? Why Donald Trump Is The Choice Of The Religious Right (*NPR News*, 13 September 2015)

Donald Trump strikes a chord – with evangelicals (*The Boston Globe*, 14 September 2015)

Have Evangelicals Who Support Trump Lost Their Values? (*The New York Times*, 17 September 2015)

Donald Trump finds religion (*Politico*, 19 September 2015)

Bible in hand, Trump makes pitch to religious voters (*CNN*, 26 September 2015)

Donald Trump's saving grace: Televangelists (*Politico*, 30 September 2015)

How Donald Trump has found common ground with televangelists (*The Christian Science Monitor*, 2 October 2015)

Shocked at evangelicals' flocking to Trump? Blame it on Reagan (*The Los Angeles Times*, 5 October 2015)

Fear and voting on the Christian right (*CNN*, 30 October 2015)

Donald Trump and the Painful Price of Religious Intolerance (*Fortune Magazine*, 9 December 2015)

Trump presents evangelical Christians with a crucial choice (*The Washington Post*, 14 December 2015)

Obama revives his 'clinging to guns or religion' analysis (*The Washington Post*, 21 December 2015)

Though each public idiom approached this expansive image on aesthetically different terms, the total effect was to imply a potent mixture of *religious orthodoxy* ('evangelicalism'), *gullibility* ('scam,' 'not an active member'), *followership* ('televangelist,' 'flocking'), *glorification* ('worship,' 'true believer'), *backwardness* ('Carter,' 'Reagan,' 'Revives') and *hypocrisy* ('lost their values,' 'shocked'). According to this image, Trump had only needed to 'find religion' and hold a 'bible' to gain the support of these god 'fearing' voters. *In one word, the religiousness image communicated a sort of blindness to the terrestrial world of political affairs.*

But as could be inferred by the sheer narrowness of this faith-based demographic, such an image could only ever provide a *partial* explanation to satisfy the reading public. A more *universal* imagery would of course be necessary to explain the rising poll numbers. Nevertheless, the general notions conjured up in the religiousness image were retained, refitted and channeled into two additional images, those based on *misperception* and *manipulation*. With the dawn of these public images, the media was now equipped to grapple with that which had previously been left unsaid. They could now engage head on with the volatile matters of the political economy. Within this new optimistic logic, reports could now approach the theme of deteriorating economic conditions by way of *leveling with the rational self-interest of those who they themselves acknowledged were representatives of the working class*. Of course, any engagement with such a subject matter was exclusively restricted to the narrow scope of election coverage and delicately approached on the terms first set by the primary and secondary definers.

For this notion that somehow journalists in New York not only knew, but sincerely cared for what was in the best *self-interest*, politically speaking, for steel workers in rural Ohio, or logistics workers in Nebraska to pass as in anyway reasonable, as we will explore in the following images, this would greatly rely on a series of skillful displacements.

7.3 The Misperception Image

Drawing on the optimistic reading of blindness, rather benevolently, this pseudo-explanation transported the notion that Trump's support might simply be understood as a matter of innocent misperception, what we might call *the misperception image*. As opposed to the consequence of *intentional* outside forces, though still planted at the level of psychology, this image explained Trump's popular support through strictly *cognitive* failures as opposed to those more *terminal* in nature. As such, since the media tasked itself with *correcting* these perceptual misreadings, this image was now able to engage with the elephant in the room. Matters of political economy were approached by simply *redefining* them out of existence. This was achieved in the subtle shift in emphasis away from the deteriorating conditions of the *economic reality* of American voters, and instead, towards the *perception* of that economic reality (e.g., 'In one chart, here's how the economy looks to Trump supporters,' *MarketWatch*, 17 July 2015). Once this shift had

been accomplished, a litany of facts and statistics were mobilized to *correct the record* and by doing so invalidate the perceptual basis of reality that had 'fueled' the Trump campaign. In other words, the reports translated the objective deterioration of living standards for members of the working class *into* subjective terms. And once depreciated as merely subjective experience, that perception could be corrected by the experts and officials who claimed access to high-quality and more *truthful* information.

However, such reports did not have to resort to condescension as one might expect. In fact, quite the opposite was true. In part due to its *rehabilitative* purpose, this image was often framed in a sympathetic manner, acknowledging supporters and their very *real feelings* that stemmed from their misperception. *The Guardian's* 'Working-class Americans feel screwed. I heard it across the entire country' (14 October 2015) makes this kindly sentiment all too clear.

In such a moment then, the media portrayed *itself* as looking out for the best interest of the population, moreover, for those more vulnerable members of the working class. *Salon's* 'It's not the economy, stupid: How clueless elites and greedy bankers help Donald Trump' (5 December 2015) provides us with a helpful example. Correcting the record that the economy had in fact been 'improving' under the Obama administration, *something Trump supporters simply could not comprehend*, the article went on to write:

»at least part of "what is going on" here is that many people quite justifiably *feel* like the economy is still in the doldrums, no matter what economists, pundits and other elites may say [emphasis added]. And they think part of the reason they're getting the short end is because those same elites, at the end of the day, have rigged the game in their favor. Trump speaks directly to these people and validates their suspicions. The endurance of his campaign makes plenty of sense.«

One of the catchwords for this overall image was 'economic anxiety.' The phrase itself is exemplary of the transformative effect of the misperception image. It successfully collapses the objective dimensions of economic reality (e.g., rates of employment, debt, income, life expectancy, etc.) into *psychic* ones (e.g., anxiety, anxiousness, fear, precarity, uncertainty, worry). And thus, as one *NPR* headline summarized, 'Nativism And Economic Anxiety Fuel Trump's Populist Appeal' (4 September 2015), economic anxiety (albeit in this case spiked with 'nativism') was put forth as an explanation in and of itself behind the Trump campaign's elusive appeal. However, the *misperception image* was not merely the product of *blinding* religiousness or emotionality, but it also introduced the complexity of environmental factors, including particular lifestyles and education levels portrayed as influential indicators behind the campaign's support:

Donald Trump's surge is all about less-educated Americans (*The Washington Post*, 27 July 2015)

The Unengaged and Uninformed (*U.S. News & World Report*, 1 September 2015)

Trust in Trump comes from lack of trust in government (*Brookings Institute*, 16 September 2015)

Here's what Donald Trump supporters believe, according to their emails to me (*Vox*, 11 July 2015)

Trump Supporters, Asked About Trump, Like Trump (*Bloomberg*, 25 August 2015)

Donald Trump Believes His Supporters Are Morons. He's Right. (*Gawker*, 8 September 2015)

How the 'Party of Stupid' Birthed Trump and Carson (*The Daily Beast*, 14 September 2015)

Reality TV bites: 'The Apprentice' effect aids Trump (*CNN*, 27 September 2015)

Column: Trump exploits rational political ignorance (*USA Today*, 4 October 2015)

Trump's supporters found to have the worst grammar (*Politico*, 6 October 2015)

Supporters of Donald Trump and other Republicans get worst grammar grades (*MarketWatch*, 6 October 2015)

Trump supporters have the worst Facebook grammar, study finds (*The Washington Post*, 6 October 2015)

Dumb as a Trump: These Republicans really are a bunch of illiterates (*Salon*, 8 October 2015)

How The Apprentice Explains Donald Trump's Campaign (*Bloomberg*, 15 October 2015)

Why Donald Trump Is the King of American Loser-dom (*Tablet*, 27 October 2015)

Donald Trump Supporters Are More Susceptible to Clickbait (*Wired*, 30 October 2015)

A DISTURBING NUMBER OF VOTERS SUPPORT BOMBING ALADDIN'S (FICTIONAL) HOMETOWN (*MTV*, 15 December 2015)

With this image, Trump's supporters were portrayed as simple-minded morons and losers, couch potatoes fed on reality TV, unaware of the world and 'susceptible to clickbait.'

Simply put, the overall effect of this image was the depiction of Trump's supporters as a uniquely *stupid* voting bloc. This conclusion in turn produced two *new* avenues for reporting. Perceived simply as ignorant, these voters could on one hand be approached as *innocent*, and given the *right* information, be made *redeemable*. And yet on the other hand, there had lurked something far more sinister. If the voting public could in fact so easily misperceive the world around them, then surely there were dark forces ready to *exploit* this electoral vulnerability. As *The Atlantic's* 'Donald Trump and the Dangers of Passions in Politics' (27 August 2015) implied, *lacking the correct information and left to the impulse of one's feelings, danger had lurked*.

7.4 The Manipulation Image

If the misperception image had largely presented a neutral world (i.e., a *lack* of information) then *the manipulation image* further complexified that image by adding another dimension of *intentionality* to the equation (i.e., the conscious dissemination of *disinformation*). Not only were there people stupid enough to support the Trump campaign, but this image also now depicted the campaign to be deliberately exploiting their stupidity. With this image, describing the machinations of Trump, one *Bloomberg* headline reported 'This Man Is the Most Dangerous Political Operative in America' (8 October 2015). At the same time the comical nature of reporting on Trump had all but vanished, the additional complexity brought on by the manipulation image had also opened the possibility for yet another avenue for the media to directly confront the economic reality *within* the confines of the consensual viewpoint. *In the manipulation image, it could now admit that the economic reality was indeed deteriorating but that this issue was being exploited by those who would only make it worse*. With this stance, the media once again presented itself as the nightwatchman of the working class—set out to protect the public against widespread and high-tech disinformation campaigns propagated by the enemies of *the people*. This posturing couldn't be made clearer than in *The Boston Globe's* 'Donald Trump is no champion of the little guy' (25 August 2015) or the near identical headlines published by *The Washington Post* and *Business Insider* on the very same day that read: 'Donald Trump's supporters are rightly angry. They're just angry at the wrong people' (9 December 2015) and 'Donald Trump's Supporters Angry at the Wrong People' (9 December 2015). In this instance, the cognitive perception of Trump voters was in fact correct and not disillusioned, it was admitted that the economy was indeed deteriorating. The issue was no longer that of misperception, but of the *exploitation* of this unfortunate reality. *In this image, the media warned that the working class was being actively misled to vote against its own interests*. In fact, they were the first to recognize the spellbinding allure of Trump and his manipulative prowess to which they themselves had fallen victim:

How Donald Trump plays the press, in his own words (*The Washington Post*, 17 June 2015)

How Donald Trump spins criticism into marketing gold (*The Christian Science Monitor*, 15 July 2015)

There's No Stopping the Trump Show (*The Atlantic*, 24 July 2015)

Is Donald Trump Sucking All the Air Out of the Room? (*U.S. News & World Report*, 24 July 2015)

Why the media can't stop talking about Trump (*The Week*, 14 August 2015)

Donald Trump Is Running A Perpetual Attention Machine (*FiveThirtyEight*, 26 August 2015)

Trump Is a Master at Manipulating the Media (*U.S. News & World Report*, 6 November 2015)

Donald Trump's Long Publicity Con (*The Daily Beast*, 28 November 2015)

Donald Trump is owning the media (*The Verge*, 2 December 2015)

Like with the misperception image, because, at this stage, the bulk of his supporters were still recognized as *decent, reasonable, hardworking Americans* who were simply on 'the wrong side of history.' Aside from further underpinning this rehabilitative quality, this image of the American public having been *actively misled* also encapsulated within it a *retributive* edge (e.g., 'Donald Trump Has Been Trolling America. Now Here's Your Chance to Troll Him Back,' *The Daily Beast*, 21 September 2015). Furthermore, because this notion of manipulation was realized through straightforward *infowars* as opposed to *physical* intimidation—though *Forbes's* 'Donald Trump Wins Through Intimidation' (7 August 2015) would beg to differ—the presence of information, moreover misinformation, disinformation, lies, conspiracy theories (and later the coining of 'fake news') in these images loomed ever larger. These developments were only enhanced by the previous images that portrayed the base of the Trump campaign as uniquely stupid and susceptible. Thus, the combination of Trump's manipulative prowess and technological mastery together with his impressionable audience resulted in an ever more convincing explanation behind his rise in the polls:

Why the most informed voters are often the most badly misled (*Vox*, 8 July 2015)

Donald Trump's brazen genius (*The Economist*, 23 July 2015)

5 Reasons Donald Trump's Brand Is So Wildly Powerful (Time Magazine, 10 August 2015)

Donald Trump's Sales Pitch (The New Yorker, 10 August 2015)

Scott Adams: Donald Trump Is a 'Clown Genius' (Business Insider, 17 August 2015)

Dilbert's Creator Explains How Donald Trump Manipulates You (Forbes, 20 August 2015)

How conspiracy theories poisoned the Republican Party (Salon, 1 September 2015)

Donald Trump's Comedic Genius (The New Republic, 8 September 2015)

How advertising research explains Donald Trump's profound appeal (The Conversation, 14 September 2015)

Pithy, Mean and Powerful: How Donald Trump Mastered Twitter (The New York Times, 30 October 2015)

Donald Trump, Political Mass Hypnotist? (Forbes, 28 November 2015)

Donald Trump is a liar. (The Boston Globe, 30 November 2015)

Donald Trump Is Not a Liar: He's something worse: a bullshit artist. (The New Republic, 1 December 2015)

Trump's Brilliant but Evil Marketing Ploy That's Tricking Us All (The Hustle, 7 December 2015)

The surprising genius of Donald Trump's Twitter account (The Washington Post, 10 December 2015)

Most of What Donald Trump Says is B.S., Fact-Checking Website Says (U.S. News & World Report, 21 December 2015)

Can Donald Trump's social media genius take him all the way to the White House? (The Guardian, 23 December 2015)

Because so much of the attention placed on the manipulation image was given to the modes under which this disinformation was disseminated (e.g., the media, social media, conspiracy theories), another variation of this image emerged placing an inordinate amount of attention to Trump's *language* as the most primal site of manipulation. In

what followed, the media homed in on the perplexing nature of *how* Trump communicated (as opposed to *what* was being communicated). There, they wrestled with how this narcissistic-bully-madman who was at once an 'artist,' 'genius' and 'master' of manipulation spoke to his base in the language of a child (e.g., 'Donald Trump Talks Like a Third-Grader' *Politico*, 13 August 2015; 'Donald Trump Speaks at a 4th Grade Level' *Politico*, 21 October 2015; 'Donald Trump's Debate Strategy Is Stolen From 8-Year-Olds and Cicero,' *Slate*, 15 December 2015). To answer the question later posed in *The Washington Post* headline: 'Why smart people believe all the crazy things Trump says (8 December 2015), the media once again played psychologist observing his body language, his delivery, and his use of words:

Donald Trump: In his own colourful words (BBC News, 22 July 2015)

Best president ever! How Trump's love of hyperbole could backfire (Reuters, 28 August 2015)

Top 10 Lessons From Donald Trump's Body Language (Psychology Today, 17 September 2015)

What Language Experts Find So Strange About Donald Trump (ThinkProgress, 15 September 2015)

How Donald Trump's language works for him (The Washington Post, 15 September 2015)

How Trump's bumptious body language dominates (CNN, 17 September 2015)

How Donald Trump Talks (The New York Times, 5 December 2015)

95,000 Words, Many of Them Ominous, From Donald Trump's Tongue (The New York Times, 5 December 2015)

Just how unique is the political rhetoric of the Donald Trump era? (The Washington Post, 7 December 2015)

Donald Trump: Does he believe what he says? Body language expert decodes Republican's most divisive speeches (The Independent, 10 December 2015)

The Plot Against America: Donald Trump's Rhetoric (The New Yorker, 15 December 2015)

Analyzing Donald Trump's Body Language (A&E, 17 December 2015)

A Major, Super-Classy List of Donald Trump's Favorite Words (New York Magazine, 22 December 2015)

A Linguistic Analysis Of Donald Trump Shows Why People Like Him So Much (Digg, 30 December 2015)

Altogether, by obfuscating the *political* content of the Trump campaign, the manipulation image, in essence, attempted to explain its outsized support on the narrowness of Trump's publicity conning, branding skills, social media trickery, huckstering, choice of words, debate strategy and hypnotic body language. Just as the misperception image gave way to the manipulation image, with the widespread depiction of the voting public as feeble-minded and helplessly vulnerable to manipulation, therein lay another image with downright antidemocratic implications.

7.5 The Populism Image

At this stage, it's important to note that the Trump campaign was not the only benefactor of the popular 'anger' that was shaping the electoral field. 2015 also marked the rise of another 'outsider' candidate in the figure of Bernie Sanders, the Independent Senator from Vermont (e.g., 'Bernie Sanders draws crowd of 10,000 at Wisconsin rally' *The Guardian*, 2 July 2015; 'Bernie Sanders is surging in a fresh batch of new polls,' *Business Insider*, 19 October 2015).

Like the Trump campaign, the Sanders campaign (SC) was widely depicted as 'unconventional,' emerging from the 'political fringes,' and vociferously hostile to 'the political establishment' and 'the rigged system.' And like the Trump campaign, rather than running as an independent third-party candidate, Sanders decided to run *within* an existing party (in his case the Democratic Party) at the same time he would run *against* that very party's 'establishment' (e.g., 'Democrats Find That Anti-Establishment Isn't Just a G.O.P. Theme,' *The New York Times*, 4 October 2015; 'Bernie Sanders Goes to War With the Democratic Party,' *The Atlantic*, 8 December 2015). Either way, by late summer, the combined influence of the Trump and Sanders campaigns on the course of American politics was irrefutable:

The unexpected rise of Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump (*The Washington Post*, 3 July 2015)

The Pissed-Off Primary: Bernie Sanders Vs. Donald Trump (*The Daily Beast*, 13 August 2015)

The Year of the Underdog? (*U.S. News & World Report*, 26 August 2015)

Trump, Sanders and the Protectionist Revolution (*CNN*, 26 August 2015)

Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders: The Two Big Phenomena of This Election
(*NBC News*, 17 December 2015)

Already early on in the Sanders campaign, like they had done with the figure of Trump, the media began shifting attention away from his politics and towards his personality (e.g., 'Great moments in Bernie Sanders's hair,' *The Washington Post*, 29 April 2015; 'Bernie Sanders's Hair Is a Media Magnet' *New York Magazine*, 15 May 2015; 'Why does Bernie Sanders dress like that? Because he can.,' *The Washington Post*, 13 October 2015, 'Why Bernie Sanders won't brush his hair,' *Al Jazeera*, November 19, 2015). However, because of their *undeniable similarity* on the political scene, the reading public would demand a more adequate explanation to better address the root of this openly 'anti-establishment' *politics*. There, the deployment of the term 'populism' served to smooth over the ambiguities found in the twin *political* developments. The nebulous term served as a common denominator that could in one fell swoop both acknowledge the *politics* of the Trump and Sanders campaigns all while *negating, disarming* and *delegitimizing* their political threats to the consensual view of society. What exactly 'populism' entailed not even the media could answer. Already prior to the rise of Trump and Sanders campaigns, articles like 'The Problem With Middle-Class Populism' (*The New York Times*, 4 February 2015), 'The problem with populism' (*The Guardian*, 17 February 2015), and 'We're all populists now' (*The Washington Post*, 15 May 2015) naturally prompted questions surrounding the term itself. Was it problematic? Or useless? Had »we« indeed already all been populists? Either way, the very ambiguity of the term proved to be its greatest asset. Lacking any coherent meaning or explanatory power in a theoretical sense, the term in its more recent iterations however did manage to hold a strong *associative power* in a cultural sense. Throughout 2014 and into early 2015, the term was regularly mobilized to describe a variety of events unfolding in Europe, especially those with origins on the far right of European politics:

Pitchfork Politics: The Populist Threat to Liberal Democracy (*Foreign Affairs*, 8 August 2014)

Far-right Freedom party exploits Austrian unease (*The Economist*, 20 May 2014)

The far right in the 2014 European elections: Of earthquakes, cartels and designer fascists (*The Washington Post*, 30 May 2014) Populist's Brash Tactics Stir Fears of Crisis in Pakistan (*The New York Times*, 24 August 2014)

Right wing in Europe could bring 'turmoil' (*CNBC News*, 2 January 2015) Don't Let Extremists Curtail European Democracy (*Al Jazeera*, 8 January 2015)

Extremists are united in an unholy alliance (*Financial Times*, 8 January 2015)

Danger of right-wing uproar after Paris attacks (*CNBC News*, 9 January 2015)

BBC Democracy Day: Europe 'faces political earthquakes' (*BBC News*, 20 January 2015)

'Merkel, Kiss My Ass' and 7 Other Slogans From Germany's New Right-Wing Populists (*Foreign Policy*, 22 January 2015)

European democracy enters dangerous times (*Financial Times*, 30 January 2015)

First Greece, Now Spain: Is Europe in for a Political Earthquake? (*The Fiscal Times*, 2 February 2015)

The Guardian view of Europe's populists: left or right, they are united by a worrying xenophobia (*The Guardian*, 17 February 2015)

Populism and democracy: friend or foe? Rising stars deepen dilemma (*The Conversation*, 23 April 2015)

Does extremism threaten Hungary's standing in Europe? (*BBC News*, 11 June 2015)

Rise of Far-Right Party in Denmark Reflects Europe's Unease (*The New York Times*, 19 June 2015)

You're Better Than This, Europe (*The New York Times*, 28 June 2015)

Situated in such a grim context, the term implicitly and explicitly began to signify a number of 'destabilizing' and 'dangerous' elements, which in the worst case, had *threatened the very underpinnings of democracy itself*. In these examples, populism was understood as the very deformation of democratic values, portrayed as *a democratic rejection* of equality, justice, and liberty. This portrayal only underlined the longstanding *vulnerabilities* that were said to lay at the heart of democracy itself. Vulnerabilities understood as the *emotionality* and *irrationality* of the masses which could be easily exploited by the manipulative powers of sinister political operators. Furthermore, it signaled 'crisis,' 'xenophobia,' 'political earthquakes' and 'turmoil,' all unwelcome developments for an American public still reeling from its own financial crisis. Thus, it was in part these particular images that were implicit in the media's use of what we might describe as *the populism image* that were leveraged to explain the rise of the Trump and Sanders campaigns:

The populist sentiment fueling both the Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump's Campaigns (The Los Angeles Times, 14 August 2015)

Are Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump Flip Sides of Same Populist Coin? (Forward, 2 September 2015)

The Pros and Cons of Populism (The New Yorker, 7 September 2015)

Bernie, Donald, and the Promise of Populism (The Nation, 21 September 2015)

Here's why Trump and Sanders are popular right now (Fortune Magazine, 24 September 2015)

Populism from unlikely candidates (The Los Angeles Times, 29 December 2015)

Even when presented benevolently, the populism image cast basic popular support—a prerequisite for the democratic process—into the ominous dangers of the populist unknown. This was perfected in *Newsweek's* 'America Is in Danger of Being Ruled by the Mob' (4 October 2015) and the *Vox* article, 'Are Americans losing faith in democracy?' (18 December 2015) where the death of democracy was portrayed *through the activity of voting*: »A lot of Americans are viscerally angry at the political system. They hate Washington, they don't trust politicians, and they are increasingly willing to *vote* for populist outsiders—like Donald Trump. [emphasis added].« In essence, for these representatives of the news media, the American voting public were *participating* in a democratic process the *wrong* way.

In essence, the deployment of the populism image provided this political discourse with an heir of *intellectualism* that could deftly intellectualize away the will of the demos. This image reduced those participating in the democratic process as not only blinded by their emotions but *shepherded onto the wrong side of democracy simply by the likes of a charismatic and alluring leader*.

At the same time, the two sides of this 'populist coin' were not as equal in the eyes of the press as they had appeared to be. While the media had supposedly been *tricked* into Trump's 'publicity con,' the Sanders campaign was strikingly ignored (e.g., 'Two Candidates Surge in 2016 Polling—but Only Trump, Not Sanders, Fascinates Media,' *FAIR*, 21 August 2015). Throughout 2015, a number of Sanders supporters and media outlets found themselves asking: 'Bernie who? Why does TV media ignore Sanders even as he tops polls?' (*The Christian Science Monitor*, 1 October 2015) and 'Where's Bernie? Media Ignores Sanders Though He's More Popular Than Trump' (*The Intercept*, 17 December 2015). Even the Sanders campaign itself claimed to be the target of a 'media blackout' (e.g., 'Sanders Campaign Decries 'Bernie Blackout' on Corporate Network News,' *The Blaze*, 12 December 2015). Although some outlets later attempted to backtrack (e.g., 'Has Bernie Sanders been 'woefully under-covered?,' *CNN*, 20 December 2015), there was little that could argue with the findings reported in *The Nation's* 'The Discourse Suffers When Trump Gets 23 Times As Much Coverage as Sanders' (14 December 2015). Citing a recent study by *The Tyndall Report* which tracked the first 11 months of the election coverage across the major television broadcasters, the article revealed how despite its popularity and polling numbers, the Sanders campaign received only 10 minutes

of national coverage, amounting to a fifth of the election coverage given to then Vice President Joe Biden *who hadn't even officially entered the race*. In contrast, the study also revealed how the Trump campaign was given some 230 minutes of coverage translating into a staggering 27 percent of that year's election coverage in what had already been described to be 'a crowded field' with seventeen contenders on the Republican ticket alone.

If the Trump and Sanders campaigns were both representative of this popular, anti-establishment politics, then this great imbalance in coverage suggests the *primary definers* of the *establishment* undertook two distinct strategies to diffuse the two adversarial campaigns: one *restrictive* and one *assertive*. If the media actively *marginalized* the Sanders campaign by simply ignoring it (i.e., 'Bernie Blackout'), for the Trump campaign, it engaged in an open war of words—a move made explicit in *Politico's* 'It's Time to Declare War on Donald Trump' (*Politico*, 16 September 2015). *As such, in what followed, it was the 'problem' of the Trump campaign and its support that bore the brunt of the populism image as the primaries unfolded:*

Donald Trump: The Billionaire for Blue-Collars (*Newsweek*, 23 June 2015)

Republican race has the flavour of 'populism on crack' (*The Telegraph*, 23 June 2015)

Why Do Working-Class Voters Love Donald Trump? (*The Atlantic*, 10 August 2015)

Le Donald, And Western Democracy's Populism Problem (*Foreign Policy*, 21 August 2015)

The simple-minded populism that controls the GOP (*The Washington Post*, 21 August 2015)

Nativism And Economic Anxiety Fuel Trump's Populist Appeal (*NPR News*, 4 September 2015)

The US Economic System Is Unjust. Says Who? Says Billionaire Donald Trump (*The Guardian*, 6 September 2015)

The Billionaire Candidate and His Blue-Collar Following (*The Atlantic*, 11 September 2015)

The Republican Class War (*The New Yorker*, 2 November 2015)

What's behind Donald Trump's Walmart vote (*USA Today*, 19 November 2015)

How Trump is Tapping Into the Blue Collar Vote (*Fortune Magazine*, 18 November 2015)

Trump Rides a Blue-Collar Wave. (*The Wall Street Journal*, 18 November 2015) How the Economy Helps Trump (*Politico*, 10 December 2015)

Donald Trump Ushers In A New Era Of Pitchfork Populism (*The Washington Post*, 10 December 2015)

Pitchfork politics (*The Economist*, 30 December 2015)

As with the manipulation image, this image consistently reaffirmed the 'blue collar' and 'working class' nature of the Trump campaign's base, even belittling segments of it to the 'Walmart vote.' However, throughout these headlines, the working class was not merely presented in relation to its socio-economic status, but as the manifestation of a particular identity group as we will explore in the next image.

7.6 The Whiteness Image

Throughout 2015, almost effortlessly, a number of publications transposed the notion of 'blue collar workers' into what became routinely and unhesitatingly referred to as the 'white working class' (e.g., 'Why Democrats Can't Figure Out White Working-Class Voters,' *VICE*, 16 January 2015, 'Donald Trump and the white working class,' *Reuters*, 25 August 2015; 'The decline of America's white working class,' *Chicago Tribune*, 5 November 2015). However, this ever so subtle *racialization* was by no means limited to the *relational* concept of the working class. With the application of what we might call *the whiteness image*, a part of the voting public became *naturally* interpreted as 'the white vote' (e.g., 'The White Vote and the GOP,' *U.S. News & World Report*, 8 September 2015) and a part of the country became *naturally* drawn up as 'white America' (e.g., 'Who lost White America? Blame these guys,' *Bloomberg*, 2 October 2015).

In her work 'Whiteness, Racism, and Identity,' Barbara Fields has written at length about the problematic nature of the term and its consequences. As she writes:

»whiteness leads to no conclusions that it does not begin with as assumptions. Whiteness is a racial identity; therefore, white people have a racial identity. Whiteness equals white supremacy; therefore, European immigrants become white by adopting white supremacy. Whiteness entails material benefits; therefore, the material benefits white people receive are a reward for whiteness.« (2001: 53)

Like populism, while perhaps *analytically vexing*, the notion of whiteness still carried a profound cultural content. Of course, this credibility to a large extent rested on the fact that it *seemed* to be adequately congruent with the socio-economic reality of the United

States. After all, to this very day, the legacy of racism still continues to leave its mark on the shape and character of American life. However regardless of its seeming omnipresence, as Fields assures her readers »displacing questions of political, economic, and social power, whiteness offers us endless variations on theme of race that, reproducing their assumptions as conclusions, invariably end where they started.« (54)

Thus, rather than better understanding our world, the term serves to reawaken the horrors of the past in a manner easily abused towards the narrow ends of the present. Worse yet, where a white vote and a white America had been reawakened from their slumber, so a 'black vote' (e.g., 'Democrats are heavily dependent on the black vote. That's an opportunity for the GOP,' *The Washington Post*, 31 July 2015; 'Do Black Votes Matter to Donald Trump?,' *The Atlantic*, 30 November 2015) and a 'black America' (e.g., 'The Burden of Debt on Black America,' *The Atlantic*, 9 October 2015) had awoken. With this, matters of *race* were reinserted into American political life after its hard-fought removal. We only must turn to the valiant efforts of the civil rights movement steadfast on exorcising the fantasy of *race* from its grips on public life—a legacy best encapsulated in the enduring words of Martin Luther King Jr. who famously orated: »I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character« (1963). With the return of whiteness (and its natural counterpart: blackness), *the whiteness image helped reinstate the dominant assumptions of a universal white and black populations with their own fundamental interests*. Moreover, helped to shift the perception of social antagonism away from economic class to that of interracial strife. Thus, the whiteness image reified the notion of *race relations* in the very same moment when the Trump and Sanders campaigns had forcibly centered popular attention around the very issue of economic class.

By deploying this image, the media began addressing white America's avowedly unique 'anxieties' and 'insecurities' alongside its 'privileges' as explanations behind the rise of the Trump campaign. Here, the various images of psychology, toxic masculinity, misperception, manipulation continued to consolidate into the evermore profane image that was the whiteness image:

Emasculated white men love Donald Trump: The real reason a billionaire bozo rules the GOP (*Salon*, 10 September 2015)

White People Explain Why They Feel Oppressed (*VICE News*, 17 October 2015)

Why Does the (White) Lower Middle Class Vote Republican? (*The Huffington Post*, 31 October 2015)

Why Donald Trump appeals to disaffected white voters (*Chicago Tribune*, 10 November 2015)

The real reason Donald Trump appeals to working-class whites (*Salon*, 10 November 2015)

The Pessimism of White, Working-Class America (*Bloomberg*, 17 November 2015)

Why Donald Trump appeals to disaffected white voters (*Chicago Tribune*, 10 November 2015)

Trump's untruths woo working-class whites who 'want to be proud again' (*Al Jazeera*, 9 December 2015)

America's self-destructive whites (*The Washington Post*, 10 December 2015)

Obama Must Reach Out to Angry Whites (*Politico*, 22 December 2015)

The articles that flowed from this premise, unproblematically referred to this supposedly coherent population as an 'angry,' 'pessimistic' and 'self-destructive' people, who more recently had 'fallen from grace' and were thus easily 'wooed.' *The whiteness image in essence, not only fabricated and mainstreamed the racist notion of a 'white people,' but as with all previous images, it did so on its own particular terms set by its primary and secondary definers.* As Fields argues, whiteness itself is indelibly bound with assumptions implicit in and constitutive of *racism*. This could be vividly seen in *Vox's* 'Donald Trump and the politics of white insecurity' (20 July 2015). There, expressing 'worry' about Trump's 'success,' the interviewer *innocently* asks: »Where does this support come from? Why are some Americans drawn to this rhetoric? *Surely, I thought, there must be something more complex driving it than just simple racism* [emphasis added].« Later in the interview, drawing on the misperception image, as well as 'taking the public voice,' the explanation at the heart of the whiteness image was neatly unpacked in the following passage:

»There's something about bad economic situations that's leading people to *feel* like they're under siege [emphasis added], and almost kind of cling to their group a little more, and feel like their group is threatened [...] Whiteness has come to matter more in *how people understand their sense of self* [emphasis added].«

In *The New York Times's* 'Opinion | Donald Trump's Appeal' (2 December 2015), invoking an *expert*, in this case a psychologist, this white working-class support for Trump was explained on the basis that he made them 'feel safe.' The article went on to state: »Poll data from the Pew Research Center shows how much Trump depends on the politically restive white working class.« What was particularly striking about this example, was its *transparent* fabrication of 'the white working class' whose existence it literally projected onto the data. Nowhere in the original report did the *Pew Research Center* refer to the white working class, or for that matter issues of *race* or *ethnicity*. These are

only a few of the examples of the ways in which, what are essentially racist notions, slowly entered their way into everyday discourse.

As will become plainly evident in our third event, the whiteness image would provide a necessary connective link in establishing the rise of the far right phenomenon. But for now, let us turn to the second event that just so happened to take place on the same morning as Trump's announcement speech—in other words *before* 'The Trump Show' had ever aired.

8 Paradigm Shift: The Other Terror Threat

On June 16th, 2015, *The New York Times* ran an opinion piece in that morning's paper titled 'The Other Terror Threat,' later published online as the 'Opinion | The Growing Right-Wing Terror Threat.' There, the authors Charles Kurzman, a professor of sociology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and David Schanzer, the director of the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security, addressed a rising concern among law enforcement officials, that of right-wing terrorism committed by 'individuals on the fringes of right-wing politics.' In short, the crux of the piece argued that: »The main terrorist threat in the United States is not from violent Muslim extremists, but from right-wing extremists. *Just ask the police* [emphasis added].«

This revelation which essentially placed the, until then *global*—and yet uniquely *Middle Eastern*—War on Terror on its head, was the result of a series of findings that emerged out of a joint study between Kurzman & Schanzer and the *Police Executive Research Forum* (PERF). Surveying 382 law enforcement agencies, each jurisdiction was asked what they perceived to be the 'top three terror threats.' There, they learned that 74 per cent of the agencies spoke of 'anti-government extremism' as a top concern, opposed to only 39 per cent of which identified the 'extremism connected with Al Qaeda or like-minded terrorist organizations.' Furthermore, the authors noted how »only 3 per cent identified the threat from Muslim extremists as severe, compared with 7 per cent for anti-government and other forms of extremism.« In a follow-up interview conducted with 19 agencies the following year, while still maintaining how 'radicalization from the Middle East was a concern,' their report revealed that it was 'not as dangerous as radicalization among right-wing extremists.'

Aside from their own research, the authors backed up their central argument with additional data. Citing a study conducted by The United States Military Academy's *Combating Terrorism Center*, where the authors highlighted how 'right-wing extremists averaged 337 attacks per year in the decade after 9/11,' whereby only 'an average of six terrorism-related plots' were carried out by 'American Muslims' per year. This disparity was once again captured in a *New America Foundation*, which found »39 fatalities from 'non-jihadist' homegrown extremists and 26 fatalities from 'jihadist' extremists.« Similar results were reported by the Start Center's Global Terrorism Database, that had listed 65 attacks 'associated with right-wing ideologies' as opposed to the 24 attacks by 'Muslim extremists' in the United States since 9/11.

As for the actors committing these acts of 'right-wing terrorism,' the authors quoted 'an officer from a large metropolitan area' who spoke of »militias, neo-Nazis and sovereign citizens« being the biggest threat. Besides this roll call, they listed several examples of

anti-government extremist violence as carried out against various law enforcement officials and ‘courthouses.’ Further examples included the stockpiling of weapons, including by a Texan ‘militant’ who was reported to have shouted ‘revolution’ before being arrested under »suspicion of attempting to rob an armored car in order to buy weapons and explosives and attack law enforcement.« To counter this disturbing trend, Kurzman & Schanzer assured their readers that:

»Law enforcement agencies around the country are training their officers to recognize signs of anti-government extremism and to exercise caution during routine traffic stops, criminal investigations and other interactions with potential extremists.«

Moreover, they noted how these agencies had since received a handout presented by the Department of Justice that alongside noting the 25 officers who had lost their lives at the hands of ‘right-wing extremists’ since 2000, also emphasized that: ‘The threat is real.’

Regardless of whether jihadist or non-jihadist in origin, the authors assured their audience that »terrorism of all forms has accounted for a tiny proportion of violence in America.« Instead, the tragedy, was the behavior of the press and the general public, as Kurzman & Schanzer lamented:

»Public debates on terrorism focus intensely on Muslims. But this focus does not square with the low number of plots in the United States by Muslims, and it does a disservice to a minority group that suffers from increasingly hostile public opinion.«

This sentiment indirectly helped reinforce their closing statement: »As State and local police agencies remind us, right-wing, anti-government extremism is the *leading* source of ideological violence in America [emphasis added].«

9 The ‘Growing Right-Wing Terror Threat’ Equation

As we will later see, this work of Kurzman & Schanzer would go on to become the statistical basis on which the rise of the far right phenomenon would unfold. Following the structure of *Policing the Crisis*, this next section will be dedicated to its interrogation. Such was a pivotal step for Hall et al. as they operationalized what they called the ‘rising crime rate’ equation. With this equation, Hall et al. could analyze the ‘chain of argument’ which undergirded the mugging panic link by link. This was done, so they wrote, »to examine each element in the argument in turn« (1978: 13). In this section, in what we will call the ‘growing right-wing terror threat’ equation, we will attempt to do the same as it relates to the chain of argument that would go on to animate the rise of the far right phenomenon. However, before we approach our equation, let us briefly take note of what the author collective described as the pitfalls of data collection and presentation in police and media reporting.

When it comes to the appearance of statistics, »whether crime rates or opinion polls,« they emphasized the absolute subtlety of their ideological function:

»they appear to *ground* free floating and controversial impressions in the hard, incontrovertible soil of numbers. Both the media and the public have enormous respect for ‘the facts’ – *hard facts*. And there is no fact so ‘hard’ as a number – unless it is the percentage difference between two numbers. With regard to criminal statistics, these are not – as one might suppose – sure indicators of the volume of crime committed, or very meaningful ones.« (13)

Instead, the authors went to provide a useful list of reasons why such statistics on their first impression—as law enforcement agencies themselves have recognized—can be quite misleading (13-14):

1. crime statistics refer only to reported crime: they cannot quantify the ‘dark figure’
2. different areas collate their statistics differently
3. police sensitisation to, and mobilisation to deal with, selected, ‘targeted’ crimes increase both the number the police turn up, and the number the public report
4. public anxiety about particular ‘highlighted’ offences also leads to ‘over-reporting’
5. crime statistics are based on legal (not sociological) categories and are, thus, arbitrary
6. changes in the law make strict comparisons over time difficult

And lastly, and most importantly, Hall et al. remind us how, in the last instance: »everything depends on how the crime statistics are *interpreted* (by the police), and then on how these interpretations are *reported* (in the media)« (14). With this brief caution, let us also make one last pitstop on our way to evaluating the ‘growing right-wing terror

threat' equation by addressing an additional aspect headlined in the original print publication of the op-ed.

9.1 'Other'

As Kurzman & Schanzer made clear in their original title, 'The Other Terror Threat,' the leading source of ideological violence in the United States was not carried out by *the usual suspects* but rather by the *other*. In political and philosophical discourse, this notion of the 'other' assumes an 'othering,' terms which *Merriam Webster* currently defines as »to treat or consider (a person or a group of people) as alien to oneself or one's group (as because of different racial, sexual, or cultural characteristics)« (2021). Though the concept is by no means new, with the outbreak of the global War on Terror and the stigmatization of Muslims the concept gained traction in the academy, and eventually becoming nearly synonymous with the popular notion of 'Islamophobia' that was said to have been afflicting the Western world. By 2015, downstream from the academy, the term bisected into two distinct channels. In one instance it entered into mainstream media reporting and became featured in articles like *The Atlantic's* 'What Does 'Islamophobia' Actually Mean?' (15 October 2014) as well as *CNN's* 'Opinion: Why Islamophobia is so dangerous' (3 December 2014) which went on to write about news stories that depict Muslims in a questionable light:

»create the framework for the "othering" of communities and in particular may influence people's perceptions of Muslims, especially when combined with lazy journalism that fails to correctly represent the true facts of each case.«

At the same time as it permeated corporate media, it found a natural ally in, and across currents on, the left-wing of politics. Whether in antiracist, postcolonial, or socialist struggles, the term began making the rounds like in *International Socialism's* 'Islamophobia: the othering of Europe's Muslims' (11 April 2015). Perhaps the pinnacle of this embrace came in April 2015 with the launch of the 'Othering and Belonging Conference' hosted by the University of Berkley. There, the platform was given to a number of prominent left-wing activists and thinkers including the likes of bell hooks and Naomi Klein.

While this notion of 'othering' is not directly a part of the 'chain of argument' in the proper sense, the term transmits themes of Islamophobia and the victimization of 'Muslim Americans' who constituted one pole of the *othering-spectrum*. Though Kurzman & Schanzer did not explicitly mobilize the notion of 'othering' or 'Islamophobia,' its chief tenets were made glaringly obvious in the structure of their argument and the unfair perception afflicting this particular Muslim population. If we understand our following analysis of the 'growing right-wing terror threat' equation to be analyzing its internal logic, then it is 'othering' moreover, Islamophobia, that provides the societal framing insulating and consequently influencing the course of events in which the 'growing right-

wing terror threat' equation had operated in and around. With that said, let us now begin drawing attention to that equation.

9.2 'Growing'

As was the case in *Policing the Crisis*, the concept of a 'rise' in 'rates' constitute a central component justifying the panicked responses and attention placed on, in this case, 'right-wing extremism.' Besides helping to visualize the *movement* and *direction* of the threat, it is in this portion of the argument that the media found some of their most sought-after news values among which included those of *novelty*, *becomingness*, and *extraordinariness*. However, already here, the *presentation* of the issue at hand is key. As Hall et al. cautioned us at the outset of this chapter, everything depends on how statistics are both *interpreted* and *reported*. Rather than refer to a *rise* in actual *incidents* of right-wing extremism, 'growth' for Kurzman & Schanzer refers to the rise in the *share* of all 'terrorism' incidents *interpreted* as right-wing extremism. So, the problem at hand isn't the actual cases of terrorism on the rise, but the proportion of terrorism *labeled* as right-wing extremism. As such, recalling the author's admission that »terrorism of all forms has accounted for a tiny proportion of violence in America,« there they make it clear that they are not concerned in cases of violence per se, but rather in »the leading source of ideological violence in America.«

Also of interest for us is START's 2016 Global Terrorism Index which reported that in 2015 international 'terrorism' had been found to be at a recent low. Falling some ten per cent, from 13,486 cases in 2014 to 12,089 by 2015 (14). A phenomenon which the report described as »the first decline since 2010« (2). Although this is forgivable given it was published in the following year, what it does suggest is that by one metric, *2015 had in fact represented a moment when terrorism had been falling and not 'growing.'* (2). Moreover, in regard to their own soon to be published study 'Law Enforcement Assessment of the Violent Extremism Threat' (2015b), Kurzman & Schanzer neglected to share with the readers of the *New York Times* that in fact right-wing extremism, according to their own citation of START's previous Global Terrorism Index, resulted in a *smaller* number of deaths than compared with so-called 'Muslim terrorism':

»The Global Terrorism Database maintained by the START Center at the University of Maryland includes 65 attacks in the United States associated with right-wing ideologies and 24 attacks by Muslims since 9/11, although right-wing attacks resulted in slightly fewer fatalities (17 as against 24).« (Kurzman & Schanzer 2015b: 9)

Not only in this chain-link have we attempted to dispel the duplicitous notion that terrorist *acts* were on the rise, but highlight the crucial role that interpretation plays, and as such, cast doubt on the likelihood of a *rise* in terrorist acts whatsoever.

9.3 'Right-Wing'

As Kurzman & Schanzer made evident in their concluding remarks, besides countering terrorism more generally, their primary concern was the manner in which 'public debates' and 'public opinion' have effectively stigmatized 'Muslim Americans' as terrorists. Rather than addressing the nature of the global War on Terror, to reconcile the shameful reality from which Islamophobia had sprung, in their conclusion, the authors essentially proposed ameliorating this scourge by shifting the blame onto the *real* culprits—to *those* interpreted as committing the majority of terrorism—to reiterate the article those »individuals on the fringes of right-wing politics.« However, throughout their article, never was there a clear definition established of who and what constituted the 'right-wing' in right-wing extremism. Instead, Kurzman & Schanzer imbued this floating signifier with meaning in two separate ways: through *negative* and *positive* associations. The former was done by simply invoking 'not from violent Muslim extremists' and '»non-jihadist« homegrown extremists.' In other words, *this defined right-wing extremism by everything that it was not*. The latter is a bit more deceptive, and therefore more demanding. Like, in our previous examples of 'populism' or 'whiteness,' while the terms *appear* to align with the situation on the ground, in the case of populism congruent with the melding of 'popular unrest' and 'parliamentary politics,' or whiteness with the presence of a 'pigmentation' and 'privilege,' on a second glance, because the terms lack any particular *internal* content or coherence, they simply remain just that, *terms*, ones applied to a theoretically endless selection of phenomena. Yet, like with populism and whiteness, as we saw, such indistinct terms can in fact gain distinction and meaning through the exercise of consecutive associations, the former for instance with notions of turmoil, crisis, uproar, xenophobia, and the latter, à la Fields, with notions of racial identity, white supremacy, and material benefits. In this sense, right-wing presents a similar conundrum. On the first glance it appears to harbor an obvious and coherent content, especially in light of its historical trajectory. A historical trajectory only further reinforced by the powerful evocation of 'neo-Nazis.' Besides the obvious imagery of National Socialism, the inclusion of 'militias' and 'anti-government extremists'; alongside more specific groups like 'the sovereign citizen movement'; and handful examples of concrete incidents that included the 'attacking of a courthouse' where the attacker 'fired an assault rifle at police officers' and set off 'tear gas and smoke grenades' in Forsyth County, Georgia, or 'anti-government militants' in Nevada who 'shot two police officers' and 'placed a "Don't tread on me" flag on their bodies' or the 'right-wing militant in Texas' mentioned earlier—when approached together, all began to progressively furnish the otherwise nebulous category with a certain form and evoke a certain image.

While the negative association is the most consistent and *objective* in so far that it assumes the categories of violent Muslim or jihadist extremism themselves to be a coherent and rigid terminology, it is also so generalizing that it runs the risk of becoming obsolete by assuming nearly *all* accounts of what might be understood as terrorism (which

for instance, could theoretically include ‘left-wing extremism’). The positive associating, even though it can assemble a seemingly credible even concrete specter, still does not manage to resolve the problem of its internal incoherence and lack of definition.

At best, like with Islamophobic policing which Kurzman & Schanzer seem to detest, policing the activity of, say ‘right-wing extremists,’ can only rely on the stereotyping, stigmatizing and ultimately pre-criminalizing of a general population on the merits of *appearances* extracted from whatever the original conception of the extremist threat was made out to be. In the case of Islamophobia, such discriminatory policing practices effectively profiled that boiled down to: brown-skinned, Middle Eastern, Arab, Muslim, men. In the case of the right-wing in right-wing extremism, the term, for now, still *appears* to be neutral. This leads into that aspect which makes the mobilization of the ‘right-wing’ threat even more pernicious. Whereby the notions of Islamic/Muslim/Jihadi extremism are intrinsically yoked to religion, albeit to one which claims a quarter of the global population, it is the intrinsically *political* nature of the right-wing which operates even more ambiguously and can be applied even more universally *to whichever political populations are defined into it*. But these observations are by no means novel. In fact, in ‘Challengers from the Sidelines: Understanding America’s Violent Far-Right’ (Perliger 2012), one of the reports cited by Kurzman & Schanzer themselves, its author Arie Perliger himself admits:

»The study of far-right movements and parties has for years suffered from terminological chaos and the absence of a clear and conceptual framework. Hence, it is not merely that different scholars have used different terms to describe these political groups, such as far right, extreme right, right wing populism, and radical right, but that there are also disagreements regarding the kind of ideological foundations that constitute the far-right paradigm. Moreover, the particularities of different political systems also facilitate confusion.« (13)

Kurzman & Schanzer tacitly acknowledged this ambiguity, even if unproblematically, describing their use of varying data sets ‘using *different definitions* of political violence [emphasis added]’ so as to ‘tell *comparable* stories [emphasis added].’ Thus, we return to the importance of *interpretation* at work. Right-wing, and by extension right-wing extremism, are both concepts in the eye of the beholder, they are whatever they are *defined* to be—what is important then for us to habitually ask is who exactly is it who does the defining. After tackling the right-wing in right-wing extremism, let us now turn to the *extremism* at the heart of this debate.

9.4 ‘Terror’

Like the term right-wing, ‘terrorism’ (what the authors use interchangeably with extremism) is an equally ambiguous and pernicious term. And like with the former, it too has

been formally recognized for its 'terminological chaos' (e.g., 'The Study of Terrorism: Definitional Problems' Jenkins 1980; 'Terrorism - The Definitional Problem' Schmid 2004; 'Twenty-first Century Terrorism: The Definitional Problem of Complex Political Environments' Suarez 2008). This was laid bare when following the 9/11 attacks, the British Ambassador, Jeremy Greenstock, speaking to the UN nakedly remarked: »Increasingly, questions are being raised about the problem of the definition of a terrorist. Let us be wise and focused about this: terrorism is terrorism [...] What looks, smells and kills like terrorism is terrorism« (as quoted in Schmid 2004: 375).

Already in 1980, Brian Jenkins grasped the utter incoherency of the term which at the same time nevertheless retained a political potency:

»The term "terrorism" has no precise or widely-accepted definition. The problem of defining terrorism is compounded by the fact that terrorism has repeatedly become a fad word used promiscuously and often applied to a variety of acts of violence which are not strictly terrorism by definition. It is generally pejorative. Some governments are prone to label as terrorism all violent acts committed by their political opponents, while anti-government extremists frequently claim to be victims of government terror. What is called terrorism thus seems to depend on one's point of view. Use of the term implies a moral judgement; and of one party can successfully attach the label terrorist to its opponent, then it has indirectly persuaded others to adopt its moral viewpoint. Terrorism is what the bad guys do.«
(1)

As he makes clear, rather than a particular action or event, the term is less representative of reality, than it is of a *moralistic universe*. If this all sounds reminiscent to the use of the right-wing, that is because terrorism is wrestling with the same problems of internal incoherence. Recognizing this *original sin*, Jenkins goes on to emphasize the ways in which the term only further distorts when exposed to dramatic media treatment:

»Terrorism is also an attention-getting word, and therefore also tends to be used, especially in the news media, to heighten the drama surrounding any act of violence. What we have in sum, is the sloppy use of a word that is rather imprecisely defined to begin with. Terrorism may properly refer to a specific set of actions the primary intent of which is to produce fear and alarm that may serve a variety of purposes. But terrorism in general usage frequently is also applied to similar acts of violence—all ransom kidnappings, all hi-jackings, thrill-killings—which are not all intended by their perpetrators to be primarily terror-producing.« (1-2)

By the time its particular content has been eclipsed by its general usage, in other words, once the term has been exhausted of all its original content, then all that remains is its outline which finds itself in need of *meaning* to stay relevant. In such a state, it can be found around every corner. As Jenkins describes:

»Once a group carries out a terrorist act, it acquires the label terrorist, a label that tends to stick; and from that point on everything this group does, whether intended to produce terror or not, is also henceforth called terrorism.« (2)

In their study on 'Constructing an American fear culture from red scares to terrorism' (2013), Geoff Skoll and Maximiliano Korstanje note the effortlessness of bestowing new meanings on to the problematic term. By contrasting *Websters'* 1965 definition: »the systematic use of terror especially as means of coercion« with an updated definition of terrorism in the 2007 edition of the *American Heritage Dictionary*:

»The unlawful use or threatened use of force or violence by a person or an organized group against people or property with the intention of intimidating or coercing societies or governments, often for ideological or political reasons.« (345)

The authors point out how »the latter adds a legal requirement and political ideology« (345) that just so happened to align with the contemporary legal and political challenges the United States government had faced in carrying out its global War on Terror. This fluidity of definitions was also made transparent by Alex Schmid who highlighted how within *one* governing body, the United States government had exercised *four* distinct definitions throughout its various organs (377).

Even if treated as a workable definition in politics and policing, the core *definitional problem* at the root of 'terrorism' nevertheless and inescapably transfigures into an analytical one. In his article 'The Uncertain Trends and Metrics of Terrorism in 2016' (2016), Antony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, detailed how the analysis of these problematic definitions produces a number of 'critical problems' in the cataloguing of incidents and methodology of studies undertaken by governments and NGOs. This is particularly the case, Cordesman argues, for those studies which heavily rely on broad definitions and a wide range of source material. Among the exhaustive list of concerns, he forwards is the indifference placed on 'internal conflicts' (i.e., the domestic *context* in which terrorism emerges) and 'low-intensity conflict' (i.e., the spectrum of acts *interpreted* as terrorism).

What is clear is that the use of *terrorism* and the *terrorist label*, if not greatly distracting, can be actively counterproductive in any concerted effort to make sense of the violent acts they purport to address. In essence, the labeling of terrorism, can in a certain sense, create the problem of terrorism itself.

9.5 'Threat'

Lastly, and as provocative as it is crucial, is the thorny matter of the *reality* of the threat. Because 'threats' entail both a deeply *speculative* and *relative* (i.e., personal, subjective) reading of a situation, their assessment is inevitably a slippery basis on which to launch

any objective and absolute claims. However, to begin, let us once again be reminded of Kurzman & Schanzer's own words admitting how in fact terrorism had only accounted for a 'tiny proportion of violence in America' and that »[f]or every person killed by Muslim extremists, there have been 4,300 homicides from other threats« (2015a). Already here, the authors provide us with some significant insight into the minimal *risk potential* of what acts of violence are labeled as terrorism *on the whole*.

But we mustn't simply rely on comparisons as gruesome as Kurzman & Schanzer's example with the rate of homicides in the United States. As a *The Washington Post* headline makes evidently clear: 'You're more likely to be fatally crushed by furniture than killed by a terrorist' (23 November 2015). As the article's title hints, life itself is steeped in an endless number of *potential* threats. As the article's author, Andrew Shaver of Princeton University put it: »In the United States, an individual's likelihood of being hurt or killed by a terrorist (whether an Islamist radical or some other variety) is negligible.« A point which he illustrated for his readers in greater detail:

»Consider, for instance, that since the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, Americans have been no more likely to die at the hands of terrorists than being crushed to death by unstable televisions and furniture. Meanwhile, in the time it has taken you to read until this point, at least one American has died from a heart attack. Within the hour, a fellow citizen will have died from skin cancer. Roughly five minutes after that, a military veteran will commit suicide. And by the time you turn the lights off to sleep this evening, somewhere around 100 Americans will have died throughout the day in vehicular accidents – the equivalent of “a plane full of people crashing, killing everyone on board, every single day.”«

In the article, Shaver went on to assure his readers that, statistically speaking: »No one in the United States will die from ISIS's—or anyone's—terrorism today.« As the latter point entails, neither Islamic nor right-wing extremism posed any serious threat. As such, regarding this assessment of the *actuality* of the threat that Kurzman & Schanzer effectively propound, Shaver dispels the veracity of any such terroristic threat at face value: »The likelihood that you or those you love will be directly affected by any of this in your lifetime is exceedingly small.«

Even *CNN's* 'The golden age of terrorism' (28 June 2015) shared Shaver's basic sentiment about the negligibility of any substantive *terror* threat, noting how: »During the decade of the 1970s terrorists killed 184 people in the States and injured more than 600 others. In the decade and a half since 9/11, terrorists have, by contrast, killed 74.« Even with its direct evocation of right-wing extremism, it minimized its actual threat, by stating that: »In the 14 years since 9/11 there have been by contrast only some two-dozen terrorist attacks in the United States perpetrated by a mix of jihadist terrorists, neo-Nazis, violent racists and anti-government militants.«

Acknowledging the *subjective* nature of these threats and that one can never stake out an absolute claim one way or another, what all these indicators suggest is that the likelihood of right-wing extremism is arguably negligible if not irrelevant in *the bigger picture* of quotidian threats, whether heart disease, traffic accidents, or gun violence that threaten the welfare of American citizens.

Following this brief but systematic evaluation of the ‘growing right-wing terror threat’ equation, we are left with a series of ambiguous and contentious definitions and metrics, which throw into question the *rise*, *categorization*, *content*, and the very *threat* itself. With the overview of this equation—that which would soon become the statistical basis and justification for the rise of the far right phenomenon in 2015—let us at last turn to our third and final component of this ever complexifying phenomenon.

- » *Since the NRA rules this country, don't expect the news media- especially Fox- but really, all of them, to spend too much time reporting on the right wing extremist groups. After all, these groups are the gun industry's best customers.*
- 'marian' from Philadelphia on June 16th, 2015, in the comment section of *The Growing Right-Wing Terror Threat* on NYTimes.com. «
- » *I've always been far more concerned about frightened, belligerent poorly educated white men with guns than I ever was of foreign terrorists. You never know what might set them off; it doesn't take much; and the result is always explosive, even if they aren't armed at the time. Which is why I'm baffled that some states let them stroll around airports and malls, and why those states are off my list of vacation destinations.*
- 'Bystander' from Upstate on June 16th, 2015, in the comment section of *The Growing Right-Wing Terror Threat* on NYTimes.com. «
- » *The 'real' question must remain why does the media, including this paper, not call the perpetrators of these domestic attacks what they are - terrorists? Words and language matter. Early on the Obama Administration attempted to identify this very real terrorist threat and met a firestorm of conservative opposition and pseudo outrage. The slaughter continues on an almost daily basis while the media sleeps.*
- 'Hal Donahue from Scranton, PA on June 16th, 2015, in the comment section of *The Growing Right-Wing Terror Threat* on NYTimes.com. «
- » *The press creates the perceptions and they aren't allowed to see the right wing as dangerous. Right wingers control a lot of the media.*
- 'Bill' from Madison, CT on June 16th, 2015, in the comment section of *The Growing Right-Wing Terror Threat* on NYTimes.com. «

10 The Charleston Church Shooting

On June 17th, the very next day following the launch of the Trump campaign and Kurzman & Schanzer's op-ed, tragedy struck Charleston, South Carolina. There, Dylann Roof, a 21-year-old, identified as a 'white supremacist' and 'neo-Nazi,' fatally shot nine churchgoers at one of the oldest African-American churches and denominations in the United States, before being arrested on several counts of hate crime charges the following morning. As detailed in a press release by The White House, of the event, Vice President Joe Biden was quoted in saying:

»Hate has once again been let loose in an American community. And the senseless actions of a coward have once again cut short so many lives with so much promise. Our hearts ache with sorrow with the entire Emanuel AME Church family as they seek solace and comfort in the shadow of a gunman's *act of pure evil and hatred* [emphasis added].«

Followed by a statement from the Attorney General Loretta Lynch who assured the public: »This is a crime that has reached into the heart of that community. The Department of Justice has opened a *hate* crime investigation into this shooting incident [emphasis added].« And lastly, ended with the words of President Barack Obama who decried: »There is something particularly heartbreaking about the death happening in a place in which we seek solace and we seek peace, in a place of worship.« His address most pronouncedly aimed to *contextualize* the tragedy and the emotions it had unleashed:

»The fact that this took place in a black church obviously also raises questions about a dark part of our history. This is not the first time that black churches have been attacked. And we know that hatred across races and faiths *pose a particular threat to our democracy and our ideals* [emphasis added].«

With the gravity of the event made palpable in these official statements (that recognized this particular act as 'evil,' 'hateful,' and a 'threat to democracy'), the tragic event had also reverberated across the media. In the two weeks following what became most commonly referred to as the Charleston Church Shooting, the *New York Times* alone uploaded over 250 stories, videos and photos galleries covering the saga on its website. But before the tragedy would become a media spectacle, as the story initially broke the events were cast in *relatively* drab and sober terms:

Gunman kills nine at historic black church in South Carolina (The Los Angeles Times, 18 June 2015)

Charleston shooter killed mostly black women (The Guardian, 18 June 2015)

Charleston church shooting suspect arrested in N.C. (CNN, 18 June 2015)

Police arrest white suspect for attack on historic black church' (Al Jazeera, 18 June 2015)

Besides the gratis *racializing* and *gendering* (i.e., 'black women,' 'white suspect'), the first reports responded to the event in a fairly standard journalistic form, outlining the given crime, perpetrator, victim and location. However, this standard practice would soon be upended when news agencies inserted a new dimension to their reporting. Where a headline in *The Washington Post* conveyed how 'Words fail in Charleston, but change must follow' (18 June 2015), one word would in fact stand out and spark a 'change' in how the media reported on the Charleston Church Shooting. Like with *The New York Times's* headline 'Many Ask, Why Not Call Church Shooting Terrorism?' (18 June 2015), the insertion of *terrorism* effectively sparked a media-wide debate:

Shooters of color are called 'terrorists' and 'thugs.' Why are white shooters called 'mentally ill'? (*The Washington Post*, 18 June 2015)

Charleston church shooting coverage criticized as racist because suspect described as 'loner white man' — not domestic terrorist (*The New York Daily News*, 18 June 2015)

Charleston shooting: Black and Muslim killers are 'terrorists' and 'thugs'. Why are white shooters called 'mentally ill'? (*The Independent*, 19 June 2015)

The Charleston Church Shooting and the Meaning of Terrorism (*Newsweek*, 19 June 2015)

Was the South Carolina shooting a hate crime or a terrorist attack? (*CBS News*, 19 June 2015)

Were The Charleston Killings 'Terrorism?' (*Politico*, 20 June 2015)

Should we call Dylann Roof a terrorist? (*The World*, 24 June 2015)

In these articles, the media pondered why it was that »*we*« more readily associated foreign *black* and *brown* perpetrators with terrorism than *white Americans* who committed similarly heinous crimes? In what followed, *replying to its own self-made controversy*, headlines like *Vox* self-righteously responded to the *debate* with a resounding: 'Yes, Charleston was terrorism. Denying that isn't just wrong, it's offensive.' (18 June 2015). Disparaging the earlier reports that *merely* described Roof in terms of 'suspect,' 'attacker,' 'gunmen,' and 'shooter,' responding to the *debate*, a *WHYY* headline pointedly remarked: 'He's a white racist domestic terrorist. Was that so hard to say?' (19 June 2015). The *NPR* affiliate was far from alone with its moral outrage. In the following days,

articles like *The Daily Beast's* 'Get Real: Charleston Church Shooting Was Terrorism' (18 June 2015) became common place:

Why calling the Charleston shooting terrorism is important to so many people (*Vox*, 19 June 2015)

Call it terrorism in Charleston (*CNN*, 19 June 2015)

Why the Charleston Shooter Should Be Called a Terrorist (*New York Magazine*, 19 June 2015)

WHY THE LANGUAGE OF MASS MURDER MATTERS (*Pacific Standard*, 19 June 2015)

Charleston Shooting Is Domestic Terrorism (*Al Jazeera*, 19 June 2015)

Daily Show's Jon Stewart: 'This was a terrorist attack' (*The Guardian*, 19 June 2015)

It's Media Terrorism to Deny Charleston Was About Race (*Time Magazine*, 20 June 2015)

Terrorism in Charleston (*The New Yorker*, 21 June 2015)

We must call him a terrorist: Dylann Roof, Fox News and the truth about why language matters (*Salon*, 21 June 2015)

Why It Matters That The Charleston Attack Was Terrorism (*The Atlantic*, 21 June 2015)

Why the Media Doesn't Call Massacres By White Supremacists "Terrorism" (*In These Times*, 23 June 2015)

Even *OpenDemocracy's* article headlined 'Dylann Roof is not an extremist' (22 June 2015), went on to reverse its course and confirm that in fact: »He [Roof] is a terrorist.«

However, this embrace of *change* didn't stop with the introduction of 'terrorism' into the debate, but what followed went about modernizing the otherwise problematic and antiquated term by fortifying it with a whole new set of *popular* and *unburdened* nomenclatures.

Not simply a *terrorist*, Roof became an 'American terrorist' (e.g., 'Charleston mass murderer Dylann Roof is a homegrown American terrorist' (*The New York Daily News*, 18 June 2015), thus, providing the otherwise ambiguous term with a geographic content. In *The New York Times's* headline, 'In Charleston, a Millennial Race Terrorist' (21 June

2015) and ‘Charleston, Dylann Roof and the racism of millennials’ (19 June 2015), there, each headline put forth another degree of information, this time demographic. Another term that emerged with further demographic content was that of ‘white terrorism’ which appeared across a plethora of articles as well as making its way into several headlines including *The New York Times*’s ‘White Terrorism Is as Old as America’ (19 June 2015), *Russia Today*’s ‘White terrorism? US avoids race debate in latest shooting massacre’ (19 June 2015), and *Slate*’s ‘Why White Terrorists Attack Black Churches’ (19 June 2015). In the days following the Charleston Church Shooting, a host of articles began emphasizing the historical depth and continuity of ‘white terrorism’ in contemporary American life with pieces like *Slate*’s ‘Centuries of Violence’ (19 June 2015) and *Jacobin*’s ‘The Long History of Southern Terror’ (21 June 2015).

Amid this emotionally charged news cycle, *The Wall Street Journal* found it an appropriate time to reassess *race relations* in its headline: ‘What Charleston Tells Us About Race Relations (23 June 2015). By that same day, *The Guardian* even took it upon itself to dutifully inform its readers that ‘Calling Dylann Roof a ‘Terrorist’ Doesn’t Erase the Privilege of His Race’ (2015), and in doing so implied that this news cycle was far from over. Once word hit of the FBI’s failure to prosecute Roof with domestic terrorism charges, this news only spurred further impassioned reports focusing their discontent on the hypocrisy of the justice system and its need for *modernization* (e.g., ‘Why Wasn’t Dylann Roof Charged With Terrorism?’, *The Intercept*, 22 July 2015; ‘White House Won’t Back FBI Chief on Charleston ‘Terror’,’ *The Daily Beast*, 22 June 2015; ‘Why is Dylann Roof not facing charges of terrorism?’, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 24 June 2015).

As the reporting on the Charleston Church Shooting developed, it began to increasingly and explicitly intersect with a now familiar theme. Already, the day after the shooting, *NPR* released its article: ‘When the home-grown terrorists are white,’ where it reminded its readers of some *unfinished business*:

»Before Islamic radicals drove planes into the World Trade Center and Pentagon, the most dangerous terror threat to the nation, the FBI warned, was the white supremacist.

In the aftermath of 9/11, the threat—the hate—didn’t disappear; only our attention to it. Americans have worried more about home-grown jihadists.

Coincidentally, just two days ago, Charles Kurzman, a sociology professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and David Schanzer, director of the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security at Duke University, issued a warning in their *New York Times* op-ed.«

Here, it must be noted that nowhere in their op-ed, did Kurzman & Schanzer ever include a single word about 'race,' 'racism,' 'ethnicity,' 'racial' or 'white' anything, rather the article primarily centered around *anti-government* extremism—a far cry from a shooting of churchgoers. Of course, this only serves as one example of the endless pliability of the right-wing category. In the days and weeks following the Charleston Church Shooting, another report strikingly similar to that of Kurzman & Schanzer appeared on the scene, most likely rushed out for publication in response to the unfolding news cycle. There, the *New American Foundation* debuted its online and interactive database, 'Terrorism in America After 9/11.' The report was essentially in lockstep with chain of argument forwarded by the 'growing right-wing terror threat' equation. As headlines like *The Hill's* 'Charleston shooting puts focus on the rising fringe' (20 June 2015) suggested, the dramatic events of the Charleston Church Shooting provided a readymade link to the matter of right-wing extremism and an opportune moment to further propagate the 'growing right-wing terror threat' equation (now reinforced by the *New American Foundation's* contribution to the discourse). In what followed, both studies made their way into some 50 national and international articles throughout June and the beginning of July of that year:

Charleston church massacre: The violence white America must answer for (*Salon*, 18 June 2015)

Charleston shooting: timeline of US far-right linked attacks (*Channel 4 News*, 18 June 2015)

Call it terrorism in Charleston (*CNN*, 19 June 19 2015)

Why the Charleston Shooter Should Be Called a Terrorist (*New York Magazine*, 19 June 2015)

Dylann Roof's extremism is not an aberration: There are millions across Western nations who adhere to his white supremacist views (*Salon*, 21 June 2015)

White House Won't Back FBI Chief on Charleston 'Terror' (*The Daily Beast*, 22 June 2015)

America is terrorizing itself: Dylann Roof, James Holmes and the violent epidemic we (still) won't acknowledge (*Salon*, 23 June 2015)

Homegrown Extremists Tied to Deadlier Toll Than Jihadists in U.S. Since 9/11 (*The New York Times*, 24 June 2015)

Communities Must Work Together to Combat Extremism (*The New York Times*, 24 June 2015)

Charleston debate: Is domestic or international terrorism the bigger threat? (*The Christian Science Monitor*, 24 June 2015)

White Americans are the biggest terror threat in the United States (*The World*, 24 June 2015)

Right-wing terrorism has killed 48 people in the US since 2001 (*Vox*, 24 June 2015)

Report: More Americans have been killed by white supremacists than Muslim extremists since 9/11 (*Splinter*, 24 June 2015)

Report: 'Homegrown' radicals now a larger threat than jihadists in U.S. (*PBS News Hour*, 24 June 2015)

US Radicals Bigger Terror Threat Than Jihadis in America (*ABC News*, 24 June 2015)

Study Says White Extremists Have Killed More Americans in the U.S. Than Jihadists Since 9/11 (*Time Magazine*, 24 June 2015)

The Homeland and Ignorance About Terrorism (*The National Interest*, 24 June 2015)

Domestic Radicals are More Violent than Jihadis (*The Huffington Post*, 24 June 2015)

White Supremacists More Dangerous To America Than Foreign Terrorists, Study Says (*The Huffington Post*, 24 June 2015)

New Study Reveals How Dangerous Muslim Terrorists in America Really Are (*Mic*, 24 June 2015)

More Than Twice as Many Terrorist Attacks Come From Right-Wing Groups as Muslims (*Mic*, 24 June 2015)

Study: Right-wing terrorism has killed 48 people in the US since 2001 (*Vox*, 24 June 2015)

Report: More Americans Have been Killed by White Supremacists Than Muslim Extremists Since 9/11 (*Fusion*, 24 June 2015)

Right-Wing Extremists More Dangerous Than Islamic Terrorists In U.S. (*NPR News*, 24 June 2015)

The Greatest Obstacle to Anti-Muslim Fearmongering and Bigotry: Reality (*The Intercept*, 24 June 2015)

U.S. Extremist Attacks Far More Common Than Jihadi Terrorism Since Sept. 11 (*NBC News New York*, 24 June 2015)

Does U.S. Ignore Right-Wing Terror? More Killed by White Extremists Than Jihadists Since 9/11 (*Democracy Now!*, 25 June 2015)

The Biggest Terror Threat in America Isn't Islamic Extremists (*Business Insider*, 25 June 2015)

The Homeland and Ignorance About Terrorism (*National Interest*, 25 June 2015)

Beyond Dylann Roof: Inside the Hunt for Domestic Extremists in the Digital Age (*The Guardian*, 25 June 2015)

Deadly American Extremism: More White Than Muslim (*The Atlantic*, 25 June 2015)

Beyond Dylann Roof: inside the hunt for domestic extremists in the digital age (*The Guardian*, 25 June 2015)

Tracking Domestic terrorism in Southern Nevada (*KNPR-Nevada Public Radio*, 25 June 2015)

The greatest terrorist threat is the one we rarely talk about (*MSNBC News*, 26 June 2015)

Why Are We Blind to Right-Wing Terrorism? (*The Century Foundation*, 26 June 2015)

Right-wing extremism a greater threat in North America (*The Star*, 28 June 2015)

FBI Tracks White Supremacists [sic.], Domestic Extremists (*NPR News*, 28 June 2015)

Tallying Right-Wing Terror vs. Jihad (*Bloomberg*, 30 June 2015)

What Is America's Biggest Terrorist Threat? (*NowThis World*, 30 June 2015)

The Rise of Violent Right-Wing Extremism, Explained (*Mother Jones*, 30 June 2015)

Right Wing Terrorism Far More Dangerous than Radical Islam (*Uprising Radio*, 30 June 2015)

What Is A Terrorist? (*Blue Ridge Public Radio*, 2 July 2015)

Fighting Extremist Terror Threats Here at Home (*The Wall Street Journal*, 5 July 2015)

Are Right Wing Extremists More Dangerous Than Jihadists? (*Fox News Radio's The Alan Colmes Show*, 7 July 2015)

Inside a security expert's collection of hateful artifacts (*Al Jazeera*, 8 July 2015)

Terrorism: For Muslim crimes only? (*Al Jazeera*, 8 July 2015)

Turns out people get angry when you say white Americans are terrorists, too (*The World*, 8 July 2015)

America's biggest terror threat is from the far right (*Al Jazeera*, 10 July 2015)

If before this, the notion of primary definers had seemed cloistered to the domain of theory, with the 'growing right-wing terror threat' equation and its *primary definition* of the 'primary threat' facing the United States, appearing *en masse* across the media establishment presented this concept in its most transparent form. In this moment, for longtime news readers, reality was in effect turned upside down. After a decade and a half of the War on Terror and the incessant fearmongering and stigmatizing of Muslim Americans by the media, to put its 180 degree turn ever so crassly: *It seemed now as if it was in fact the good guys that were the bad guys and the bad guys that were the good guys.* In this moment, terrorism was being salvaged from the stain that Islamophobia had tarnished it with.

As this instance makes plain, throughout the summer of 2015, the statistical basis of the 'growing right-wing terror threat' equation became indelibly linked with the emotionality and imagery emitted throughout the media's reporting on the Charleston Church Shooting as the two synergized and became a formidable force in shaping the public consciousness. However, lest we forget the original *NPR* article that warned of how before 9/11 it was 'white supremacy' which had in fact been 'the most dangerous terror threat to the nation.' As such, in the same moment that the 'growing right-wing terror threat' equation proliferated and became *common knowledge*, so had the alarming return of 'white supremacy.'

10.1 The Specter of White Supremacy

Aside from the debate around the use of the term terrorism and the dissemination of the 'growing right-wing terror threat' equation, as the Charleston Church Shooting news cycle evolved, it ushered in a wholly *new* theme to American audiences, that of white supremacy. The interrogation of this term began with Roof himself who one headline described as straight 'Out of White Supremacist Central,' Expert Says' (*ABC News*, 19 June 2015). These initial reports feverishly investigated the patches on Roof's jean jacket and combed through his online records in search of confirmation of his white supremacy:

Dylann Roof Wears Flag Linked to White Supremacy Groups (*Time Magazine*, 18 June 2015)

The racist flags on Dylann Roof's jacket, explained (*Vox*, 18 June 2015)

Dylann Roof, Suspect in Charleston Shooting, Flew the Flags of White Power (*The New York Times*, 18 June 2015)

Charleston church shooting suspect Dylann Roof wore white supremacist apartheid-era flag patches on jacket (*The New York Daily News*, 18 June 2015)

Dylann Roof Embraced White Supremacy in Photos and Website (*NBC News*, 21 June 2015)

But as the news cycle progressed, like suggested in *Democracy Now!*'s 'Dylann Roof's White Supremacist Views, Links to Hate' (21 June 2015), Roof was by no means alone in his beliefs but was intimately 'linked' to a number of *outside* groups that were said to have been resurfacing across the United States. In the same way that right-wing extremism made its debut to American audiences with the vast propagation of the 'growing right-wing terror threat' equation, so the specter of its *doppelgänger* simultaneous began to make its rounds across the media landscape:

The Charleston Massacre and the Cunning of White Supremacy (*The Nation*, 18 June 2015)

Charleston shooting: Who are US white supremacists? (*BBC News*, 19 June 2015)

Lonnae O'Neal: White supremacy is slowly killing us (*The Washington Post*, 21 June 2015)

Lupe Fiasco Issues Open Letter to White Supremacy (*The Wrap*, 22 June 2015)

GOP candidates seek distance from white supremacist group (*Des Moines Register*, 22 June 2015)

White Supremacy: A Long History in American Politics (*WNYC News*, 22 June 2015)

The White-Supremacist Group That Inspired a Racist Manifesto (*The New Yorker*, 22 June 2015)

'Lone Wolf' White Supremacists Like Dylann Roof (*ThinkProgress*, 24 June 2015)

White supremacist group stands by racist ideology (*CNN*, 24 June 2015)

The White Supremacist Effect: How Underprivileged Whites are Conditioned to Believe That They're Superior to Blacks (*Atlanta Black Star*, 24 June 2015)

This is how you become a white supremacist (*The Washington Post*, 25 June 2015)

But as readers would soon learn, thanks to the internet and its *dangerous* excesses of freedom, the hate-filled ideology of white supremacy was not only limited to the backwoods of rural America, but had in fact gone both viral and global:

White Supremacists Without Borders (*The New York Times*, 22 June 2015)

White supremacy isn't just a national problem — it's global (*The World*, 22 June 2015)

On Web, white supremacists stir up a growing and angry audience (*The Los Angeles Times*, 24 June 2015)

The New Face of Global White Nationalist Terror (*Foreign Policy*, 25 June 2015)

Beyond Dylann Roof: inside the hunt for domestic extremists in the digital age (*The Guardian*, 25 June 2015)

White Supremacists Extend Their Reach Through Websites (*The New York Times*, 5 July 2015)

I Spent Two Weeks Tracking A Secret Teen White Supremacist Messaging Group (*BuzzFeed News*, 9 July 2015)

To stay relevant, the white supremacy news cycle exceedingly demanded additional news values as its original values became increasingly depleted. There, the media enlisted the *quirky* and *unusual* (e.g., 'How a White Supremacist Became a Civil Rights Activist,' *Yes Magazine*, 25 June 2015; 'How pop culture white's supremacists help us feel good about ourselves,' *The Washington Post*, 26 June 2015; 'How a white supremacist tapped into a Jewish fortune,' *Yahoo! News*, 2 July 2015) as well as the downright

disturbing (e.g., 'White supremacist gets 20-40 years in eye-gouging attack,' *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 10 July 2015).

By late June and early July, as the Charleston Church Shooting news cycle began to wane along with its *newsworthiness*, a last-ditch effort was undertaken to keep the specter in *the news*. Reports began emerging of an *imminent* 'race war' (e.g., 'Behind Dylann Roof's race war: The highly motivated secret white supremacy movement working toward "the battle of Armageddon",' *Salon*, 24 June 2015; 'Beyond Dylann Roof: Why White Supremacists Want a Race War,' *Newsweek*, 26 June 2015; 'White supremacist calls Charleston 'a preview of coming attractions',' *The Guardian*, 28 June 2015; 'White supremacists want a race war. They must not fight America's wars,' *The Guardian*, 29 June 2015).

However, once the initial emotional resonance and momentum of the Charleston Church Shooting and the novelty of the white supremacy news cycle had been fully exhausted of all their newsworthy content, talk of the Charleston Church Shooting, right-wing extremism and the white supremacy all began to recede from the headlines and cement their importance into the social and cultural maps of meaning. Once the discourse had fully devolved, the media transitioned into a wholly new debate—a procedural debate around the flying of confederate flags—a transition best captured in *Bitch Media's* headline: 'Taking Down the Flag Doesn't Signal the End of White Supremacy' (9 July 2015).

Having now detailed the convergence of the Charleston Church Shooting and the 'growing right-wing terror threat' equation, and the product of their combined synergizing in the form of the white supremacy specter, let us return to the Trump campaign to approach the final sequence in which the public race of the rise of the far right phenomenon would soon crystallize.

11 Trump, Charleston, and the Other Terror Threat

By now it is not difficult to see the ways in which the media portrayal of an intrinsic relationship between the Trump campaign (on the ticket of the *right-wing* political party) and its unwavering support from *white* America would go on to dovetail with the emergent *right-wing* extremism and *white* supremacy specter and thus establishing a linkage to the emotional events of the Charleston Church Shooting and the statistical basis of the 'growing right-wing terror threat' equation. However, before the Trump campaign would help fully form the public face of the rise of the far right phenomenon, several final public images would be required before all of the themes implicit in the previous imagery could be made *explicit*.

11.1 The Demagoguery Image

If the image of angry and unruly masses being *misled* was key to the populism image, and if in that image lurked the charismatic populist leader, and moreover, if 'anger' was understood as one step removed from 'hate,' then its fusion with the whiteness image helped establish Trump as an explicitly hate-filled leader of white America in what we call *the demagoguery image*. Like with the analytically impoverished terms of 'populism,' 'whiteness,' 'right-wing,' and 'terrorism,' the leveraging of 'demagoguery' was yet another term which could be bent in whichever way one so pleases. And like with the others, this floating signifier only survived because of its associative and emotional appeal. Lacking any particular content, demagoguery could only exist by virtue of its historical *associations* be they any number of universally disapproved of behaviors such as fearmongering, lying, intimidation, vulgarity, oversimplification, and undue attacks against a free press. In essence, the term denoted whatever vice its *definers* at any given moment in time and against any given person or group see fit. With the demagoguery image, Trump was no longer simply a one-dimensional troll, a narrow-minded narcissist, or even just a greedy billionaire. Instead, he was depicted as *actively* and *ruthlessly* exploiting the anger of white America towards (recalling *The Atlantic's* 'Dangers of Passions in Politics') what was an ultimately a divisive and dangerous end. No longer a man of the people like in the populism image, as a headline in *The New Republic* articulated 'Donald Trump Is Not a Populist. He's the Voice of Aggrieved Privilege' (24 August 2015). It was with this very image, that Trump became unhesitatingly referred to as an outright *demagogue*:

The demagogue cometh: The Donald Trump Campaign (*Liberation News*, 7 July 2015)

The Rich and Disturbing History of American Political Demagoguery (*Texas Standard*, 20 July 2015)

Is Donald Trump a demagogue? (*CNN*, 23 July 2015)

Donald Trump, American Demagogue (*Politico*, 10 August 2015)

The Donald and the Demagogues (*The Washington Post*, 31 August 2015)

Trump is latest in long line of demagogues (*The Hill*, 3 September 2015)

The Trump Campaign: The a of the demagogue (*The Economist*, 5 September 2015)

Donald Trump is our creepy new face of demagoguery (*Salon*, 8 September 2015)

8 Reasons White America Falls For Demagogues Like Donald Trump (*Salon*, 24 September 2015)

The Difference Between a Leader and a Demagogue (*Newsweek*, 26 October 2015)

The Age of the Demagogues (*Truthout*, 26 October 2015)

Donald Trump wasn't a textbook demagogue. Until now. (*The Washington Post*, 2 December 2015)

Republicans have enabled Donald Trump's demagoguery (*The Boston Globe*, 8 December 2015)

Donald Trump Isn't Your Average Demagogue (*The New Republic*, 8 December 2015)

Democratic Activist Says Donald Trump Fits Demagogue Mold (*NPR News*, 9 December 2015)

Donald Trump and 'Demagogue': The History of a Loaded Word (*The Atlantic*, 10 December 2015)

What these headlines represented was a major breach of civility, and as such, marked a turning point in the imagery of the Trump campaign that had once been belittled to that of a mere joke. With this charismatic and self-obsessed, madman, billionaire leader commanding his army of deranged, uneducated, poor, white, toxically masculine, gun-toting 'Christian soldiers,' *who could dare deny the dangers afield?* It is at this point where the reporting on the Trump campaign *explicitly* converged with the white

supremacy news cycle and thus the events of the Charleston Church Shooting and the propagation of the 'growing right-wing terror threat' equation as our next images make all too clear.

11.2 The Racism Image

Reinforced by the psychology, religiousness, misperception, manipulation, populism, whiteness, and demagoguery images, the Trump campaign was increasingly imbued first covertly, and later overtly, as 'racist' in a moment in the discourse we will call *the racism image*. Rather than with the psychology image that first diagnosed Trump only to later do the same with his base, the racism image applied this strategy in reverse. In these transparently ad hominem attacks, the image *incriminated* the candidate by first *associating* him with white supremacists:

The White Supremacists Lining Up Behind Trump (The World, 21 August 2015)

Trump Supporter Yells Out "White Power" during Alabama rally (Slate, 22 August 2015),

'White Supremacist' Wants to Name a Town After Donald Trump" (Business Insider, 24 August 2015)

Top Racists And Neo-Nazis Back Donald Trump (BuzzFeed News, 26 August 2015)

Meet The Members Of Donald Trump's White Supremacist Fan Club (The Huffington Post, 25 August 2015)

Donald Trump and the White Nationalists (The New Yorker, 31 August 2015)

White Nationalists for Trump: The Disturbing Truth About The Donald's Base (Salon, 2 September 2015)

How White Nationalist Groups Found Their Candidate In Donald Trump" (NPR's Fresh Air, 3 September 2015)

The White Supremacists Flocking to Donald Trump (The Telegraph, 24 September 2015)

David Duke and other white supremacists see Trump's rise as way to increase role in mainstream politics (The Los Angeles Times, 29 September 2015)

Under the guidance of NGOs tracking such hate groups (e.g., 'White Supremacists View Donald Trump as Champion of Disaffected Whites,' *Anti-Defamation League*, 15 July 2015; 'An Energized White Nationalist Movement Rallies Behind Trump's Immigration

Plan,' *Southern Poverty Law Center*, 26 August 2015), by mobilizing and engaging with the recently indoctrinated white supremacy specter following the Charleston Church Shooting, the image effectively portrayed the Trump campaign as *guilty by association*—which in its best case portrayed the campaign as simply resonating with racist ideology, and in the worst case as actively 'mainstreaming' it. The repeated drawing out of this connection and the weight it was given not only implied an *affirmation* of Trump's connection to white supremacy, but it also signaled that connection to be a *secretive* one, since nowhere had Trump *officially* recognized any such affiliations. This latter aspect resulted in a variation on the racism image which assumed the existence of a secret mode of communication between candidate Trump and his white supremacist supporters, which was increasingly assumed to makeup a prominent segment of his base. Due to the nature of such a secret code, there could and would never be any *hard* evidence, rather the media had to put on its investigative hat and sniff out the trail of Trump's 'dog whistles' and 'racially charged rhetoric'—assertions, which in and of themselves provided them with the smoking gun for *what they defined* to be the candidate's deep-seated racism:

Donald Trump Tweets Racially Charged Jab at Jeb Bush's Wife (*Time Magazine*, 6 July 2015)

Donald Trump retweets racially charged attack on Jeb Bush, wife (*Global News*, 6 July 2015)

Donald Trump is the ultimate opportunist: Why his racist theatrics—and surging popularity—explain everything about the modern GOP (*Salon*, 9 July 2015)

Opinion: Trump Is Latest Pied Piper Of Dog Whistle Politics (*NBC News*, 23 July 2015)

Lindsey Graham: Donald Trump 'Selling Fear and Prejudice' (*ABC News*, 26 July 2015)

Donald Trump's Instinct for Racially Charged Rhetoric, Before His Presidential Bid (*The New York Times*, 30 July 2015)

Donald Trump likes to talk about the 'silent majority.' (*The Washington Post*, 27 August 2015)

Donald Trump's dog whistle-politics needs to stop (*Detroit Free Press*, 27 August 2015)

Republicans Fear Donald Trump Is Hardening Party's Tone on Race (*The New York Times*, 7 September 2015)

The Long, Ugly History of 'Law and Order' Candidates (*Bloomberg*, 16 September 2015)

The dark, complex history of Trump's model for his mass deportation plan (*The Los Angeles Times*, 13 November 2015)

'Trump's a race-baiting, xenophobic, religious bigot' (*Business Insider*, 8 December 2015)

Donald Trump Has Escalated His Rhetoric. So Has The Press Covering Him (*NPR News*, 11 December 2015)

Of course, this secretive behavior could only remain hidden for so long. Soon, per the media, this secret became an open secret as Trump began showing signs of what was described as his now 'open racism.' While similar ground was covered with accusations of his 'xenophobia,' 'sexism' and 'nativism' (e.g., 'Donald Trump's xenophobia: Divide and conquer,' *The Economist*, 8 July 2015; 'The history of Donald Trump's insults to women,' *Fortune*, 9 August 2015; 'The Immigrant Roots of Nativist Donald Trump,' *Bloomberg*, 25 September 2015), given the American context, and the enduring legacy with which *actually existing* state-sanctioned white supremacy had left on the country, it was the particular framing of 'racism' which proved itself most adept at subverting the anti-establishment campaign's progress:

As the Confederate Flags Come Down, Trump's Open Racism Rises (*Newsweek*, 16 July 2015)

Donald Trump is the Bigoted Elephant in the Room (*Al Jazeera*, 22 July 2015)

'Racist, Absurd and Incoherent' Donald Trump (*The Guardian*, 27 August 2015)

Larry David: 'Donald Trump's a Racist' Said During SNL Monologue (*Entertainment Weekly*, 8 November 2015)

Donald Trump embraces open racism (*The New Republic*, 23 November 2015)

Donald Trump is Running the Most Explicitly Racist Campaign Since 1968 (*The Week*, 25 November 2015)

Donald Trump is a Bigot and a Racist (*The Washington Post*, 2 December 2015)

Washington Post Columnist Calls Trump "a Racist and a Bigot" (*CBS News*, 3 Dec, 2015)

Donald Trump shows hate speech is now out and proud in the mainstream (*The Guardian*, 8 December 2015)

Barbara Walters to Donald Trump: 'Are you a bigot?' (*Business Insider*, 8 December 2015)

Donald Trump Is a Bad Person (*Reason*, 8 December 2015)

Donald Trump Labeled 'Racist Bully' by The Huffington Post (*The Wrap*, 9 December 2015)

Colin Kaepernick Rips Donald Trump's 'Racism' (*Rolling Stone*, 11 December 2015)

Donald Trump is no longer funny, he's dangerous, says Hillary Clinton (*The Guardian*, 11 December 2015)

According to the media, if Trump was indeed an 'open racist,' then as the other images had already suggested, it was increasingly likely that his white working-class base was as well. It was only a matter of time before the media asked: 'Are Donald Trump's Supporters Racist?' (*The Atlantic*, 7 December 2015). Just like with the psychology image, the attention to Trump's racism soon swung back in the direction of his *general support*:

Go Ahead, Admit You're a Racist (CNN, 2 September 2015)

Silent Majority? Who Are Donald Trump's Supporters? (NBC News, 3 September 2015)

The Republicans Are Now Officially the Party of White Paranoia (Rolling Stone, 4 September 2015)

How racism explains Republicans' rise in the South (The Washington Post, 24 November 2015).

The Cozy Bigotry of Donald Trump's America (The Huffington Post, 3 Dec, 2015)

Social Science Tells Us About Racism in the Republican Party (The Washington Post, 11 December 2015)

Donald Trump Leads an Insane White Cult -- and Pat Buchanan Just Explained How It Works (Salon, 23 December 2015)

Are Trump Supporters Driven By Economic Anxiety or Racial Resentment? Yes. (Vox, 30 December 2015)

2015: The Year Racism Made a Comeback (MSNBC News, 31 Dec, 2015)

The year it became impossible for white America to turn a blind eye to racism (Quartz, 31 December 2015)

Where the previous images left the rehabilitative window open, with the sweeping indictment of the campaign and its base now as racist, this window was promptly shut, a sentiment made explicit in *The Gothamist's* headline which straightforwardly described how 'The Worst People In America Gather For Donald Trump Rally' (22 August 2015). Even the *Socialist Worker* asked its readers 'Why does anyone support this racist asshole?' (10 December 2015).

Not only were those represented in the *privileged* construct of white America assumed to be the beneficiaries of this ubiquitous, modern-day racism, but these bald assertions were swiftly corroborated in *hard fact* (e.g., 'Poll Finds Most in US Hold Dim View of Race Relations,' *The New York Times*, 23 July 2015; 'Are White Americans More Pessimistic About Race-or More Realistic?,' *The Atlantic*, 25 July 2015; 'US Race Relations Are Deteriorating,' *Business Insider*, 6 August 2015). Of course, not that the sensationalizing of the said relations, for instance in the wake of the Charleston Church Shooting with headlines like 'DEAR WHITE AMERICA: COME SEE HOW BLACK PEOPLE BURY OUR DEAD' (*Dame Magazine*, 29 June 2015) and 'Latinos and black Americans have an enemy' (*The Guardian*, 15 July 2015) had anything to do with these 'deteriorating' *race relations*.

With the Trump campaign tapping into this present-day 'silent majority' and its 'insane white cult' deluded by 'paranoia,' *MPR's* headline, 'Fueled By Racism, Politics Leads Us Down An Ugly Road (24 November 2015) began to ring ever truer. As the campaign continued to rise in the polls, so did *the impression* of its growing army of toxically masculine, angry, uneducated, gun-toting, white working class, white supremacist, evangelicals. No longer confined to the fringes of the Trump campaign, the racism image molded his broad and heterogenous support into this most exaggerated of images.

Not only was an increasing segment of the population casted as racist, but as the Charleston Church Shooting reminded the nation: *hateful ideology if left unchecked can have devastating consequences*. However, the questions regarding: what exactly was understood as 'hateful'? Who determined this? And why some people were more amenable to such ideology, moreover, willing to act on it? were quietly left unsaid. With the depiction of its open embrace of racism and a primed audience, the Trump campaign was portrayed as if playing with dynamite. In this context, reports began capturing the fateful trajectory of what happened when those hateful ideas materialized into hateful acts:

A Donald Trump-Inspired Hate Crime in Boston (*The Atlantic*, 20 August 2015)

A Beating in Boston, Said to Be Inspired by Donald Trump's Immigrant Comments (*The New York Times*, 20 August 2015)

Trump inspired us to beat up, pee on Hispanic man, suspects say (*New York Post*, 20 Aug, 2015)

Police: Man who beat homeless Mexican said 'Trump was right' (*PBS*, 21 August 2015)

Donald Trump's appalling reaction to a hate crime committed in his name (*Vox*, 21 August 2015)

Trump says fans are 'very passionate' after hearing one of them allegedly assaulted Hispanic man (*The Washington Post*, 21 August 2015)

Police: Man who beat homeless Mexican said "Trump was right" (*CBS News*, 21 August 2015)

Donald Trump Inspired Boston Duo To Beat Up Homeless Latino: Cops (*Time Magazine*, 21 August 2015)

Donald Trump: Boston beating is 'terrible' (*CNN*, 21 August 2015)

'Trump Was Right,' Says Suspect in Attack on Homeless Hispanic Man (*The Daily Beast*, 21 August 2015)

Racial beating in Boston brings out a different side of Trump (*The Star*, 21 August 2015)

Trump Fans Who Beat Up Mexican Immigrant Apparently Lived Illegally in Public Housing (*Slate*, 22 August 2015)

Within days this brief episode was dissolved and absorbed into the general recognition of both the fear-inducing repercussions of the Trump campaign and its highly questionable base. While similar examples made ritual appearances throughout the media (e.g., 'I've experienced a new level of racism since Donald Trump went after Latinos,' *The Guardian*, 9 September 2015; 'Trump Supporters Harass Immigration Protesters In Iowa,' *The Huffington Post*, 14 September 2015), unlike the initial 'Trump-inspired hate crime' located on the cold anonymous streets of Boston, by October the new venue for hate and violence erupted from the heart of the Trump campaign itself—at its popular nationwide rallies:

Protesters at Donald Trump Rallies Face Increasing Violence (*Time Magazine*, 28 October 2015)

Trump rallies get rough (*Politico*, 24 November 2015)

TRUMP SUPPORTERS BOO RALLY-CRASHING BLACK LIVES MATTER PROTESTERS: “SIEG HEIL!” (*Vanity Fair*, 15 December 2015)

Supporter yells “Sieg Heil” toward black protester at Trump rally. (*Slate*, 15 December 2015)

Trump Campaign Rally Erupts In Chaos And Ugly Confrontation (*BuzzFeed News*, 15 December 2015)

Donald Trump supporters forcibly remove black protester at rally amid call to 'set him on fire' (*The Independent*, 15 December 2015)

Trump Supporters To Latinos at Rally: “Mother f—ing Tacos! Go Back To Mexico! Go Back To Mexico! Nobody Wants You!” (*America’s Voice*, 18 December 2015)

One of the most notable examples from the Trump rallies news cycle came in November when, as a *CBS News* headline put it, ‘Trump supporters, Black Lives Matter protester clash at rally’ (21 November 2015). There, the media relished the opportunity to portray a Black Lives Matter protester—who it must be said, attended the rally under their own volition to interrupt it by shouting ‘Black Lives Matter’—as some sort of a civil servant fulfilling his civic duty for which he had been *viciously* attacked by Trump’s unhinged and militant base. In the days following, once a video of the tumultuous incident had gone viral, a slew of stories ceased on the moment by further sensationalizing it:

Trump supporters beat up Black Lives Matter protester at rally (*Slate*, 22 November 2015)

'Roughed Up' Black Lives Matter Protester (*The Huffington Post*, 22 November 2015)

Black Lives Matter Protester Tackled, Beaten by Crowd at Trump Rally in Alabama (*New York Magazine*, 22 November 2015)

Black Activist Punched at Donald Trump Rally (*Time Magazine*, 22 November 2015)

Black Lives Matter protester 'attacked' by Trump supporters (*The Guardian*, 23 November 2015)

A news story that would only go on to be redirected towards Trump, from which his response to the news story only helped to further sensationalize it:

Trump on rally protester: 'Maybe he should have been roughed up' (The Washington Post, 22 November 2015)

Trump defends bogus Muslim claim and rough treatment of black protester (The Washington Post, 22 November 2015)

Donald Trump on his Black Lives Matter heckler: 'Maybe he should have been roughed up' (Business Insider, 22 November 2015)

Protester gets punched at Trump rally. Trump: "Maybe he deserved to get roughed up." (Vox, 22 November 2015)

Trump on protester: 'Maybe he should have been roughed up' (CNN, 23 November 2015)

Donald Trump Supporters Attack Black Lives Matter Activist at Campaign Event. Trump Calls the Beating Victim 'Obnoxious And Loud.' (Color Lines, 23 November 2015)

Riding the tail-end of this particular news cycle, no longer even relating to the incident itself, *The Nation* went on to flagrantly conflate two entirely separate events, a shooting of an individual who happened to be a Black Lives Matter activist in Minneapolis and Trump's unrelated social media activity, in the headline: 'Black Lives Matter Activists Are Shot While Trump Is Busy Sharing a Neo-Nazi Graphic on Twitter' (24 November 2015).

What all these juxtapositions between Trump and the violence of his supporters accomplished (e.g., 'Donald Trump, and when 'microaggressions' turn into violence,' *The Washington Post*, 24 November 2015; 'Donald Trump is radicalizing his followers: Terrorism expert explains how Trump is marching Americans towards extremism,' *Salon*, 8 December 2015), was to solidify *the impression* of a quasi-hive mind that connected Trump to his supporters, and his supporters to him. Moreover, the depiction of this intimate relationship imbued the candidate as if in direct command and control of his *army* of support. Slowly but surely, this 'army' (e.g., 'Donald Trump's troll army may be targeting other Republican politicians,' *The Guardian*, 9 December 2015) began to materialize, and as it did, with the backdrop of the demagoguery imagery, *it inevitably drew parallels to one particular demagogue with one particular mode of politics.*

11.3 The Fascism Image

By the end of 2015, the accumulation of images forwarded over the past six months since the launch of the Trump campaign all consolidated into one final image to end the year going into the 2016 election. This image spun together themes of widespread racial

animus from the racism image, the hateful leader from the demagoguery image, the racial purity and ethnonationalism from the whiteness image, the vulnerability of democracy implicit in the populism image, the propagandistic implications in the manipulation image, the idiocy of the masses in the misperception image, the blind faith followership of the religiousness image, and the basic predispositions towards this all in the psychology image. The result of this complex web of themes resulted in what we call *the fascism image*. Where the joke image had severely lacked in any sophistication, this last image drew from the complexity of all the previous imagery which had since entered into the commonly held maps of social and cultural knowledge across substantial sections of the American news-reading public.

Even with this basis in the public discourse, because the fascism image was engendered with potent imagery—death camps, gas chambers and millions upon millions murdered—its use was carried out with far more reverence than some of the previous images where the stakes were far lower and far more forgivable in the world of the 24/7 news cycle. While early on in the Trump campaign, some isolated news articles *attempted* to leverage the image, whether through circumspect headlines (e.g., ‘These Are the Dictators Donald Trump Loves,’ *The Daily Beast*, 18 June 2015; ‘Is Donald Trump a Fascist?,’ *Newsweek*, 17 July 2015; ‘Is Donald Trump leading a proto-fascist movement?,’ *The Week*, 28 August 2015) or those more direct (e.g., ‘Eva Longoria Compares Donald Trump to Hitler,’ *Hollywood Reporter*, 1 July 2015; ‘Donald Trump is an actual fascist: What his surging popularity says about the GOP base,’ *Salon*, 25 July 2015; ‘Triumph of the Will: Taking Donald Trump’s Fascism Seriously,’ *Common Dreams*, 4 September 2015). But the fact that these were unable *to stick* until many months later is further proof of this image’s innate fragility. For the fascism image to stick then, required the ideological work we have thus far outlined. Without this supporting infrastructure incrementally erected around the Charleston Church Shooting, the ‘growing right-wing terror threat’ equation and the rise of the Trump campaign, and their eventual fusion, this final image would have likely been written off as tasteless, tone-deaf, and perhaps by some accounts even regarded as dangerous. Nonetheless, by November, the image and its imminent threat to democracy and humanity itself had become so *well grounded* that the media could now put it on the agenda by superintending another one of its debates. From this point on, the fascism image could be carried in four seemingly contrasting manners that gave the impression of an *impartial* and *innocent* attempt to understand this political development through a lens which was otherwise far too sensitive and accusatory to apply to any other candidate.

In one variation of the fascism image, it was presented as a question, very much like with the intra-media debate on the use of ‘terrorism’ following the Charleston Church Shooting, this debate centered on the justification of whether calling Trump a fascist was fair and accurate:

Is Donald Trump a Fascist? (*New York Magazine*, 25 November 2015)

Is Donald Trump a Fascist? (*The New York Times*, 3 December 2015)

We Asked a Fascism Expert if Donald Trump Is a Fascist (*VICE News*, 5 December 2015)

Is Donald Trump a fascist? (*CNN*, 9 December 2015)

Trump May Be a Loudmouthed Demagogue, but Is He a Fascist? (*Foreign Policy*, 9 December 2015)

Is Donald Trump a Fascist? (*Jacobin*, 15 December 2015)

Is Trump really a fascist, or just an ugly capitalist? (*The Times of Israel*, 16 December 2015)

Posed as an innocent question, the loaded image could be breached in a neutral and even outwardly rigorous manner. Thus, just as the media had put forth such a volatile question, it of course provided its readers with several answers all hinging on the premise that condoned framing of the question in the first place. Even so, to retain the impression of a fair debate, the responses could and would not be singular in nature. The headlines that constituted the remaining variations of the fascism image were presented so to approach the question in both the *negative* and the *affirmative*. Let us begin with the former.

Even by denouncing the accusations pit against Trump, the debate set in motion by the primary and secondary definers, like with the initial line of questioning, implicitly reaffirmed the frame which associated the candidate with 'fascism.' Even though this grouping of articles seemingly defended the candidate's namesake in the light of such accusations, the articles nevertheless served to further reinforce the notion of the Trump campaign as a 'scary' and 'far right' menace:

The problem with comparing Trump to Hitler (*MSNBC News*, 30 November 2015)

Why you should stop calling Donald Trump a fascist (*The Washington Post*, 4 December 2015)

Trump Is Scary, But Not 'Fascist' (*Bloomberg*, 8 December 2015)

No, Trump isn't the next Hitler: But his real historical comparison is still scary (*Salon*, 10 December 2015)

Donald Trump Just Isn't Left Wing Enough To Be A Fascist (*Forbes*, 11 December 2015)

Trump Is a Far Right Populist, Not a Fascist (*Al Jazeera*, 26 December 2015)

Donald Trump Isn't a Fascist; He's a Media-Savvy Know-Nothing (*The New Yorker*, 28 December 2015)

As for the *affirmation* of the original question, the media did so both *implicitly* and *explicitly*. Like with the original question, the implicit mode of affirmation simply relied on framing Trump as *fascist-adjacent* through the repetition of 'comparisons' with 'Hitler,' 'Mussolini' and 'Nazi references' or his 'skidding' towards 'out right fascism':

Donald Trump is trying really hard to sound like a Nazi (*The Verge*, 19 November 2015)

Donald Trump's alarming skid toward outright fascism (*The Week*, 24 November 2015)

Why some conservatives say Trump talk is fascist (*CNN*, 25 November 2015)

Donald Trump prompts Nazi references (*CBS News*, 27 November 2015)

Spike Lee: Trump 'like Hitler' toward Muslims (*The Hill*, 1 December 2015)

Donald Trump, America's modern Mussolini (*The Washington Post*, 8 December 2015)

Donald Trump Shrugs Off Hitler Comparison (*ABC News*, 8 December 2015)

Trump not bothered by comparisons to Hitler (*ABC News*, 8 December 2015)

Donald Trump's ban on Muslims echoes earliest days of Nazi propaganda: expert (*The New York Daily News*, 9 December 2015)

Donald Trump's fascist inclinations do not bother his fans (*The Los Angeles Times*, 9 December 2015)

A Belief System That Once Laid the Groundwork for Fascism (*The New York Times*, 10 December 2015)

Donald Trump compared to Adolf Hitler after 'complete shutdown of Muslims' comments (*The Independent*, 10 December 2015)

Of course, the explicit confirmation of this rising fascism was the most corroborating and thus fear-provoking mode in which the fascism image played out. It cast no doubts on the matter as some headlines made clear in their unequivocal pronouncements:

Donald Trump Is a Fascist (*Slate*, 25 November 2015)

Donald Trump has gone full blown Nazi on us (*The New York Daily News*, 8 December 2015)

'Racist', 'fascist', 'utterly repellent': What the world said about Donald Trump (*BBC News*, 9 December 2015)

Sure, call Trump a Nazi. Just make sure you know what you're talking about. (*The Washington Post*, 14 December 2015)

From the fascism image onwards, the campaign was no longer a joke or a secret agent for the Democratic Party but—upon synergizing with the 'growing right-wing terror threat' equation and the Charleston Church Shooting—instead became a bona fide right-wing fascist threat. One headline even recognized this very evolution in its frightening reminder: 'Think Donald Trump is a joke candidate? That's what they said about Hitler' (*NewStatesmen*, 8 December 2015). Where the racism image had centered around the white supremacy specter, and thus the *racial* divide, the emergence of the fascism image, with fascism commonly understood as a uniquely *right-wing political ideology*, it now approached the Trump campaign on strictly *political* terms. But as suggested in the countless headlines, the image was not only political in nature, but infinitely moralistic. Where there were forces of human destruction, so there were forces of salvation, rectitude emanating from the political opponents countering this ensuing right-wing nightmare—the political left-wing as represented by the Democratic Party, not to mention the celebrity of #NeverTrump Republican »heroism« on the *actually existing* right-wing of politics.

However, this fusion of *political* and *moral* grievances, especially as it had related to the deployment of 'fascism,' was by no means a new phenomenon. At the same time a *Salon* headline claimed, 'The GOP has become the party from George Orwell's nightmares' (27 December 2015), it was this delusional embrace of the fascism image which Orwell had openly detested in his 1944 essay 'What is Fascism?' where he attempted to ask and answer what he described to be one of the most important unanswered questions of modern times. Over the course of its usage, the term fascism, according to Orwell, »[had] lost the last vestige of meaning.« As he went on to illustrate, the term had been consistently leveraged by and against conservatives, socialists, communists, Trotskyists, Catholics, war resisters, war supporters, and nationalists alike, revealing the term's internal inconsistencies. However, amidst the analytical abuse of the term, Orwell did recognize a particular logic at work:

»underneath all this mess, there does lie a kind of buried meaning. [...] roughly speaking, something cruel, unscrupulous, arrogant, obscurantist, anti-liberal and anti-working-class. Except for the relatively small number of Fascist sympathizers, almost any English person would accept 'bully' as a synonym for 'Fascist'. That is about as near to a definition as this much-abused word has come.« (1944)

As with so many of the other terms observed in this report that have been faithfully advanced and reproduced by the primary and secondary definers in the media, the widespread deployment of fascism to cap off 2015, albeit with the scholarly pretensions, reliance on 'fascism experts' and great caution in its negative appraisals, saw the incoherent term leveraged in essentially the very same manner which Orwell had already recognized back in 1944—simply put, as a pejorative attack pit against an adversary. But since 1944, the term has not only come to signify a mere 'bully,' but has come to carry with it the vivid and emotional representation of a world war and the Holocaust and all their horrors as perennially revisited in contemporary pop-history and pop-culture—a development which has only served to enhance the damaging effects of this pejorative attack, if applied tactfully.

As we have already observed with the media over the course of the social production of news, the role of primary and secondary definers, the consensual worldview and the role of media ownership, all which represent and reinforce the ideas and interests of the powerful, not to mention an American media which gleefully leveled segments of the American electorate with that of domestic terrorists, it's not hard to imagine exactly *which* Americans might be pinned with this ugly label moving forward.

12 The Rise of the Far Right Panic

» First came the white newspapers-feature writers and columnists: “Alarming” . . . “hate-messengers” . . . “threat to the good relations between the races” . . . “black segregationists” . . . “black supremacists,” and the like.

And the newspapers' ink wasn't dry before the big national weekly news magazines started: “Hate-teachers” . . . “violence-seekers” . . . “black racists” . . . “black fascists” . . . “anti-Christian” . . . “possibly Communist-inspired . . .”

It rolled out of the presses of the biggest devil in the history of mankind.

— Malcolm X in *The Autobiography of Malcom X* (1964: 239)

«

As we have laid out in the past chapters, a disparate sequence of unrelated events converged to bring about what we are forwarding as the public face of the rise of the far right phenomenon. A phenomenon which in turn helped to universalize and augment what we have otherwise observed to be a negligible threat following our analysis of the ‘growing right-wing terror threat’ equation.

The various events, as we observed, coalesced in a particular manner that saw the emotional basis of the Charleston Church Shooting resonate with the statistical basis of the ‘growing right-wing terror threat’ equation which were adapted so as to further implicate the Trump campaign’s working-class base, who by that point had been discursively rendered into the white working class, from which they could be easily brought into the fold of the white supremacy specter. Put differently, the Charleston Church Shooting made all too palpable the threat sketched out in the ‘growing right-wing terror threat’ equation, which was then projected onto the popularity, ubiquity, and moreover, the *numbers* of the Trump campaign which now, was presented to contain the seeds of a bona fide fascistic threat. The growing ranks of the latter provided the necessary agents that were positioned as the *potential violent perpetrators of right-wing extremism*, to assist in the promotion of a near non-existent threat into one of utmost national concern (recall the introductory quotes by the DHS and President Biden). All that was required was the *definition* of Trump, his base, and the terms of right-wing extremism to consummate the rise of the far right phenomenon and its unfolding into a full on panic. Here, it is essential to grasp the ways in which the primary definers helped *define this very situation into existence*. Let us not forget, before the Trump campaign had even begun, the media first *defined* the candidate as an unserious joke and only later as a narcissistic, bullying demagogue. And the same media who freely *defined* his campaign as racist, sexist, nativist, and bigoted, and its politics as de facto antithetical to the working class, a class so misled and stupid, that they posed not only a threat to democracy, but to the very security and longevity of the nation itself. As we have seen, with no intention of

simply *absolving* the candidate or the campaign, it was the same media that had *obsessed* over the figure of Trump, moreover, which had mobilized the *racist, sexist, homophobic, and ableist* imagery, underscored the *stupidity* and *dangerousness* of the working class, and was itself *hostile* to the legitimate exercise of democracy in the first place.

Without defining the campaign into its most exaggerated and debased form as an army of backwards, mentally unstable, gullible, angry, hateful, toxically masculine, violent, stupid, poor, privileged, racist and fascistic white supremacists, the threat put forward by the ‘growing right-wing terror threat’ equation would have likely remained just another one of the countless ‘threats’ the American populace had faced on a daily basis.

12.1 The Moral Panic

Still, if the relevant data did not portray an increase in *incidents* of right-wing extremism, but rather merely an increase in the *proportion* of incidents *interpreted* as right-wing; if rather than rising, cases of terrorism had experienced a recent low, as suggested by multiple accounts; and if the proposed threat was indeed negligible, like multiple sources, including Kurzman & Schanzer essentially admitted to being the case; then what explained the broad and exaggerated response by the media, state officials and experts to the rise of the far right phenomenon?

After conducting their own ‘*rising crime rate*’ equation, discovering that indeed there had been little *new* nor *rising* about the supposed wave of ‘mugging’ incidents besides the growing frequency with which the label had been deployed, this blatant disconnect prompted Hall et al. to ask: »If the reaction to mugging cannot then be explained by a straightforward reference to the statistics, how *can* it be explained?« (1978: 20) to which they introduced a critical turning point in their analysis:

»When the official reaction to a person, groups of persons or series of events is *out of all proportion* to the actual threat offered, when ‘experts’, in the form of police chiefs, the judiciary, politicians and editors *perceive* the threat in all but identical terms, and appear to talk ‘with one voice’ of rates, diagnoses, prognoses and solutions, when the media representations universally stress ‘sudden and dramatic’ increases (in numbers involved or events) and ‘novelty’, above and beyond that which a sober, realistic appraisal could sustain, then we believe it is appropriate to speak of the beginnings of a *moral panic*.« (20)

It was from this point onwards that *Policing the Crisis* would adopt the sociological concept of the ‘moral panic’ first conceptualized by Stanley Cohen in his 1972 book *Folk Devils and Moral Panic*. In the now oft cited passage, Hall et al. quoted Cohen and his description of the unfolding of a moral panic:

»Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible. Sometimes the object of the panic is quite novel and at other times it is something which has been in existence long enough, but suddenly appears in the limelight. Sometimes the panic is passed over and is forgotten, except in folklore and collective memory; at other times it has more serious and long-lasting repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or even in the way society conceives itself.« (As quoted in Hall et al. 1978: 20)

It was only after debunking the threat implied in the ‘mugging panic’ that allowed Hall et al. to begin observing the events as a moral panic, where *Policing the Crisis* would take on a decisive turn in both its object of study and its evolution. With this interpretative breakthrough, the authors ‘pushed back, behind the headlines’ (54) to direct their attention to the primary definers ultimately responsible for the panic’s *primary definition*. In a similar vein, following our own analysis of the ‘growing right-wing terror threat’ equation, by choosing to approach the rise of the far right phenomenon as a moral panic, we too must inevitably turn our attention away from its public face and towards its *primary definers*. But before we do so, let us briefly review the role which the right-wing label had played, which like ‘mugging,’ provided the phenomenon with its *unifying* element—whether referencing the Trump’s candidacy on the ticket in the *right-wing* Republican political party, the ‘growing *right-wing* terror threat’ equation, or the actually existing *right-wing* extremism that resulted in the Charleston Church Shooting—that helped to generate, organize and direct the ways in which the moral panic would unfold.

13 The Career of the ‘Right-Wing’ Label

In our analysis of the ‘growing right-wing terror threat’ equation, we began to probe the indefinite character of what Kurzman & Schanzer denoted as ‘right-wing.’ There, we saw how even one of their own sources admitted of the ‘terminological chaos’ and effective synonymy of the term with a host of other interchangeable expressions (e.g., far right, extreme right, radical right, fringe right, hard right). Because, as opposed to centrism (whether its center-left or center-right variant), these various terms ultimately denote *a substantive rightward leaning* in relation to the political spectrum, for the sake of simplicity, like Kurzman & Schanzer, in what follows, we will subsequently consolidate all these various expressions and leanings into that which we will term ‘right-wing.’

As previously suggested, this term also happens to borrow both its particular namesake and meaning in relation to the left-right political spectrum. As for the left-right political spectrum, its origins date back to the political landscape in the heat of the French Revolution. There, the political orientations of left-wing and right-wing were, rather arbitrarily, born out of the seating arrangements at the 1789 French National Assembly. As it happened, supporters of the revolution occupied the former half, while supporters of the monarchy were seated on the opposing half. What on first glance might seem random, on second glance reveals the material relations of power that were originally signified in the political spectrum which today is overlooked, if not taken for granted. In this initial period where the left-wing and right-wing of politics were first established, according to Frank Furedi in his book *Politics of Fear: Beyond Left and Right* (2006), the political orientations endowed an internal coherence and substance that directly corresponded to notions of economics, democracy, rights, the individual, religion and science. Furedi writes:

»This conflict was not confined to the domain of politics. It involved a different orientation towards such basic questions as the meaning of human nature—whether it is determined by nurture (left) or nature (right) and the role of tradition and morality. Nor was this conflict confined to a small group of politicians and intellectuals. During the past two centuries millions of people have been mobilized by political parties wedded to distinct ideologies. And the conflict between parties of the left and right has provoked revolutions, counterrevolutions, upheaval and violence.« (49)

Thus, as Furedi implies, their significance was not merely limited to the realm of ideas but were intimately interwoven into the everyday lives and struggles of untold participants. Participants, who would go on to alter the course of history as they took to political

struggles, in some cases sacrificing their very existence in the fight for freedom and democracy against those who *materially* denied them of it through force.

Following the overthrow of the feudal order, where the insurgent bourgeoisie had once constituted the political left-wing—as the radical, progressive and revolutionary wing of politics demanding societal change—about a century later this wing would be *replaced* by another revolutionary class, that of the proletariat—the working class. As for the bourgeoisie who had overthrown the kings of old, now themselves constitutive of the ruling order, like with the monarchs before them, they became closely associated with those tendencies on the right-wing of politics, most prominently that of the *conservation* of their own class rule and the system which faithfully reproduced it.

And yet, over the course of modern political history, the once internal coherence of the left-right political spectrum has more recently deteriorated in meaning to such a point that Furedi has forwarded the argument that »these terms have lost much of their historic relevance« (50), and noting:

»Left and right have become words in search of meaning. People who define themselves according to old ideological labels do so as individuals and as a matter of self-definition. And they do so in isolation from a wing of political tradition. What we have are individuals, but not projects or movements that are associated with the classical meaning of left or right.« (Ibid.)

While we will return to this particular subject matter in a later chapter, for now, let us explore how this relates to the terminology of ‘right-wing.’ Depleted of any internal significance, reminiscent of Greenstock’s ‘terrorism is terrorism,’ the significance of ‘right-wing’ has been reduced to little more than what Furedi described as a mere *label*. But as Hall et al. remind us, while ‘right-wing’ as a label may *itself* be without meaning:

»Labels are important, especially when applied to dramatic public events. They not only place and identify those events; they assign events to a context. Thereafter the use of the label is likely to mobilise *this whole referential context*, with all its associated meanings and connotations.« (1978: 23)

As a label, the use of right-wing has also undergone a subtle shift in tenor, from a noun, ‘the political right-wing,’ denoting a collective and class-conscious political project, to an adjective, ‘right-wing,’ classifying conservative tendencies in politics, back to a noun bringing together all that is interpreted as conservative into communion with that which is popularly referred to as *the right-wing*. Thus, all resulting in what we will, henceforth, refer to as *the right-wing label*.

Of course, in the present-day, this sensational deployment of the right-wing label has not been forwarded in such a manner as to stoke the historical imagery of the French revolution nor that of lumber and oil barons of the early 20th century, but instead, it has

been conjured up, in the case of the rise of the far right phenomenon, to capture two very *distinct* moments in its historical career.

One of these historical chapters is that of fascism, as the fascism image made abundantly clear. A chapter by no means foreign to American audiences. As Jean Baudrillard alluded to in his book *Screened Out* (2002), for decades, in television documentaries, films, literature and across the United States cultural landscape more generally, the media has undertaken a 'revival of Nazism, fascism and the holocaust' in its own particular manner. This is because, so Baudrillard:

»we have disappeared today politically and historically (this is our real problem) that we want to prove we actually died between 1940 and 1945 at Auschwitz or Hiroshima — that at least is a kind of history that really has some weight to it.«
(16)

Noting how in the modern era »our reality comes to us through the media, the tragic events of the past included« (17), instead of inspiring a *historical curiosity and consciousness*, Baudrillard argues that the particular form of this revival has produced the opposite effect which has led to »a collective attempt to hallucinate the historical truth of evil« (15).

While our point here has less to do with whether Baudrillard's general analysis is right or wrong, what is important is his recognition to the extent to which themes such as Nazism, the Holocaust, and fascism have been exercised in a very particularly *moralistic* fashion by the dominant cultural apparatuses (i.e., Hollywood, news media, the intelligentsia). According to Baudrillard, audiences have long been sensitized to this moralistic reading of the 'evils' of this fateful chapter in history which have been played back to Americans on repeat. The ideological work of the media then, was to channel this longstanding popular and moral disdain and resentment of such *transcendental evils* into the right-wing label.

The other distinct historical chapter consisted of a more *localized* moment in United States history: the legacy of slavery and segregation—these most *racist* of events which have been commonly referred to in biblical terms as *America's original sin*. Just as we saw reporting on the 'growing right-wing terror threat' equation adapt to the post-Charleston Church Shooting climate with the integration of the white supremacy specter, the right-wing label itself now fulfilled the role as the necessary conduit in tying together the three otherwise disparate events. This *transhistorical* index of the white supremacy specter brought to mind the objectionable history of plantation whippings, lynch mobs, the hooded Klansman, fear campaigns, segregated schools and second-class citizenry. Instances in which the media readily condensed into the imagery of confederate flags and those who dared wave them following the shooting in Charleston. As if inevitable, these images were effortlessly blended with those of Kristallnacht, Mussolini's

Black Shirts, *Mein Kampf*, and concentration camps. The total-effect of these transhistorical associations, served to imbue the otherwise conceptually impoverished label with a reinvigorated and now distinctly moralistic meaning.

Aside from this transhistorical usage, by 2015, the right-wing label also harbored within it a number of other ambiguities, those involving questions around the axes of scale, geography, and matters of politics itself. Built into the vagueness of the concept, the label could at once denote agents and institutions on the *actually existing* right-wing with those simply *defined* into the latter. Moreover, the label effectively collapsed scales whether of *individuals* (i.e., lone wolves, mass shooters, etc.), *online communities* (e.g., Twitter, 4chan), *social movements* (e.g., The Tea Party, PEGIDA), *membership organizations* (e.g., Klu Klux Klan, White Aryan Resistance), *political parties* (e.g., the United States Republican Party, the French National Front, the Dutch Party for Freedom), *administrations* (e.g., Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Turkey, Benjamin Netanyahu's Israel), as well as entire *systems of government* (i.e., fascism, capitalism, theocracies, autocracies, monarchies) into its scope.

In a recent video plug for his book *How to Stop Fascism* posted on his Twitter feed, the British left-wing commentator Paul Mason perfectly exemplified such a collapse of time, space, politics, and scale in his evocation of the right-wing label:

»Imagine the Nazis invent a time machine and towards the end of the war they decide to send a crack team of SS men into the future to restart the Reich. What year do you think they aim for? [Audio of Donald Trump speaking at a rally: "I think tomorrow is going to be one of the greatest wins in the history of politics"] Suppose they arrive in 2020 ... they love our technology, hate our culture, but then ... they see far-right mobs in Delhi beating students with iron bars ... they Mussolini era used as a playbook by men like Putin and Bolsonaro ... they see the Proud Boys storm the Capitol and then they realize ... all the ideas in their heads, white supremacy, leader worship, violent misogyny, and the desire for genocide, are there in the heads of millions of people. So, what do these time traveling Nazis do next? I think they buy popcorn and just watch ... their mission was pointless. Fascism is back, but of its own accord.« (2 August 2021)

Because of its abstract and malleable nature, and inherent relation to the left-right political spectrum, the right-wing label was able to account for a whole array of contradictory global and political contexts and developments whether intimate or far-reaching in scale. Recalling those headlines that portrayed a continuum between *lone wolves* and *the global white supremacist community* (*The New York Times's* 'White Supremacists Without Borders' and 'White Supremacists Extend Their Reach Through Websites') provides just a few minor examples of the unproblematic harboring of extremes innate in the right-wing label. Here, the individual, who is at once the basic unit of terrorism (and

for that matter of politics), becomes one and the same with a diffused threat that spans the entirety of the cybersphere and so enters into the private domain of internet users the world over. Furthermore, since the *ideology* in question is made out to potentially manifest itself into hateful *action*, in a similar manner to which the threat of 'Islamic terrorism' managed to universally threaten far-flung airports and the skies in the wake of 9/11, the specter of white supremacy endowed in the right-wing label managed to cast a comparable shadow across schools, malls, places of worship and peaceful society more generally with the threat of shootings like the ones committed in Charleston and Halle.

What the right-wing label effectively achieved was to level right-wing lone wolves with right-wing prime ministers, lumping right-wing libertarians in with right-wing white nationalists, placing right-wing anti-abortion evangelicals in communion with right-wing neo-Nazis, and counting right-wing critics of tax and immigration policies or the government more generally (recall Kurzman & Schanzer's use of 'anti-government extremism' as the core feature of what they described as 'The Growing Right-Wing Terror Threat') into the ranks of right-wing white supremacists and right-wing mass shooters. Or even more crudely, labeling left-wing and politically homeless dissenters as right-wing hangers-on a degree removed from neo-Nazis.

In essence, by selectively exercising the right-wing label, from their foothold in the media, primary definers effectively *homogenized* and then *criminalized* the very exercise of politics in the court of public opinion by equivocating dissent with the incarnation of pure evil.

14 The New Definition of the Situation

If the events ushered in by the right-wing label which initiated the rise of the far right phenomenon were indeed neither growing nor a substantive threat to begin with, why then had the media, experts, law enforcement officials and activists treat the severity of the threat as if the reverse were true? Sizing up a similar predicament in the wake of their investigation, Hall et al. wrote:

»Strictly speaking, the facts about the crimes which both police and the media were describing as ‘novel’ were not new; what was new was the way the label helped to break up and recategorise the general field of crime – the ideological frame which it laid across the field of social vision. What the agencies and the press were responding to was not a simple set of facts but a new *definition of the situation* – a new construction of the social reality of crime. ‘Mugging’ provoked an organised response, in part because it was linked with a widespread *belief* about the alarming rate of crime in general, and with a common *perception* that this rising crime was also becoming more *violent*. These social aspects had entered into its meaning.«
(1978: 32)

These observations resonate with the rise of the far right phenomenon on several counts. For one, the *recategorization* of ‘the general field of crime’ quite accurately reflects the addition of the right-wing label that joined the ranks of the ‘Islamic,’ ‘Muslim,’ and ‘Jihadi’ labels used to assist in tabulating and tracking of violent acts identified under the rubric of terrorism. Moreover, by 2015, as observed in the work of Kurzman & Schanzer and the general mood in the press, ‘the ideological frame’ was increasingly displaced *away* from the decade and a half reign of ‘Islamic terrorism’—increasingly sullied by accusations of Islamophobia—*towards* a general acceptance of right-wing extremism as the *real* (‘leading,’ ‘primary’) terror threat.

These adjustments were made implicit in the framing advanced by Kurzman & Schanzer who approached the problem of terrorism in terms of individual prejudice, and thus effectively evading not only its definitional problem, but moreover the material repercussions brought on by the global War on Terror. In the crudest form, for Kurzman & Schanzer, these problems were not *material* in origin, as stemming directly from the broad implementation of counterterrorism measures undertaken amid the global War on Terror but were essentially *idealistic* in nature—made expressive in the *Islamophobic outlooks* of individuals (whether by those in the press or the public at large).

Another example of such maneuvering could be seen in the direct aftermath of the Charleston Church Shooting when the media underwent its own ‘self-critique’ in its

debate regarding the application of the terrorism label. There, the problem was squarely framed as a matter of unequal and thus the unfair *labeling* of terrorism as opposed to the *institutional drivers* responsible for the stigmatization and disparities in the first place.

In both of these examples, rather than eradicating the pernicious racialization and labelling of populations as terrorist or terrorist-adjacent, in these instances the logic of Kurzman & Schanzer and the media only helped to reify the issue which they had purportedly set out to critique. At the same time, as suggested in the notion of the *other* terror threat, the right-wing label itself became a subtle mode of racialization, which at once transformed right-wing *political* affiliation with a static right-wing *group identity*, a group which because of its proximity to terrorism itself, was liable to be designated as an enemy of law and order, and as such, an enemy to the general population as national security officials had so often done with political dissidents in the past.

But if all of this ideological reframing was indeed ‘responding’ to what effectively amounted to a new definition of the situation, then we must allocate our attention to the original source of the statistical basis of the ‘growing right-wing terror threat’ equation—to the primary definitions at the heart of the rise of the far right phenomenon. While the press and its tendencies towards sensationalization and institutional capture by powerful interests undoubtedly contributed to the public side of the rise of the far right phenomenon, as we saw in social production of news, it is not they who themselves ‘make’ the news, but rather *select* and *present* news items forwarded to them by those select few academics, experts, officials and institutions who function as primary definers. In the case of the ‘growing right-wing terror threat’ equation, as we saw, the official statistics collected by Kurzman & Schanzer were those which they had derived from hundreds of testimonials by law enforcement agencies across the country. So, for us to probe whether or not the growing right-wing terror threat was in anyway legitimate, in the following chapter we will do as Kurzman & Schanzer suggest: *Just ask the police*.

15 The Social Production of Law Enforcement

» *But headlines can mislead. The main terrorist threat in the United States is not from violent Muslim extremists, but from right-wing extremists. Just ask the police.*

— Charles Kurzman and David Schanzer in the ‘The Growing Right-Wing Terror Threat (The New York Times, 16 June 2015)’ «

Just as *particular* news organizations face a number of *particular* structural pressures, whether material or ideological in nature over the course of the social production of news, so is the case with *particular* law enforcement agencies in a process we might designate as *the social production of law enforcement*. Where both sites of production are confronted with budgetary and staffing pressures, and while both, to a certain extent rely on public relations (whether in terms of satisfying readers or taxpayers), where the social production of law enforcement begins to depart from the social production of news is in its intimate relation to the law and violence which significantly structure its *production process*. Rather than produce ‘news,’ it could be said that law enforcement officials produce *order*. To do so, the law which stands between order and anarchy must be adequately enforced. If crime is essentially the transgression of order, or alternatively understood as the *breaking* of law, and because the number of daily crimes and potential injunctions far outweighs the limited resources of police forces (i.e., traffic violations, loitering, jaywalking), law enforcement agencies are inevitably confronted by the problem of which criminal activities to direct their limited resources towards. Like with news values then, because there is no objective criteria for crime, it is inevitably approached through what we might call *the professional ideology of law enforcement*. And like with the media, this combination of pressures, be they material or ideological, inevitably go on to structure *the sense and selection of which crimes require the most of the limited resources on hand*.

Already here we see the pull of ideology influencing the shape of crime control. However, as Hall et al. point out, there is one *objective* metric by which police agencies can orient their efforts referred to as the ‘clear-up rate’ (1978: 41). This source of objectivity is important, since given their budgetary restraints, it provides agencies with a ‘logical’ basis on which to allocate their resources and concentrate their activity accordingly. However, the adoption of this measure also tends to orient and concentrate law enforcement attention towards those crimes with the most ‘high detection potential.’ In other words, criminal conduct which can be plainly *identified* and *located*. Thus, from the perspective of the clear up rate, crime control can legitimately present itself as an impersonal affair based on seemingly objective circumstances. But this approach is not without its shortcomings. As Hall et al. note:

»this logical practice is also a structuring one; it amplifies the volume of these selected crimes, since the more resources are concentrated, the greater the number recorded. The paradox is that the selectivity of police reaction to selected crimes almost certainly serves to increase their number (what is called a 'deviancy amplification spiral').« (41)

This aggregation of select crimes in select areas then sets the impetus to profile select populations. In the case of the global War on Terror, the efforts to get out in front of so-called 'Islamic terrorism' inevitably resulted in the discovery of 'Islamic terrorists,' from which sentiments of Islamophobia were sure to trail.

With a newfound sensitivity towards the social production of law enforcement, in the following chapter we will examine some of the more crucial changes and pressures that guided the work of law enforcement.

16 Law Enforcement *Before* the Rise of the Far Right Phenomenon

» *If the police were so sensitised to the real or perceived threat from ‘muggings’ before ‘mugging’ had been appropriated to the public domain, then that prior activity must have been predicated on an institutional definition of certain kinds or patterns of crime as ‘adding up to’, or ‘being interpretable as’, the beginnings of a ‘mugging’ wave – a ‘new strain of crime’.*

– Hall et al. in *Policing the Crisis* (1978:54)

«

As Kurzman & Schanzer have shown us, law enforcement agencies do not merely attempt to produce order, but they also produce testimonials and statistics. It was from this raw data and the interpretative work of the former as well as the *New America Foundation* that constructed the chain of argument found in both the release of ‘The Growing Right-Wing Terror Threat’ and the ‘Terrorism in America After 9/11.’ Thus, it is the aim of this chapter to explore the context in which this raw data was recorded in the decade leading up to their public releases in the summer of 2015. This includes observing the relevant factors, changes and distribution of energies as it relates to the production of order and those transgressing it. To do this, let us now turn our gaze away from the media and towards those doing the policing and those being policed.

16.1 The Decline of Budgets

Without question, the most far-reaching event for law enforcement was the emergence of the subprime mortgage crisis that began to spiral in 2007, and its facilitation and collision with the financial crisis in the years following. The combination of these two distinct crises, in what follows, we shall refer to as the Great Recession. Not only were the impacts of the Great Recession unevenly distributed across particular geographies, sectors, and demographics, but also across particular law enforcement agencies. These internal and external changes to those law enforcement agencies most affected, greatly shaped the course and character of their work. Specifically, it was the everyday realities of county and municipal law enforcement, also known as State and local law enforcement, which bore the brunt of the far-reaching effects of the Great Recession. As happened to be the case, these were also the same agencies who most regularly interfaced with communities ‘on the ground,’ and whose ranks were most influential in providing Kurzman & Schanzer’s op-ed and the ‘Terrorism in America After 9/11’ database with its raw data to interpret.

Financially speaking, whereas federal law enforcement agencies came out of the Great Recession largely unabated due to their dependence on regular and reliable federal

funding, State and local law enforcement agencies found themselves in a very different situation. Since these agencies depended on local coffers, specifically the revenue from property taxes, the spiraling of the subprime mortgage crisis and the wave of home foreclosures and abandoned properties that followed signaled financial disaster for those agencies that had already begun facing severe declines in their annual budgets. Already in the years prior to the Great Recession, where the 1994 Crime Bill had flushed those very same agencies with an influx of funding which would go on to bloat police budgets and facilitate the rollout of mass incarceration as we know it today, by the mid 2000s, this financial boon had effectively been cut in half. According to the magazine *Government Technology's* 'Budget Cuts, Anti-Terror Duties Strain Policing' (27 July 2010), federal support went »from \$1.1 billion in 1999 to \$584 million in 2003.« In Police Executive Research Forum's newsletter *Subject to Debate* the headline of a 2009 cover article reiterated this point, reading '63 Percent of Local Police Departments Are Facing Budget Cuts, PERF Survey Shows' (Jan 2009: 1). The article would go on to reveal how already prior to the subprime mortgage crisis State and local law enforcement agencies had recorded substantial hiring freezes, layoffs, and cutbacks on overtime pay, equipment and training.

By 2005 and into the following years, these recent budgetary strains were only further compounded as homes began to decline in value, which only placed further mortgages underwater. These faulty mortgages in turn forced many homeowners to default on their payments, which by 2007, resulted in an ever-increasing spiral of home foreclosures, forced evictions and abandoned properties—all of which only served to further the decline in home values unevenly across the United States.

From the perspective of State and local law enforcement agencies, these developments translated into missing property taxes, which translated into more budget cuts, which in turn translated into added pressures in those very communities which had been hit the hardest by the housing crisis. As a later report put together by the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), 'The Impact of the Economic Downturn on American Police Agencies' (2011), noted: »The economic downturn has been devastating to local economies and, by extension, their local law enforcement agencies« (2). In the following years, national headlines like 'In Lean Times, Police Cuts Spark Debate Over Safety' (*The Wall Street Journal*, 3 September 2010), 'Cities scrape for dollars, even in police budgets' (*MPR*, 3 September 2010), and 'Budget and Staffing Shortages' (*Police Chief Magazine*, 6 January 2012) provide only a glimpse into the extent to which these impacts took their course. Not only would such effects linger in the immediate aftermath of the Great Recession, but as the 2011 COPS report also foresaw:

»The effects of the economic downturn on law enforcement agencies may be felt for the next 5–10 years, or worse, permanently. The permanence of this change will be driven not just by the economy, but by the local government officials

determining that allocating 30–50 percent of their general fund budgets for public safety costs is no longer a fiscal possibility.« (2)

With these increasingly permanent austerity measures, to make do with their truncated budgets, agency leadership had to seek new strategies in their effort to *make do with less*.

16.2 The Introduction of Force Multipliers

Already prior to the Great Recession, police forces were experimenting with strategies to cushion their dwindling budgets. As reported by a leading law enforcement news website, *Officer.com's* 'Technology serves as a force multiplier' reported, the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) Police Chief, William Bratton, was quoted in saying: »Technology is truly the key to increasing the department's effectiveness as we continue to fight and reduce crime with limited resources« (15 June 2007). In the article Bratton acknowledged that: »With too few cops, we need cutting-edge technology to give us an edge on the criminals so one day we will achieve our goal of making Los Angeles the safest city in America.« For him, this meant investing in enhanced equipment and surveillance technologies to extend the reach and effectiveness of those 'few cops' out on patrol. By 2011, his probationary philosophy became the gospel for all State and local law enforcement departments. Reappearing in the 2011 COPS report, Bratton assured his colleagues and constituents:

»Around the country, cash-strapped communities are looking for any way to boost efficiency and cut spending [...] police agencies are shifting their operational models to include the use of technology systems that can help agencies to improve outcomes and increase efficiency.« (26)

The utilization of 'Closed-Circuit Televisions,' 'Light-Based Intervention Systems,' 'Tactical Automatic Vehicle Locators,' 'Automated Emergency Dispatch Systems,' listed in the report, all served to »act as force multipliers through incident intervention and crime prevention, without requiring the immediate presence of an officer« (26). From the perspective of State and local police forces, these technologies allowed units a maximal range with minimal manpower. In essence, creating more agile, independent, and effective units. The upshot of course was departments' ever greater reliance on technology, especially surveillance technology. From the perspective of taxpayers, with these new measures in place, the presence of State and local police ebbed and flowed between the nonexistent and the militarized and impersonal.

But inanimate technology was not the only force multiplier. To counter the contracting budgets, State and local police departments increasingly enlisted the *volunteerism* of the general public to help soften the effects of deteriorating budgets and insufficient personnel. As the *New York Times's* 'Police Departments Turn to Volunteers' (1 March

2011), reported: »Hamstrung by shrinking budgets, the police say the volunteers are indispensable in dealing with low-level offenses and allow sworn officers to focus on more pressing crimes and more violent criminals.« This volunteerism was not limited to physical support, but also found its form online. The use of the internet and especially social media, the 2011 COPS report acknowledged, »provides a cost effective avenue for police to communicate directly with their communities, as well as receive information and feedback from those that they serve« (27). A later *NBC News* article, 'Boston's Legacy: Can Crowdsourcing Really Fight Crime?' (12 April 2014), described this support as 'crowdsourcing,' quoting the words of a retired chief inspector who underlined its significance: »We can't knock on one million doors, so the speed of the Internet is a major advantage when it comes to sharing information.« If technological force multipliers distanced the State and local law enforcement officials from the public, the voluntaristic variant not only incorporated the public into its daily practice, but increasingly exposed the police to the public and the public to the police.

16.3 Changes and Increases to the Workload

Not only did the Great Recession directly alter budgets of select State and local police departments across the country, but the content and intensity of their duties. Although State and local police had always been responsible for the issuing and enforcing of court-ordered eviction notices and home foreclosure as well as enforcing the law against housing code violations, mortgage fraud, and petty crimes, following the subprime mortgage crisis and the Great Recession, these once infrequent duties grew significantly in scope. To begin, according to the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, »federal foreclosure proceedings rose 82 percent from calendar year 2006 to calendar year 2012 and represented 61 percent of all real property cases filed in federal courts in 2012« (2019). Though officially processed in federal courts, such foreclosures were inevitably enforced by State and local police.

Besides increasing the workload of State and local police, such tasks increased their interaction with individuals under these most traumatic of circumstances, but these changes themselves led to increased duties and pressure from the surrounding communities. For example, as the president of the Illinois Association of Code Enforcement explained in a 2013 press release:

»As the rates of foreclosed properties and bankruptcies continue to soar, communities are struggling to find ways to manage these properties and the various code and ordinance violations that may be connected to the growing number of vacancies. This has affected, and significantly expanded, the role of code enforcement officers within communities.« (1)

Where housing code had gone unenforced, the report warned that »trash, tall grass and weeds, graffiti, and inoperable vehicles« (1) as well as »an increase in the amount of crime and a significant decrease in property values« (1) likely followed. Because many State and local police were responsible for the enforcing of housing code, this not only resulted in an increased workload, but the deleterious effects of home foreclosures in select communities only resulted in further social pressure from property owners in the surrounding neighborhoods, in other words, pressure from their very tax base.

Another side-effect of the subprime mortgage crisis as it related to State and local police was the unprecedented rise in mortgage fraud that had taken advantage of the crisis. In the paper 'Mortgage Fraud, Foreclosures and Neighborhood Decline Meeting' (2010), the National Institute of Justice reported how this previously niche crime was »one of the fastest growing financial crimes in the history of the United States« (4), and later noting how it had taken on 'epidemic proportions' (131).

Not only did these challenging and time-intensive tasks preoccupy the limited energies of State and local police, but the growing economic strains, vacant properties, and deterioration of communities also resulted in rising crime rates in those areas most effected by the subprime mortgage crisis. An early *Reuters* article exemplified this collision of declining budgets and rising crime rates in its headline: 'Economic downturn hits US police with double whammy' (20 October 2008). The National Institute of Justice report only corroborated this trend, and in a fashion similar to the effects of housing code violations, its opening statement noted that:

»Increasing foreclosure rates can lead to immediate and visible increases in crimes such as theft, vandalism, squatting and arson. Over time these crimes damage the social fabric of a neighborhood or a metropolitan area for decades to come.« (2010: 1)

Thus, as the numbers of abandoned properties rose, State and local police were confronted with a whole new set of policing challenges. Closely related to code violations, of these challenges, the report illustrated how:

»More vacant homes pop up bringing weedy, overgrown lots, vandalism or gang graffiti "tags." If the properties are occupied, the police are called upon to intervene in a rising tide of crime. Some crimes, like public intoxication and prostitution, are a nuisance and an offense to the community's moral values. Some, like mail theft and auto break-ins, are relatively petty. But some, like gunfights, drug trafficking, and the conversion of McMansions into hydroponic marijuana farms, meth labs, and stash houses, are deadly serious.« (142)

In 'The Impact of Foreclosures on Neighborhood Crime' (2015), a later study submitted to the Department of Justice (DOJ) by Ingrid Ellen and Johanna Lacoé, its authors once

again corroborated this trend of the spiraling deterioration of neighborhoods. The study proclaimed: »As expected, effects [of crime] are largest for foreclosed properties that go all the way through the foreclosure process to an auction. The effects of foreclosure extend to crime on neighboring blockfaces, but these effects are attenuated« (Ellen & Lacoë: 1).

One final example of the increase and changes to the work profile of State and local level policing took place in the gray area between public health and crime control: a sharp rise in substance abuse. The fallout of the Great Recession only increased the rate of opioid addiction and overdoses, what more recently has been referred to as the ‘Opioid Epidemic.’ As a discussion paper, ‘Opioid overdose: preventing and reducing opioid overdose mortality’ (2013), published by the UN documented, in 2010 close to half of all drug overdoses in the United States were the result of »fatal opioid overdoses related to prescription opioid analgesics« (2). The paper went on to establish how:

»The recent increase in prescribing rates of opioids in the United States appears to have contributed to the increase in cases of opioid-related overdose, from 4,000 opioid overdose deaths per annum in 1999 to more than 16,000 in 2010.« (5)

Thus, this influx in opioid abuse translated into a set of new challenges for overburdened and underfunded State and local police departments. In *PsychCentral’s* ‘Change in Police Attitudes to Overdose May Improve Outcomes’ (28 September 2013), the website reported on a new study released by the journal *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* that reported:

»while law enforcement officers often serve as medical first responders, there is a lack of clarity as to what the police can — or should — do at the scene of an overdose.

“Police officers are often limited by available resources or protocol when it comes to responding to overdose,” said principal investigator Traci C. Green, Ph.D., a research scientist in Rhode Island Hospital’s department of emergency medicine.

“While some expressed negative attitudes toward people who use drugs, others were empathetic and simply frustrated with the lack of drug treatment, the cycle of addiction, and the ease with which people can access drugs in their communities.”«

As this suggests, even by 2013, State and local police were underprepared if not entirely unprepared for how to safely and effectively deal with the sharp rise in opioid abuse that only intensified over the course of the Great Recession. Only by 2014 would training materials like the *Division of Criminal Justice Services’s* ‘Opioid Overdose and Intranasal Naloxone Training for Law Enforcement Trainer’s Guide’ (2014) or *PERF’s* ‘New

Challenges for Police: A Heroin Epidemic and Changing Attitudes Toward Marijuana' (2014) become widely available to assist State and local police departments in this new challenge and thus officiate this new responsibility into their work profile.

16.4 Changes in the Community

Of course, as we have already hinted, State and local police were not merely impacted by internal changes (e.g., changes in budgets, technique, quality and scale of workload), but those same agencies were exposed to drastic changes in the social environment within which they operated. As opposed to changes in policing following the Great Recession, in the following pages, we'll attempt to depict the changes affecting *those being policed*.

The most obvious targets of the subprime mortgage crisis were those very individuals and families foreclosed upon and evicted from their homes. For many, this traumatic experience was often compounded by either precarious temporary living arrangements, or in the direst cases, homelessness. While there are no official statistics that record rates of homelessness, in the report 'Foreclosure to Homelessness' (2008) released by *The National Coalition for the Homeless*, after surveying homeless shelters across the United States, the report found that: »Nearly 61 percent of respondents had seen an increase in homelessness since the foreclosure crisis began in 2007, with only 5 percent indicating that they had not seen an increase. Nearly a third did not know« (5). Either way, those who were forced to leave their homes inevitably had to find a new source of housing, which in the aim of securing affordable rent, also resulted in neighbors parting ways with their communities.

The interplay between the subprime mortgage crisis and financial crisis, only intensified this widespread housing instability. In its 2009 report, 'The Impacts of Foreclosures on Families and Communities,' *The Urban Institute* outlined how:

»Such troubled economic times are not good environments for families trying to bounce back from foreclosure. These families are likely to be financially vulnerable and may be experiencing illness, job loss, or other traumas. While this is not unexpected of families facing foreclosure, the number of households in crisis coupled with the economic downturn exacerbates problems. Families in foreclosure need help at a time when people, organizations, and institutions that may be traditional sources of assistance are overburdened and underfunded. With unemployment rising, coming back from a job loss is made even more difficult.« (6)

In this context, 'housing instability,' the report had written, becomes »very worrisome for groups who may be hit hard by volatility and change« (9) and acknowledged how:

»increased personal and family stress feeds marital problems and exacerbates negative behaviors (child abuse, addictions, etc.). Stress may also have a negative

effect on health, as do compromised or unsanitary housing conditions. While these effects are in some ways the most difficult to document, they are serious and troubling, with long-term consequences.« (11-12)

Similarly, in a later report titled 'The Far-Reaching Impact of Job Loss and Unemployment' (2015), its author also highlights the psychological tolls resulting from the Great Recession:

»Research suggests that displacement is associated with subsequent unemployment, long-term earnings losses, and lower job quality; declines in psychological and physical well-being; loss of psychosocial assets; social withdrawal; family disruption; and lower levels of children's attainment and well-being.«

Another social byproduct closely related with the decline in psychological and physical wellbeing following the wave of job losses experienced during the Great Recession was the unprecedented rise in substance abuse (as suggested by the opioid epidemic). According to a report released by the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, as reported in *CNN's* '1 in 6 unemployed are substance abusers' (26 November 2013), in a survey it found that »17% of unemployed workers had a substance abuse disorder last year, whereas 9% of full-time workers did so. The numbers are self-reported, and therefore, could be even higher in reality.« This increase in substance abuse of course alters the shape of the society which the police enforced. As the *DOJ* reported in its 2010 National Drug Threat Assessment:

»The consequences of illicit drug use are widespread, causing permanent physical and emotional damage to users and negatively impacting their families, coworkers, and many others with whom they have contact. Drug use negatively impacts a user's health, often leading to sickness and disease. In many cases, users die prematurely from drug overdoses or other drug-associated illnesses. Some users are parents, whose deaths leave their children in the care of relatives or in foster care. Drug law violations constitute a substantial proportion of incarcerations in local, state, and federal facilities and represent the most common arrest category.«

One final example that relates to the changing landscape that confronted law enforcement officials in their daily was the spike in the purchasing and stockpiling of firearms. As worded in the opening line of *Time Magazine's* 'Boom in Gun Sales Fueled by Politics and the Economy' (8 April 2009): »Americans are afraid of this economy. As a result, they're getting locked and loaded.« Besides the mention of ammunition shortage across the country, the article reported how large retail stores were reporting a 39 per cent increase on firearm sales.

Thus, for the State and local police and their departments, the combined effects of the Great Recession on the public resulted in a unique set of challenges. In this new

landscape, underfunded and overburdened, policing was rife with growing levels of homelessness, poverty, psychological distress, marital and familial problems, drug abuse, and now a great influx of guns. Of course, because of the uneven nature of the Great Recession, this new set of challenges was expressed disproportionately towards differentiated segments of the population.

16.5 The Geography and Demography of Impact

As mentioned at the outset, the far-reaching effects of the Great Recession on State and local law enforcement agencies, as well as on those very communities being policed, was by no means evenly distributed across geographies and demographics. In this next section, without claiming to provide an exhaustive or precise account, with the aid of various data points we will attempt to merely sketch out which particular areas and populations were, so to speak, 'hardest hit.'

To do so, let us first look at the subprime mortgage crisis through the vantage point of home foreclosures. In 'Foreclosures: America's hardest hit neighborhoods' (23 January 2012), *CNN Money* reported how the combination of the subprime mortgage crisis and »the auto industry's ills had turned inner-city neighborhoods in Detroit, Cleveland [sic.] and Indianapolis into foreclosure ground zero, with the three cities claiming 25 of the nation's 100 hardest hit neighborhoods.« By 2011, as the bulk of home foreclosures shifted towards the West Coast, according to the article it claimed »82 of the 100 worst hit zip codes with 38 in California and another 28 in Nevada.«

In terms of who was most impacted by these home foreclosures, according to a 2009 report by *The Urban Institute*: »Persons at the ends of the age range—the very old and the very young« (2009: 9). As for the former demographic, at a 2008 congressional hearing on the 'Subprime Mortgage Crisis and America's Veterans,' Ellen Harnick of the Senior Policy Counsel at the Center for Responsible Lending (CRL) was quoted saying:

»The housing crisis is hitting veterans especially hard. As a recent Pentagon study has shown, military personnel are particularly vulnerable to predatory lending, and the financial stresses for many military families have been well documented.«

CRL also released its report 'Foreclosures by Race and Ethnicity: The Demographics of a Crisis,' which in its executive summary noted that one: »The majority (an estimated 56%) of families who lost homes were non-Hispanic and white, but African-American and Latino families were disproportionately affected relative to their share of mortgage originations« (2). And two: »Among recent borrowers, we estimate that nearly 8% of both African Americans and Latinos have lost their homes to foreclosures, compared to 4.5% of whites« (2). While many think tanks, academic publications and media outlets, like CRL, framed the disparities in the aftermath of the subprime mortgage crisis in terms of 'minorities,' 'race' and 'color' (e.g., 'Minorities Affected Most as New York

Foreclosures Rise,' *The New York Times*, 15 May 2009; 'Housing crisis hits blacks hardest,' *CNN*, 19 October 2010; 'The Foreclosure Crisis and Its Impact on Communities of Color: Research and Solutions,' *National Community Reinvestment Coalition*, September 2011; 'The Recession Had a Racial Slant,' *The Atlantic*, 24 June 2015), in the concluding chapter of the Pew Research Center's 'Wealth Gaps Rise to Record Highs Between Whites, Blacks, Hispanics' (26 July 2011), the report cautioned its readers of another more general disparity that occurred *within* and *across* all ethnic and racial 'groups':

»Even though the wealthiest 10% of households within each group suffered a loss in wealth from 2005 to 2009, their share of their group's overall wealth rose during this period. [...] those in the top 10% of the wealth ladder were relatively less impacted by the economic downturn than those in the remaining 90%.«

While the subprime mortgage crisis had undoubtedly enflamed the historical legacy of racism in the United States or reflected the challenges which 'minority' communities face, as the *Pew* report obliquely suggested, the disparities that emanated from the subprime mortgage crisis were not simply driven by some ominous 'racial slant,' but as the universal rates illustrate, by *class*. Thus, it is little surprise that the young and old, two of the most economically weak populations were the 'hardest hit.'

As for the financial crisis, although it is statistically difficult to pinpoint the extent of its effects, as the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) stated in its report 'The Recession of 2007–2009' (2012): »One of the most widely recognized indicators of a recession is higher unemployment rates« (2). Where national unemployment had been at 5.0 percent in 2007, the report detailed how by 2009 it had peaked to 10.0 percent (2). Of those unemployed, the overwhelming majority of jobs lost were those in the construction and manufacturing sectors. Those sectors, so the report elucidated, experienced their largest contraction in employment rates since WWII (10). While geographically speaking, it is difficult to locate the construction sector by virtue of its geographic ubiquity, according to the report 'The Geographic Concentration of Manufacturing Across the United States' (2013) put together by the Economics and Statistics Administration (ESA), it found that manufacturing jobs were most highly concentrated in the Midwest and the South, away from metropolitan areas, and in less populous counties (1). The report designated Indiana, Ohio, Tennessee, Wisconsin, Georgia, Iowa and Kentucky as the states who claimed the most counties where manufacturing made up above 20% of state revenue, which the study held for more relevant than the 'overall size' of the sector (which California's economy claimed) (1). Moreover, the report also underscored the importance of this sector to surrounding economies:

»Of course, manufacturing is not isolated from the rest of the economy, and in places where a significant portion of economic activity is due to manufacturing,

other types of businesses benefit. In other words, the presence of manufacturing in a community generates direct and indirect jobs and confers additional economic benefits that exceed the earnings and employment measures described above.« (6)

Not only did manufacturing often serve as the lifeblood for communities and their contiguous economies, as a briefing paper by the *Economic Policy Institute* noted, but historically the sector had been an important source for decent paying jobs without the requirement of higher education:

»The manufacturing sector employs workers at all skill and education levels and is a particularly important provider of jobs with good wages for workers without a college degree. It employs a higher share of workers without a college degree than does the economy overall.« (2015: 8)

In respects to education levels, the construction sector is similar. Its workers, according to *The Center for Construction*, »have the lowest levels of education among all industries except for agriculture« noting how by 2015, »about 40% of construction workers had some post-secondary education, in contrast to 65% of the total workforce.«

Not only do both sectors employ the rural working class, but they are two sectors overwhelmingly represented by men. This fact was reflected in the 2012 BLS report, which detailed that whereas the employment of young women remained fairly stable, young men accounted for the majority of those unemployed throughout the recession. The report also indicated:

»For many years, men's unemployment rates were generally lower than women's both during and between recessions. However, since the early 1980s, men's unemployment rates have been higher than women's during or immediately after recessions, and the rates for men and women have been quite similar in other periods. Higher unemployment among men was especially notable during and immediately after the recent recession.« (BLS 2015: 4)

As the *ABC News* article 'Older white males hurt more by this recession' (29 July 2009) reported:

»Jobless rates for men and women older than 55 are at their highest level since the Great Depression, government data show. White men over 55 had a record 6.5% unemployment rate in the second quarter, far above the previous post-Depression high of 5.4% in 1983. The jobless rate for older black men was higher — 10.5% — but more than a percentage point below its 1983 peak.«

This trend was contrasted with what the article described as 'the most remarkable change' which was to be seen in the unemployment rate of 'black women' which hovered

at 12.2 percent, far below the historic peak of 20% in 1983. Meanwhile, it reported Hispanic unemployment rates to have fallen well below their historic highs.

Similar demographic trends could also be observed in relation to the distribution of the opioid crisis as it existed leading up to 2015. According to the 2014 study ‘Understanding the Rural–Urban Differences in Nonmedical Prescription Opioid Use and Abuse in the United States,’ the report explained how »nonmedical prescription opioid misuse are concentrated in states with large rural populations, such as Kentucky, West Virginia, Alaska, and Oklahoma« (52) and noted, unusually, how while »Black and Hispanic individuals face the same if not greater stress because of economic hardship than do Whites and yet have lower overall rates of nonmedical prescription opioid use« (55).

The combination of all of these factors only helped to reinforce a trend, that by 2015 was reported of showing a substantial decrease in life expectancy for ‘White America’ and especially ‘it’s’ men (e.g., ‘More White People Die From Suicide and Substance Abuse,’ *The New York Times*, 3 November 2015; ‘America’s white working class is a dying breed’ *The Washington Post*, 4 November 2015; ‘Why So Many White American Men Are Dying,’ *Newsweek*, 23 December 2015). In reality, while these reports, once again emphasized *race*, it is not as if in *The Washington Post’s* ‘A group of middle-aged whites in the U.S. is dying at a startling rate’ (2 November 2015) ‘economic insecurity,’ ‘decay of communities,’ ‘breakdown of families,’ ‘opioid epidemic,’ ‘lung cancer’ and ‘diabetes’ are somehow uniquely toxic to physiology of *white America*. Rather, what all these reports are hesitant to recognize, is that it is *poverty* which is at the center of that which *kills Americans of all ‘colors.’* Unable to recognize how over the past decades’ poverty has expanded to claim an ever-increasing number of the general population, this development has been routinely mystified by racializing it as strictly a ‘white’ problem.

While these data points are by no means complete and full, their purpose is merely to provide a broad picture of how the impacts of the Great Recession consolidated among key regions and demographics in the United States. But even so, these concentrations are only half the story. In the next section we will observe how these societal changes substantially altered the relationship between those doing the policing and those being policed.

16.6 Law Enforcement—Community Relations

Clearly, the thrust of changes accrued by State and local police and the public during the Great Recession did not serve to strengthen the relationship of these two groups, but as we will argue, only served to further erode the extant trust between them. From the perspective of the public, as State and local police underwent their severe budget cuts in the wake of the Great Recession, this translated into less training and fewer personnel, which it is fair to assume resulted in the depreciation of their ability to adequately deliver services to their tax-paying communities. We can also assume that the increased reliance

on technological force multipliers only hastened the breakdown in trust, as the militarization and impersonalization of roving forces likely served to reinforce a psychic and physical distance between law enforcers and those they ostensibly *served*. Moreover, it was State and local police who delivered traumatized homeowners and families eviction notices and enforced their eventual evictions. Similarly, for increasingly overworked and underpaid State and local police departments, it is also reasonable to assume that the mounting pressures and environmental changes which they faced took a toll on their levels of trust towards the general public. With the tightening of budgets which led to the reliance on technology and turn the militarization and impersonalization of forces, in some cases undertrained and underequipped; with the increasingly regular encounters with a citizenry increasingly burdened by economic losses and the psychological toils of housing instability, joblessness, and drug addiction; and with the notable influx of firearms—if it wasn't previously the case—it is not hard to imagine how the combination of these conditions might spawn serious challenges and points of friction between the State and local law enforcement and the general public.

But as we mentioned earlier, regardless of this breakdown in trust, as it happened, these law enforcement agencies did increasingly rely on the public for support as their budgets contracted. To be sure, this *opening* up to the public was no minor event when contrasted with the words of Hall et al. remarking on the traditionally hidden presence of British police in the 1970s, who noted how »the 'world' of the police is closed by deliberation and intent. [...] tasks of crime prevention and control are certainly not regularly exposed to public scrutiny« (1978: 40). Of course, while volunteers were welcomed to participate in the everyday work, it was social media which most directly *connected these State and local police departments to the public and the public to them*. As the authors had importantly observed:

»If the individual policeman is constrained by his organisation, he is also constrained by the society of which he is a part. Formally, the police enforce and apply the law and uphold public order; in this they see themselves and are seen as acting 'on society's behalf'. But in a more informal sense, they must also be sensitive to shifts in public feeling, in society's anxieties and concerns. In mediating between these two 'social' functions [...] the force tends to see itself as 'representing the desires of a hypothesized "normal" decent citizen'. Even where, formally, they apply the law, how, where and in what manner it is enforced – key areas of police discretion – are influenced by the prevailing 'social temperature'.« (50)

This growing tension between police and the public began to coalesce into its own unique 'social temperature' which brought about various strains of civil disorder. A lesser publicized strain, which we might refer to as the *antigovernment strain*, began to gain in popularity following the Great Recession. Some of the most notable examples of this tendency included movements and organizations such as the Sovereign Citizen

Movement, the 3 Percenters, the Oath Keepers, and the Ohio Defense Force alongside a host of other smaller and more decentralized militias. These groups emerged in part as a response to the failure of local law enforcement and government agencies to adequately serve their communities and protect their constitutional liberties. Perhaps the most prominent exposure of such a tendency in the mainstream press wasn't until the spring of 2014, when Cliven Bundy, a Nevadan cattle rancher and adherent to the Sovereign Citizen Movement, together with his supporters, held a month-long armed stand-off with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management who had ordered Bundy to pay over \$1 million in 'grazing fees' for allowing his cattle to graze on federal land as he had done so for decades. The media event that resulted from this spectacular showing of a mass of cowboys and guns, entered this strain of civil unrest on the map, albeit in an ambivalent if not questionable light. As the Southern Poverty Law Center penned in its special report 'WAR IN THE WEST: The Bundy Ranch Standoff and the American Radical Right' (Lenz & Potok, July 2014) shortly after incident:

»The Bundy standoff has invigorated an extremist movement that exploded when President Obama was elected, going from some 150 groups in 2008 to more than 1,000 last year. Though the movement has waxed and waned over the last three decades, antigovernment extremists have long pushed, most fiercely during Democratic administrations, rabid conspiracy theories about a nefarious New World Order, a socialist, gun-grabbing federal government and the evils of federal law enforcement.« (5)

At the same time these marginal and fragmented expressions of civil disorder began to take shape, similar discontent with State and local police began to coalesce and enter into public consciousness around matters loosely pertaining to what we might call the *criminal justice strain*. Already by 2012, as communicated in the *CNN* headlines 'Outrage, protests grow over shooting of unarmed Florida teen' (21 Mar) and 'From coast to coast, protesters demand justice in Trayvon Martin case' (26 Mar), the shooting of the 17-year-old Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman, who claimed to act in self-defense, sparked outrage and shock and went on to catalyze the social movement that would become known as 'Black Lives Matter.' What had originally begun as a springboard for various social issues including bail and prison reform, and the countering of racial profiling and mass incarceration, by early 2014, following the shooting of Michael Brown by Police Officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri, served to direct national attention to the previously inconspicuous work of State and local law enforcement. For months Ferguson experienced waves of unrest and became a literal battleground, attracting both the national guard and protestors from all around the United States to descend upon the city. Imagery of the events populated the headlines for weeks on end.

By late 2014, captured on cellphone cameras and shared across social media platforms, videos of police brutality had slowly become commonplace features on a tightly

networked internet. As graphic videos of murders like those of Dontre Hamilton, Eric Garner, Laquan McDonald, Akai Gurley, Tamir Rice, and Antonio Martin at the hands of law enforcement officials went viral, in doing so, they helped to launch Black Lives Matter onto the national stage. Whether reflective of the movement or of a particularly vocal segment, Black Lives Matter sparked a series of *national conversations* about the use of 'body cams' (e.g., 'What Happens When Police Officers Wear Body Cameras,' *The Wall Street Journal*, 18 August 2014) that by the year's end resulted in their eventual implementation (e.g., 'Obama announces funding for 50,000 police body cameras,' *The Verge*, 1 December 2014). While this may have been a far-cry from what originally drove many of Black Lives Matter activists onto the streets in the first place, the latter developments nevertheless signaled the successful capture of popular energy which the movement effectively directed towards the ranks of the State and local law enforcement officials. Slowly but surely, Black Lives Matter had become a force to be reckoned with, and a political one at that.

However, here it is crucial to reemphasize that the movement existed in the media was not directed at the role of police killings *in general*, let alone explicitly targeting their social roots, but rather approached them *in explicitly racial terms* as its namesake made unmistakably clear: *Black Lives Matter*.

Large sections of the media, the one which had in the decades prior helped to successfully racialize the image of the 'mugger,' the 'black thug,' the 'gangbanger,' the 'crack baby' and the 'superpredator,' had also been on board with this new racial framing as headlines from the period suggest: 'Exactly How Often Do Police Shoot Unarmed Black Men?' (*Mother Jones*, 15 August 2014), 'Americans' Deep Racial Divide on Trusting the Police' (*The Atlantic*, 20 August 2014), '11 Racist Police Killings With No Justice Served' (*Rolling Stone*, 4 December 2014), 'Shooting Death of Black Man by White Officer Spurs Protests in St. Louis Suburb' (*The Guardian*, 24 December 2014).

Already prior to the rise of Black Lives Matter and the aforementioned media reporting, State and local police departments had experienced institutional pressures, emerging from the arenas of both politics and civil society. An example of the former could be seen in the 'End Racial Profiling Act of 2011.' At its congressional hearing, one of its key testimonials had proclaimed: 'It is high time that these practices end!' (Harris 2012: 19). While the act did not pass, its emblematic of the stature such issues had garnered and the political pressures and momentum that had already been building at the beginning of the decade. Similar tendencies could be spotted throughout civil society that began applying pressure onto State and local law enforcement agencies (e.g., 'The Three Faces of Racial Profiling: The ACLU Connects the Dots,' *American Civil Liberties Union*, 18 October 2011; 'US: End Discriminatory Profiling by Police,' *Human Rights Watch*, 17 April 2012; 'Black, Brown and Over-Policed in LA Schools,' *Community Rights Campaign of the Labor/Community Strategy Center*, 2013).

This new emphasis on the racial character of *crime control* via a ‘racial profiling’ is of course no small matter in regard to the work carried out by State and local police. In the past, whereby racial profiling had operated in accordance with the dominant ideology of its time, there is little reason to believe why law enforcement would deviate from the ideological pressures in the present moment. As we have seen, alongside the changes and pressures in large part brought on by the Great Recession, it is not without reason to assume, to one degree or another, that these social changes *also* played a determining role for State and local police in the carrying out their duties in a world prior to the rise of the far right phenomenon.

While these various pressures and changes in the agencies and to the society at large only offer us a partial picture of the context in which State and local police had operated in the years leading up to 2015, it is not unreasonable to assume the ways in which they may very well have directed the law enforcement officials away from certain populations and crimes and towards others (e.g., rural, poor, ‘white,’ working class, veteran, men). Moreover, they provided more surface area for conflict between vulnerable communities following the Great Recession which might have led to strong ‘anti-government’ sentiments and anger over the inability to deliver ‘criminal justice’. It is, therefore, also not unlikely to assume the way in which this broader social context might have found statistical form in the ‘growing right-wing terror threat’ equation and discursively in the rise of the far right phenomenon.

In a sense, what we have tried to outline here the ways in which the work of State and local police, like in decades previous, is guided to police certain crimes which inevitably targets certain areas and populations, all while being done in a manner that it is also fair to argue is not intentionally biased and carried out under the most *objective* terms possible (i.e., the ‘clear up rate’). Thus, here we do not wish to argue against the raw data interpreted by Kurzman & Schanzer nor the *New American Foundation* per se, but rather, in recognizing this, for the most part, unbiased nature of law enforcement and its tendency to concentrate attention towards certain subsets of the population—in our case, what suggested a significant tilt towards rural, working class, white, and male following the Great Recession and its aftermath—then the question instead becomes where the mechanism of the right-wing label which had statistically categorized certain crimes and their perpetrators in the first instance. For that, we have to look at the final and most central component determining the work of law enforcement—their enforcement of *the law*. In the next chapter we will visit the legal criteria and the state programs that by their very nature went on to intimately structure the work of these State and local police in the years preceding the rise of the far right phenomenon. If we are to assume that the basic mission of law enforcement is the prevention of crime and the maintenance of order, we must then interrogate how exactly crime and order are interpreted and codified and by whom.

17 The Law

» *Ultimately, the law, created by Parliament, executed in the courts, embodying the will of the population, provides society with the basic definition of what actions are acceptable and unacceptable; it is the 'frontier' marking 'our way of life' and its connected values. Action to stigmatise and punish those who break the law, taken by the agents formally appointed as the guardians of public morality and order, stands as a **dramatised symbolic reassertion** of the values of the society and of its limits of tolerance.*

— Hall et al. in *Policing the Crisis* (1978: 69)

«

While we have observed many of the structural factors that shaped the conduct of State and local police, their work is of course deeply enmeshed with the very *rule of law* itself. To begin, law is enacted and enforced at two levels, that of the state and the federal government. Whereby the former only relates to activity within a given state, federal law applies to the entire nation. When a discrepancy between the two levels of law emerges, the latter always prevails. This is a necessary precaution, because it is federal law which enshrines the constitution, and thus, sees itself as the primary source of authority for all levels of government not to mention its citizenry. This also suggests that the federal government is all the more sensitive when it comes to the matter of threats that might undermine its own authority to govern.

Either way, for State and local police, not only does the federal government play a determining role in its everyday operation, but moreover, because of their financial ruin following the Great Recession, in the years leading up to 2015, they became increasingly dependent on sources of federal funding procured through their participation in federal programs and initiatives. In the following chapter we'll observe how one particular threat assessment conducted by federal agencies found its form in two separate instances of federal law, and how the tensions and contradictions between the two, greatly shaped the conduct of State and local law enforcement, and as such, the statistical basis for the 'growing right-wing terror threat' equation.

17.1 Assessing the Threat: Left-Wing and Right-Wing Extremism

Our focus begins in early 2009 with the release of two originally classified 'threat assessments,' conducted by assorted agencies of the United States government including the DHS and FBI. Emerging out of the thralls of the Great Recession, the two reports took aim at (and it must be said, correctly foreboded) the rise of civil disorder that was to emerge from the political fringes. The first of these threat assessments, appeared in January under the title: 'Leftwing Extremists Likely to Increase Use of Cyber Attacks over

the Coming Decade' (DHS 2009a). According to the report, its purpose was »to alert DHS policymakers, State and local officials, and intelligence analysts monitoring the subject so they can better focus their collection requirements and analysis« (1) as well as »facilitate a greater understanding of the emerging threats to the United States« (1), and thus help state officials »effectively deter, prevent, preempt, or respond to terrorist attacks against the United States« (1).

As suggested in the title, the report centered around theme of cyber-attacks that it feared would be carried out by 'leftwing extremists' and 'more prominent leftwing groups' involved in, so the report, »animal rights, environmental, and anarchist extremist movements that promote or have conducted criminal or terrorist activities« (1). One of the features of 'left-wing extremist groups,' according to the report, was their lack of 'hierarchy' and »defined members, leaders, or chain of command structures« (8), instead functionally operating »as loosely-connected underground movements composed of 'lone wolves,' small cells, and splinter groups« (8).

While the report did warn that such 'extremists' will »continue to focus on what they consider economic targets« (2) and citing their »potential for economic damage« (3), by and large, neither the economy nor the Great Recession played a decisive role in the report.

This, however, was very much the case in a follow-up report issued several months later under the title: 'Rightwing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment' (DHS, 2009b). The report repeatedly addressed the Great Recession and the economy, even dedicating entire sections to the issues (e.g., 'Current Economic and Political Climate,' 'Economic Hardship and Extremism,' 'Exploiting Economic Downturn'). The report laid out its 'key findings' in the following points:

- »The DHS/Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A) has no specific information that domestic rightwing* terrorists are currently planning acts of violence, but rightwing extremists may be gaining new recruits by playing on their fears about several emergent issues. The economic downturn and the election of the first African American president present unique drivers for rightwing radicalization and recruitment.« (2)
- »The current economic and political climate has some similarities to the 1990s when rightwing extremism experienced a resurgence fueled largely by an economic recession, criticism about the outsourcing of jobs, and the perceived threat to U.S. power and sovereignty by other foreign powers.« (Ibid.)
- »The possible passage of new restrictions on firearms and the return of military veterans facing significant challenges reintegrating into their communities could lead to

the potential emergence of terrorist groups or lone wolf extremists capable of carrying out violent attacks.» (Ibid.)

- »Proposed imposition of firearms restrictions and weapons bans likely would attract new members into the ranks of rightwing extremist groups, as well as potentially spur some of them to begin planning and training for violence against the government. The high volume of purchases and stockpiling of weapons and ammunition by rightwing extremists in anticipation of restrictions and bans in some parts of the country continue to be a primary concern to law enforcement.« (3)
- »Returning veterans possess combat skills and experience that are attractive to rightwing extremists. DHS/I&A is concerned that rightwing extremists will attempt to recruit and radicalize returning veterans in order to boost their violent capabilities.« (Ibid.)

As for the asterisks hovering over the ‘right-wing’ in the initial bullet point, it explained how the label:

»can be broadly divided into those groups, movements, and adherents that are primarily hate-oriented (based on hatred of particular religious, racial or ethnic groups), and those that are mainly antigovernment, rejecting federal authority in favor of state or local authority, or rejecting government authority entirely. It may include groups and individuals that are dedicated to a single issue, such as opposition to abortion or immigration.« (2)

The report saw the economy as the main driver behind the growth of ‘rightwing extremists,’ ‘lone wolves’ and ‘small terrorist cells.’ »Rightwing extremist chatter on the Internet continues to focus on the economy, the perceived loss of U.S. jobs in the manufacturing and construction sectors, and home foreclosures« (3) the report clarified, going on to warn how »this trend is likely to accelerate if the economy is perceived to worsen« (3). In a later section, the report addressed the propagation of ‘conspiracy theories,’ drawing attention to how:

»Historically, domestic rightwing extremists have feared, predicted, and anticipated a cataclysmic economic collapse in the United States. Prominent antigovernment conspiracy theorists have incorporated aspects of an impending economic collapse to intensify fear and paranoia among like-minded individuals and to attract recruits during times of economic uncertainty. Conspiracy theories involving declarations of martial law, impending civil strife or racial conflict, suspension of the U.S. Constitution, and the creation of citizen detention camps often incorporate aspects of a failed economy. Antigovernment conspiracy theories and

“end times” prophecies could motivate extremist individuals and groups to stockpile food, ammunition, and weapons.« (4)

This was also addressed in the section covering the ‘Perceived Threat from Rise of Other Countries,’ once again evoking the proliferation of ‘paranoia’ and ‘conspiracy theories’ the report wrote:

»The dissolution of Communist countries in Eastern Europe and the end of the Soviet Union in the 1990s led some rightwing extremists to believe that a “New World Order” would bring about a world government that would usurp the sovereignty of the United States and its Constitution, thus infringing upon their liberty.« (6)

The mode of dissemination for these conspiracy theories was the encrypted world of the internet as the report later outlined:

»the advent of the Internet and other information-age technologies since the 1990s has given domestic extremists greater access to information related to bomb-making, weapons training, and tactics, as well as targeting of individuals, organizations, and facilities, potentially making extremist individuals and groups more dangerous and the consequences of their violence more severe. New technologies also permit domestic extremists to send and receive encrypted communications and to network with other extremists throughout the country and abroad, making it much more difficult for law enforcement to deter, prevent, or preempt a violent extremist attack.« (8)

Like in the previous threat assessment, the report emphasized the rise of ‘lone wolves’ and ‘small terrorist cells’ who were suggested to have shown ‘intent’ and who in some instances have had the ‘capability’ to commit violent acts. Perhaps most importantly, as it relates to the rise of the far right phenomenon, *a full six years prior to the publication of the ‘growing right-wing terror threat’ equation*, putting the fact they had ‘no specific information’ aside, the report designated »groups embracing violent rightwing extremist ideology« (7) as »the most dangerous domestic terrorism threat in the United States« (Ibid.). As we shall soon see, the wording in the last section, ‘Disgruntled Military Veterans’ (Ibid.), would prove decisive in postponing the public face of the rise of the far right phenomenon. Warning of the possible recruitment and radicalization of returning military veterans the section warned how ‘rightwing extremists’ might »exploit their skills and knowledge derived from military training and combat« (Ibid.). Before concluding, suggesting involvement with State and local police, the report assured congress that the DHS and the intelligence community:

»will be working with its State and local partners over the next several months to ascertain with greater regional specificity the rise in rightwing extremist activity in

the United States, with a particular emphasis on the political, economic, and social factors that drive rightwing extremist radicalization.« (8)

17.2 Partisan Backlash from Republicans

As alluded to, a few days following its release, the document was leaked to the public and was met with outrage by several prominent veteran organizations. One such group, *The American Legion*, as stated in the *Guardian's* 'Obama administration issues warning over rightwing extremists' (15 April 2009), referred to the report as 'unfair,' and 'politically motivated.' At the same time, leading Republicans had also taken the opportunity to toady up their constituency and dismiss the report as blasphemous. According to the *CBS News's* 'DHS' Domestic Terror Warning Angers GOP' (16 April 2009), the Republican Speaker of the House, John Boehner, »described the report as offensive and demanded that the agency apologize to veterans,« and was quoted in saying: »To characterize men and women returning home after defending our country as potential terrorists is offensive and unacceptable.« In the following days, under the mounting public pressure, the DHS Security Secretary, Janet Napolitano, apologized and walked back the report. In a press release posted on the department's website, Napolitano addressed her detractors stating:

»Let me be very clear: we monitor the risks of violent extremism taking root here in the United States. We don't have the luxury of focusing our efforts on one group; we must protect the country from terrorism whether foreign or homegrown, and regardless of the ideology that motivates its violence.

We are on the lookout for criminal and terrorist activity but we do not – nor will we ever – *monitor ideology or political beliefs* [emphasis added]. We take seriously our responsibility to protect the civil rights and liberties of the American people, including subjecting our activities to rigorous oversight from numerous internal and external sources.«

By the following week, pressure on Napolitano's department had only escalated. This time appearing in *ABC News's* 'Napolitano Facing Republican Calls for Her Ouster' (23 April 2009), Boehner was quoted saying:

»I think Secretary Napolitano has an awful lot of explaining to do [...] When you look at this report on right-wing extremism, it includes [...] about two-thirds of Americans, who, you know, who might go to church, who may have served in the military, who may be involved in community activities. [...] It's bizarre [...] I and my colleagues are trying to understand who wrote this report, why wasn't it edited [...] I just don't understand how our government can look at the American people and say, 'You're all potential terrorist threats' [...] Furthermore, the Secretary of

Homeland Security owes the American people an explanation for why ... her own Department is using [“terrorist”] to describe American citizens who disagree with the direction Washington Democrats are taking our nation.«

According to a 2011 interview, ‘INSIDE THE DHS: FORMER TOP ANALYST SAYS AGENCY BOWED TO POLITICAL PRESSURE’ (17 Jun), conducted by the *Southern Poverty Law Center*, Daryl Johnson, one of the original co-authors of the report, explained how in the weeks following the bout of public pressure outlined above, his unit had been effectively ‘gutted.’ However, prior to its dismantling, Johnson noted how it was tasked with, in his words, »providing answers to State and local law enforcement agencies,« a relationship with State and local police he continued elaborating on:

»They would submit questions, and we would help out, usually by telling them what is happening throughout the country, identifying emerging trends and explaining the history, organization structure, capability and activities of extremist groups. The fusion centers would send in information, and we’d analyze it and respond. We had a monthly newsletter, and we wrote several assessments and reference aids that provided background information on extremist groups who had violent histories. Most valuable, I think, were the dozens of presentations we gave to State and local law enforcement agencies each year. We often received positive feedback and letters of appreciation from our stakeholders.«

Later in the interview, he mentioned how his department began shifting their focus away from ‘leftwing extremist groups’ to ‘rightwing extremism’ in 2007. By 2009, Johnson described how he was not only directed to formulate an assessment but also, in his words, »help State and local police prepare for an anticipated change in the domestic threat environment.« When asked if there had been any controversy inside the DHS prior to the report’s release, Johnson admitted that there were some concerns voiced by the Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties who expressed discomfort with the particular wording and definition of ‘right-wing extremism,’ and instead wanting a more »narrow definition limited to violent groups and individuals.« But according to Johnson, his ‘subject-matter experts’ and management insisted that the broad nature of the term and definitions was essential for combatting this emergent threat. As for what happened to the unit upon its being gutted, Johnson explained:

»When the right-wing report was leaked and people politicized it, my management got scared and thought DHS would be scaled back. It created an environment where my analysts and I couldn't get our work done. DHS stopped all of our work and instituted restrictive policies. Eventually, they ended up gutting my unit. All of this happened within six to nine months after the furor over the report. Analysts then began leaving DHS. One analyst went to ICE [U.S. Immigration and Customs

Enforcement], another to the FBI, a third went to the U.S. Marshals, and so on. There is just one person there today who is still a "domestic terrorism" analyst.«

What the report and Johnson reveal is not only had attention to 'the rise of the far right' phenomena had already begun in 2007 and culminated in the publication of the 2009 threat assessment, but the same unit who had 'no specific information' regarding potential violent activity orchestrated by 'domestic rightwing terrorists' had by that time, already begun working together with State and local law enforcement agencies.

Here, we would like to argue that while the unit may have disbanded and its members diffused across various agencies, attention to that most dangerous of domestic terrorism threats in the United States was not simply disregarded, but rather, because of its politically untenable status following the leak, it instead would go on to be reformulated into two various strands of previously existing federal law. On the one hand, the burgeoning field of 'hate crimes' and on the other, the escalating 'counterterrorism' measures that had emerged in the wake of 9/11. In both of these distinct and yet unavoidably interrelated fields of law and policing, 'the rise of the far right' would remain tentatively dormant until the contradictions internal to these two legal forms eventually pushed to the fore.

17.3 The Rise of Hate Crime Law

The first strand we argue found its form in the signing of the Federal Hate Crimes Prevention Act (HCPA) into law by then President Obama a half a year following the by then rebuked report. The signing of this act essentially expanded the federal definition of hate crimes, enhanced the legal mechanisms for law enforcement, and removed the jurisdictional barriers that it claimed hindered prosecution, by integrating disability, gender identity and sexual orientation alongside the already legally sanctioned racial, religious and ethnic groups. Moreover, as the DOJ's website announced, the Act would also help direct »funding and technical assistance to state, local, and tribal jurisdictions to help them to more effectively investigate and prosecute hate crimes« (2009).

Though not originally labeled as 'hate crimes,' the origins of this legal concept can be found in the 1968 Civil Rights Act which allowed for the federal prosecution of criminal activity that »willingly injures, intimidates or interferes with another person, or attempts to do so, by force because of the other person's race, color, religion or national origin« (USGPO 2013: 35). However, it wasn't until 1985, when public attention around issues of race, gender, and sexual orientation crystalized into the Hate Crime Statistics Act that required the DOJ collect and publish statistics on crimes that it deemed racially, religiously, and ethnically motivated. Following its signing into law, with this new set of data now collected and reported on, unsurprisingly for its critics, it resulted in a surge of hate crimes which only furthered enflamed public attention to what Kimberly Potter and the recently deceased James Jacobs described as a full blown 'hate crime epidemic.'

In their book, *Hate Crimes: Criminal Law and Identity Politics* (2000), echoing Hall et al.'s notion of the 'recategorization of the general field of crime,' Jacobs & Potter described the ways in which hate crimes categories:

»add a new component to our criminal law lexicon and to our way of thinking about the crime problem. Consequently, we now (or will soon) find it natural to think of the hate crime problem and the hate crime rate as distinct from the "ordinary" crime problem and the "ordinary" crime rate. This reconceptualization of crime is both reflected by and furthered by hate crime data collection initiatives, especially the federal Hate Crime Statistics Act of 1990 (HCSA), which gave national recognition to hate crimes as a bona fide category of crime.« (3-4)

Already in 2005, sensitivity towards hate crimes legislation became common practice for police departments like LeRoy Baca's, who in the training manual *To Lead, To Learn, To Leave a Legacy* (2005) wrote:

»As a leader in the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, I commit myself to honorably perform my duties with respect for the dignity of all people, integrity to do right and fight wrongs, wisdom to apply common sense and fairness in all I do, and courage to stand against racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, homophobia and bigotry in all its forms.« (9)

With Obama's expansion and enhancement of the HCSA (first signed into law by the Republican President, George H. W. Bush), this particular emphasis in the law was only reinforced, and as such, went on to affect the duties of the everyday conduct of the State and local officials who enforced it. Regardless of the fanfare surrounding such legislation, in their book, Jacobs & Potter convincingly argue the futility of such laws in legitimately stopping criminal acts deemed as 'hateful.' As they insist, rather than address the root causes of crime, hate crimes simply forwards enhanced sentencing and punitive measures. They argue that such laws were never passed due to glaring gaps in criminal law, or the fear that heinous acts of violence would go un- or under-punished (in a country that claims some of the most stringent sentencing the world over), nor because State and local police departments or the justice system lacked the necessary tools to sufficiently prosecute those individuals who commit such 'hateful' acts.

While perhaps well-intentioned, Jacobs & Potter offered five reasons that spoke against any further expansion of this burgeoning legal category. For one, quite simply, there is no straightforward approach to designating which crimes are motivated out of 'hate.' Two, the articulation is inherently contradictory in the sense that if prejudiced groups (e.g., bias against anti-gay and mentally disabled people) aren't equally recognized, this results in prejudice against them, and alternatively, if *all* groups are recognized equally, then the category of hate crimes itself become redundant. Third, *criminal* activity exists a priori outside of societal norms (e.g., tolerance, equality, and civility). Fourth, hate

crimes can facilitate accusations of double standards and hypocrisy, and in doing so, stymie the criminal justice system. And lastly, Jacobs & Potter write: »the splintering of criminal law into various offender/victim configurations based upon characteristics like race and gender may backfire and contribute to the balkanization of American society« (2000: 8)—that is to say, rather than deemphasize the centrality of these identity features, it reifies them and hardens the very notions of *difference* in conflict with the very notion of *universal* law.

Thus, as we saw with terrorism, hate crimes, while articulated in a straightforward and uncontroversial manner (i.e., criminal acts motivated by prejudice whether racial, ethnic, religious, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or disability), in fact deny the complexity of criminal conduct by reducing actions into unidimensional motives.

More yet, as the authors reminds us, crimes have already been criminalized and the idea that tripling sentences might lead to a more tolerant society stands in direct contradiction with the reality that it is *prisons which in fact produce intolerant people*. Not only do they produce intolerant people, but as it relates to the self-identifying and actually existing ‘far right,’ they serve as critical nodes of radicalization and recruitment by groups like the Aryan Brotherhood (an avowedly white supremacist and neo-Nazi ‘prison gang’). Thus, prisons themselves can become cauldrons for the reinforcement of prejudiced and ‘hateful’ views held by those imprisoned on those enhanced prison sentences which in essence is the only real function that hate crime laws serve.

The overall effect of hate crime law has created a distorted picture of American society, that sees hate as an epidemic, only helping to cement the notion that there exists incompatible ‘group interests’ pit against one another. Rather than eliminating societal divisions, hate crime law actively enflame and enshrine them into the code of law. But at its core, the pursuit of hate crimes law displays an unwillingness to go to the roots of crime, by instead simply redefining it at the surface while doubling down on the repressive powers of the law.

17.4 The Rise of Countering Violent Extremism Legislation

The second strand of law that helped facilitated the ‘growing right-wing terror threat’ equation and thus the rise of the far right phenomenon was channeled into preexisting Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) programs, a federal initiative that first appeared under the aegis of the global War on Terror. Currently, the DHS defines CVE as conducting:

»evidence-based research to improve the effectiveness of public safety and violence prevention efforts implemented by government agencies and NGOs. This research will enable policy-makers and operational end-users to make informed

decisions to divert vulnerable individuals, prevent potential offenders, mitigate vulnerabilities, and enhance community resilience in the face of various social and behavioral threats.« (2021)

Although *officially* introduced to the public in 2014 (e.g., ‘Attorney General Holder Announces Pilot Program to Counter Violent Extremists,’ DOJ, 15 September 2014, ‘A New Approach to Countering Violent Extremism,’ FBI, 7 October 2014), as we will later see, signs of this federal program could already be found to be emerging in the mid 2000’s amid the institutionalization of the global War on Terror and its swath of federal laws and programs (e.g., E-Government Act, Patriot Act, The Intelligence Reform, Terrorism Prevention Act, Common Terrorism Information Sharing Standards).

Early on, the elaborate legal infrastructure inherited from the global War on Terror paved the way for domestic initiatives like the ‘Information Sharing Environment’ and ‘Suspicious Activity Reporting’ which helped streamline the exchange of intel across various levels of law enforcement agencies (i.e., federal, State, and local). By January 2008, according to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in its 2016 report ‘More About Suspicious Activity Reporting,’ Information Sharing Environment and Suspicious Activity Reporting initiatives “published functional standards for State and local law enforcement officers to report ‘suspicious’ activities to fusion centers and to the federal intelligence community through the ISE.” According to these standards, innocuous activities like ‘photographing,’ ‘acquiring expertise,’ and ‘eliciting information,’ themselves became considered ‘inherently suspicious.’ Within several months of their release, the LAPD was one of the first departments to implement the Suspicious Activity Reporting program in their effort to, as the ACLU writes, “gather, record, and analyze information of a criminal *or non-criminal nature*, that could indicate activity or intentions related to either foreign or domestic terrorism.” Among the 65 different behaviors the department set out to log, again included a list of innocuous activities (e.g., ‘taking pictures or video footage, taking notes, drawing diagrams and espousing extreme views’). By mid-2008, together with the Major City Chiefs Association, the DOJ and DHS set out to expand the Suspicious Activity Reporting program to other State and local police across the United States which included collaborating with departments in Chicago, Boston and Miami-Dade.

These earliest of developments begin to reveal the ways in which the global War on Terror’s legal framework and State and local police became progressively ensnared in what would become known as CVE initiatives. However, before we address this ensnarement, let us briefly review the origins of CVE.

The roots of CVE can be found in the British Preventing Violent Extremism programs (PVE) that date back to 2004. Here, it is important to note that, as confirmed in a recent 2019 press release, ‘News Release: U.S. and UK Celebrate 15 Years of Partnership’ (12 November 2019), the DHS proudly celebrated its longstanding partnership with the

British Home Office on a number of ‘mutual homeland security challenges’ since the early years of the global War on Terror. Thus, it is not unreasonable to assume that the DHS was, to some degree or another, involved in the 2004 ‘Preventing Extremism Together’ taskforce, which eventually led to the conceptualization of PVE.

It wasn’t until the release of ‘Preventing Violent Extremism: winning hearts and minds’ (2007) that PVE made its official debut, which intended to “[s]upport local authorities to work with their communities in tackling violent extremism” (7). First established under the Labour Prime Minister, Tony Blair, four years later, under the Tory leadership of David Cameron, the program was significantly overhauled, as noted in the introduction of the ‘Prevent Strategy’ (2011). There, on opening page, the *strategy* noted: »The *Prevent* programme we inherited from the last Government was flawed« (1). As such, the revised program went on to assure:

»This new strategy is designed to endure. Already it has to deal with a range of terrorism threats, including Al Qa’ida and right-wing extremism. None is singled out for special treatment outside the operational demands of current threat levels. New groups may emerge as others fade.« (3)

Indeed, part of the changes included a newfound attention to ‘extreme right-wing groups’ as the report would go on to divulge:

»The original strategy allowed for the possibility that *Prevent* could be used to tackle other forms of terrorism. The review found evidence that local *Prevent* practitioners (notably the police) have done this, and in particular that some projects have addressed the threat posed by extreme right-wing groups. But the common perception is that *Prevent* has dealt solely with terrorism associated with Al Qa’ida.

A majority (over 80%) of respondents to the consultation which accompanied this review believed that *Prevent* should address a wider range of threats, including not only Al Qa’ida but also violence from extreme right-wing or other ethnic or religious organisations.« (25)

Ten years into the global War on Terror, rather than narrowly focusing on Islamic extremism, the strategy now ‘believed’ »that *Prevent* should be flexible enough to address the challenge posed by terrorism of any kind« (Ibid.) and that »*Prevent* programmes should be able to support people being drawn into all forms of terrorism« (Ibid.). The report went on to admit that another one of its flaws had been the subsequent ‘distrust’ for Parliament that it provoked. Some Brits had, so the report stated, »an aspiration to defend Muslims when they appear to be under attack or unjustly treated« (18). Moreover, referring to a 2009 survey, the updated strategy acknowledged that:

»Issues which can contribute to a sense that Muslim communities are being unfairly treated include so-called 'stop and search' powers used by the police under counter-terrorism legislation; the UK's counter-terrorism strategy; a perception of biased and Islamophobic media coverage; and UK foreign policy, notably with regard to Muslim countries, the Israel-Palestine conflict and the war in Iraq.« (18)

Thus, after a decade the British government's central participation in fighting the global War on Terror and its consequential denigration of British and non-British Muslims, even the Prevent Strategy recognized that it was becoming necessary to confront the unsavory reality of 'Islamophobia,' a problem, however, that the report unilaterally attributed to having »increasingly become part of extreme right-wing terrorist ideology« (21).

Sharing the stage with 'International terrorism,' 'Northern Ireland-related terrorism,' in a section titled 'The Threat,' the report went on to dedicate substantial attention to 'Extreme right-wing terrorism' even after acknowledging how in the United Kingdom it had »been much less widespread, systematic or organised than terrorism associated with Al Qa'ida« (15). It did take stock of the '17 people serving prison sentences' for what it called 'terrorism-related offences,' who, quoting the report, »are known to be *associated* with extreme right-wing groups [emphasis added], though *none* of these groups are themselves terrorist organisations [emphasis added]« (15). Despite this niche and almost nonexistent status in the UK, right-wing extremism was nevertheless put on par with Al Qa'ida, equivocating the two as both:

»driven by a supremacist ideology, which sanctions the use of extreme violence as a response to perceived social injustice and dysfunction. That ideology is a response to and reflects a perception that identity itself is under threat from social change. People can be drawn to right-wing terrorist ideology through the rhetoric and language of apparently non-violent right-wing extremist groups.« (21)

Where the two diverged, according to the report, was the ominousness exuding from the fact that »right-wing terrorism is not driven or justified by religion« (21). Lastly, the report provided a preliminary sketch of its average perpetrators:

»People drawn to extreme right-wing terrorism are usually male, poorly educated (although there are some cases of high-achieving individuals) and often unemployed. In some cases, previous involvement in criminal activity has been an issue. The internet plays a key role in reinforcing ideology and facilitating activity.« (21)

While it's unclear to what extent and in which direction the DHS and the British Home Office collaborated on this issue of right-wing extremism, either way, the very same year in which the Prevent Strategy was published, President Obama released his own 'Strategic Implementation Plan for Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent

Extremism in the United States' (2011). Highlighting the importance of State and local police, the plan opened with the following paragraph:

»Law enforcement and government officials for decades have understood the critical importance of building relationships, based on trust, with the communities they serve. Partnerships are vital to address a range of challenges and must have as their foundation a genuine commitment on the part of law enforcement and government to address community needs and concerns, including protecting rights and public safety. In our efforts to counter violent extremism, we will rely on existing partnerships that communities have forged with Federal, State, and local government agencies. This reliance, however, must not change the nature or purpose of existing relationships. In many instances, our partnerships and related activities were not created for national security purposes but nonetheless have an indirect impact on countering violent extremism (CVE).«

While the report went on to clarify how it: »will prioritize preventing violent extremism and terrorism that is inspired by al-Qa'ida and its affiliates and adherents« (2), it also made abundantly clear that: »This is, however, a matter of emphasis and prioritization, and does not entail ignoring other forms of violent extremism« (2) from which it subsequently referenced the killing of 77 people in Norway by a self-described neo-Nazi.

The report went on to provide examples of how CVE programs were *already* being conducted with the LADP to develop a CVE 'curriculum,' as well as its 'adoption' and 'implementation' in a pilot program that was already set to be adopted by State and local police in San Diego by the year's end.

Not only did this plan bear a striking resemblance to the PVE plan in its open-ended presentation, but moreover, it inferred that the LAPD had already been involved in a CVE prior to the plan's release.

Furthermore, as suggested in *The Aspen Institute Homeland Security Program's 'Los Angeles' Preparedness for Terrorism'* (2009), the countering of 'the rise of the of the far right' through CVE-like programs may have already begun as early as 2009. The report outlined the existence of counterterrorism efforts undertaken by the DOJ and DHS and in cooperation with the LAPD. In that report, speaking of an 'evolving' 'terror threat,' Al Cruz, the Special Agent in charge of the California DOJ, was quoted warning of »home-grown cells composed of people radicalized in prison and/or right-wing extremists in league with radical Islamists« (17) who he described as 'the biggest threat.' To counter this most pertinent threat to the Los Angeles and surrounding areas, Cruz advised adopting the following measures:

»(1) increased cooperation within and between the law enforcement and intelligence communities; (2) the Patriot Act; (3) public vigilance; (4) the "creative" use

of criminal statutes like those relating to drug offenses, immigration law violations, and money laundering; and (5) enlisting the cooperation of key ethnic and religious communities. He wholeheartedly agrees with the “all crimes, all hazards” approach to counterterrorism policing that LAPD practices.« (17)

Even if such collaborations were not formally connected to the later CVE programs, in the passage above, Cruz’s descriptions confirm the existence of their basic tenets and collaboration across federal and State and local police organizations.

By 2012, once again referring to the ‘evolving’ threat posed by ‘right-wing extremists,’ a report put forth by the U.S. Government Accountability Office to the Senate’s Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs titled ‘Countering Violent Extremism: Additional Actions Could Strengthen Training Efforts’ once again confirmed the role of State and local law enforcement in these earliest of operations:

»State and local law enforcement and homeland security officials, in partnership with local community members, are the first line of defense against the evolving threat posed by violent extremism—ideologically motivated violence to further political goals. In recent history, the United States has faced violent extremist plots by neo-Nazis and other anti-Semitic hate groups, racial supremacists, and international and domestic terrorist groups.« (1)

Like the 2011 Prevent Strategy, the report underscored how »violent extremist ideologies changes over time and new threats will undoubtedly arise in the future« (1) and that »the United States government must ensure that its approach to countering violent extremism (CVE) is flexible enough to address a variety of current and possible future threats, whether they are posed by al Qaeda or other groups« (2). Not only did the report emphasize the importance of definitional flexibility but remarked how »it is important that they [State and local law enforcement] receive high-quality CVE-related training« (2). Also, similar to the 2011 Prevent Strategy, the report went on to reveal the growing contradictions inherent to the global War on Terror and its unrelenting identification of the ‘terrorist threat’ as ‘Muslim.’ The report detailed how the DHS and DOJ had received considerable feedback from ‘individuals and advocacy organizations’ who reported how CVE helps to »cast aspersions on the vast majority of Muslim Americans who pose no threat to the United States« (2).

17.5 The Rise of a Legal Contradiction

Similar to hate crime legislation, CVE programs have been riddled with problems. For one, the notion that one’s ideology is an indicator for violence has been repeatedly argued to be unfounded as the Brennan Center for Justice (BCJ) along with the ACLU, Arab American Institute, Black and Pink, Refugee Advocacy Coalition Muslim

Advocates, and other signatories remarked in an open letter addressed to the DHS in 2014. CVE programs, so the letter read:

»are controversial because several government and non-government entities have promoted unfounded and discredited theories of terrorist radicalization that improperly identify First Amendment-protected religious and political activities as precursors to, or predictive of terrorist attacks. The most prominent of these reports available in the public realm are the FBI's 2006 intelligence report, "Radicalization: From Conversion to Jihad," and the New York Police Department's 2007, "Radicalization in the West." [...] These theories have been discredited through numerous empirical and academic studies of terrorists, yet they continue to influence policy.«

The consequence of proceeding with the various 'steps' and 'indicators' in the initial focus on 'Muslim terrorism' inevitably led to the profiling and stigmatization of Muslim Americans. The same year as their letter, the BCJ released another report titled 'Stigmatizing Boston's Muslim Community is No Way to Build Trust' (2014) that described the inevitable outcomes of such undertakings:

»CVE programs that rely on false theories of terrorist radicalization will only spread fear, distrust and dissension within communities, and lead to unwarranted law enforcement reporting. Instead of wasting resources chasing false leads, police should focus their resources where they have evidence of criminal activity.«

Rather than make populations safer, CVE and PVE programs, so the BCJ argued, have instead resulted in a loss of religious and political protections and of trust with State and local officials who are best positioned to intervene in such cases of violence in their own communities. More yet, the problems that arose from such programs stood in direct confrontation with the aims proposed in the legislation and 'popular support' of hate crime legislation so much so that congress addressed this matter head-on.

17.6 The Resolution of the Legal Contradiction

Slowly but surely as the contradictions between the *anti-discriminatory* legislation of hate crime law and the *discriminatory* practices of CVE programs began to mount, the prejudicial treatment and stigmatization of Muslim Americans over the course of the global War on Terror garnered significant political support and in so doing became increasingly difficult for those ensuring *order* to ignore. By 2012, this contradiction could no longer be papered over and was obliquely addressed in the United States Senate hearing 'Hate Crimes and the Threat of Domestic Extremism.' In the opening statements, Senator Dick Durban remarked:

»As one public FBI report warned, “right-wing terrorists pose a significant threat due to their propensity for violence.” [...] I hope this hearing will redouble our efforts to combat the threat of domestic extremism and to take whatever steps are necessary to protect the vulnerable in America.«

Besides affirming that CVE were in fact ‘actively being pursued,’ later into the hearing, Michael Clancy of the FBI’s Counterterrorism department assured the panel of the State and local police’s involvement in such efforts, saying:

»we work to strive toward providing the tools and information necessary for those indicators and behaviors of violent extremism, regardless of whether it is domestic or international, to not only our personnel but also our State and local partners and the community.«

Daryl Johnson was also in attendance and provided the hearing with his own statement on this matter of ‘right-wing extremism.’ Without discounting the attention placed on ‘al Qaeda and its affiliates,’ he underscored the importance of also focusing on ‘non-Islamic terrorism,’ noting how »we are currently seeing an upsurge in domestic non-Islamic extremist activity specifically from violent right-wing extremists.« In what followed, he compared the rates of ‘Muslim extremist’ to ‘non-Islamic extremist’ terrorist attacks following 9/11, underscoring how »[i]n particular, domestic right-wing extremists trumped all other forms of ideologically motivated violence in the U.S. for number of deaths during this time period.« In light of these numbers, Johnson went on to plead with the lawmakers present: »the Federal Government must do more to combat domestic terrorism within the U.S. Our failure to act now will assuredly embolden the enemy and bring more attacks.« Reminding the floor of the strides made in the ‘information sharing’ efforts following 9/11, he alerted how there were still »communication gaps between levels of government—local, State, and Federal« that needed to be amended. Moreover, Johnson warned, how »a whole generation of State and local officers has not been trained and has no clue what to look for.« Johnson also pleaded with the Senate to direct more resources towards the federal government to counter this emerging threat, citing the need for ‘strategic analysis’ so as to better spot the ‘emerging national trends and patterns.’ Thanking the panel for allowing him to testify on what he called »this most important issue facing our Nation,« he concluded by stating:

»It is important that the U.S. Government take the lead in developing new strategies and tools for law enforcement and the courts to better deal with problems associated with domestic extremism. [...] For many years, we have focused on the threat from al Qaeda and homegrown Muslim extremists. It is now time to also strengthen our resolve to combat violent domestic non-Islamic extremism in all of its forms.«

Before adjourning the hearing, citing the »growing awareness of the severity and the frequency of these crimes,« Senator Richard Blumenthal expressed how he 'hoped' this might translate into »greater enforcement, tougher enforcement, more stringent penalties.« As for the 'growing awareness,' this according to Durbin was already made palpable in the attendance alone, remarking in his closing statements:

»I might note that over 400 people are in attendance at this hearing, in the overflow room and in this main room, showing the level of interest in this important topic [...] We are not alone in our feelings about this. We have had an enormous amount of interest from many groups, 80 written statements for today's hearing, [...].«

17.7 The Formation of the Domestic Terrorism Executive Committee

If PVE efforts began in 2004, and DHS attention to right-wing extremism gained momentum in 2007 only to be officially disbanded in 2009 (where we argue it was channeled through into hate crimes legislation and CVE programs), and if by 2011 and 2012 the issue was back on the table due to the mounting pressures from civil society, it appeared as if the contradiction between hate crimes and CVE would go on to find its ultimate resolution in the *re-establishment* of the Domestic Terrorism Executive Committee (DTEC) in 2014. The committee, which originated following the Oklahoma City Bombing in 1995, and abruptly ended following the events of 9/11, which saw all counterterrorism efforts directed towards fighting the *global* War on Terror. By June 3rd, 2014, as communicated in an official statement put forth by Attorney General Eric Holder, he announced the reconvening of DTEC. In this announcement, similar to Obama's 2011 plan, maintaining that 'the threat posed by Islamic extremist satellite groups' had still been 'real,' like President Obama had done with his reference to the Norwegian neo-Nazi attack, Holder made incontrovertibly clear that »we also must concern ourselves with the continued danger we face from individuals within our own borders who may be motivated by a variety of other causes from anti-government animus to racial prejudice.«

Reminiscent of Johnson's calls in the Hate Crimes and Domestic Extremism congressional hearing, DTEC, Holder explained, »will coordinate closely with U.S. Attorneys and other key public safety officials across the country to promote information-sharing and ensure an effective, responsive, and organized joint effort.«

In the ensuing months, a Congressional Research Service Report—intended to support Congress in its legislative, oversight, and representational duties—attempted to translate this new era domesticating the global War on Terror into simplified language for policymakers in its widely distributed briefing: 'Domestic Terrorism Appears to Be

Reemerging as a Priority at the Department of Justice' (*CRS Insights*, 15 August 2014). The three-page document laid out how 'the Threat' ought to be 'framed,' 'Who are domestic terrorists?', and 'Why now?.' Self-admittedly unsure to the exact reasoning behind DTEC's sudden return, citing the concerns of State and local police, the report nevertheless evoked the 'growing right-wing terror threat' equation writing:

»one source suggests that domestic terrorism features prominently among the concerns of state, local, and tribal (SLT) police. The threat posed by sovereign citizen extremists was the top counterterrorism concern voiced by SLT police in a 2013-2014 survey, displacing »Islamic extremists/jihadists,« the top concern highlighted in a similar study conducted seven years earlier.« (2)

Thus, after tracing the contours of federal law as forged during the global War on Terror, as the contradictions between hate crimes and CVE effectively gave way to *the domestication of the War on Terror*, we saw how this intimately guided the work of State and local police and by extension greatly influenced the 'growing right-wing terror threat' equation and the course of the rise of the far right phenomenon as it unfolded in 2015.

18 The Right-Wing Extremist Folk Devil

» *This angry White man has been a major character throughout US history. He gave the country slavery, the slaughter of Native Americans, and Jim Crow laws. His anger also helped fuel the January 6 insurrection at the Capitol.*

It's this angry White man -- not the Black or brown man you see approaching on the street at night -- who poses the most dangerous threat to democracy in America.

— John Blake in 'There's nothing more frightening in America today than an angry White man' (CNN, 21 November 2021)

In the previous two chapters, we observed how the events of the Great Recession and global War on Terror not only effected individuals, families, communities and religious groups, but State and local law enforcement and the law itself. There we observed how the subprime mortgage crisis and financial crisis resulted in internal pressures and changes for both State and local police and the general public. We also observed how they expressed themselves in the external relations between the two groups resulting in yet additional pressures and changes for all parties involved. As we saw, these secondary pressures, resulted in 'a growing awareness' of both the State and local police towards the threat of the public, and the public to the threat of State and local police. This not only began to manifest itself in a number of routine practices (e.g., bodycams, increased public scrutiny), but in the law itself (e.g., hate crime legislation and CVE and their particular inclination towards 'right-wing extremism').

The collision of these various fears and threats which found their expression through the law and the activities of the state resulted in what Hall et al. called a 'therapeutic psychodrama,' where the contradictions that created and guided the Great Recession and global War on Terror were in part exorcised through the mere pronouncement of the rise of the far right. Outlining a similar moment in British politics, the authors described how:

»A genuine sense of cultural dislocation, then, came to focus not on structural causes but on symbolic expressions of social disorganisation [...] That these were themselves often 'magical solutions' to the same cultural or structural problems— attempts to resolve, without transcending, inherent contradictions of the class— was not the least of the ironies.« (1978: 157)

In moments of such pervasive social anxiety, like those accompanying the global War on Terror and following the Great Recession, while expressive of a very real pain and

powerlessness (e.g., Islamophobia, home foreclosures, unemployment, police killings), there arises a tendency to conjure up 'scapegoats,' according to Hall et al.:

»into which all the disturbing experiences are condensed and then symbolically rejected or 'cast out'. These scapegoats have attributed to them the role of causing the various elements of disorganisation and dislocation which have produced 'social anxiety' in the first place. However, these scapegoats do not just 'happen', they are produced from specific conditions, by specific agencies, as scapegoats.« (155)

As we have seen from a variety of angles, the global War on Terror and its more recent domestication, these developments have affected some geographies and demographics more than others. The former, expressed as Islamophobia, resulted in the infringing of rights and a pernicious stigma which contributed to additional problems (e.g., racial profiling, discrimination, social exclusion). The latter, expressed as the rise of the far right phenomenon, resulted in the *typification* of a politicized member of the working class *stigmatized* as dangerous, old, white men found both online and in rural areas, and posing not only a threat to minority groups but to democracy and free society itself. As CNN's John Blake wrote at the opening of his article 'There's nothing more frightening in America today than an angry White man':

»It's not the "radical Islamic terrorist" that I fear the most. Nor is it the brown immigrant or the fiery Black Lives Matter protester, or whatever the latest bogeyman is that some politician tells me I should dread.«

Rather, for Blake, it is the angry white men who he 'fears the most,' and who for him 'have damaged democracy.'

Of course, while such scapegoats tend to appear as the natural enemies of all that is good, they are far from natural, and are rather the result of the ideological work dutifully carried out by the agencies of public signification. They help construct what Hall et al., once again drawing on Cohen, described as the 'Folk Devil':

»on to whom all our most intense feelings about things going wrong, and all our fears about what might undermine our fragile securities are projected [...], a sort of alter ego for Virtue. In one sense, the Folk Devil comes up at us unexpectedly, out of the darkness, out of nowhere. In another sense, he is all too familiar; we know him already, before he appears. He is the reverse image, the alternative to all we know: *the negation*.« (1978: 159-160)

In 1978, the Folk Devil that the authors described was one who appeared to be »young, black, bred in, or arising from the 'breakdown of social order' in the city« (160). According to them: »He was a sort of personification of all the positive social images—only *in reverse*: black on white« (Ibid.). Today, after four decades of economic, political, and

cultural changes, the emergence of this present-day Folk Devil seems to have once again appeared ‘in reverse’—veteran, white, and rural. As we had already seen in the media, the primary definition of the Trump campaign was none other than an army of backwards, mentally unstable, gullible, angry, hateful, toxically masculine, armed, violent, stupid, poor, privileged, racist and fascistic white supremacists. This population became the scapegoat par excellence for a ruling class who funneled into it all society’s ills.

Lest this be confused with taking any one side in this ideological reversal, none of this is to endorse the one or the other as *rational*. Indeed, they are both the product of *irrational* fears put forth by those segments of the population most threatened by the very cultural and economic dislocations underway. Still, with time, a particular political ‘logic’ does emerge to capture, reshape, and make use of the Folk Devil as it exists to accommodate its own ends. As Hall et al. articulated in their concluding chapter on ‘The Politics of Mugging’ in relation to the economic crisis underway in British society:

»What we are witnessing here, in short, is nothing less than the synchronisation of the race and the class aspects of the crisis. Policing *the blacks* threatened to mesh with the problem of policing *the poor* and policing the *unemployed*: all three were concentrated in precisely the same urban areas – a fact which of course provided that element of geographical homogeneity which facilitates the germination of a militant consciousness. The on-going problem of policing the blacks had become, for all practical purposes, synonymous with the wider problem of *policing the crisis*.« (325-326)

Thus, as the authors illustrate, this condensation of the themes of race and class, as well as geography and conciseness raising, that enter into the figure of the Folk Devil is by no means an unprecedented nor accidental but signals the tide of real economic crisis that threaten the foundations of material existence for large and influential segments of the population. And yet, neither is this drive towards its particularly racialized incantation without its own logic. As Hall et al. explain:

»Although the black and white poor find themselves, objectively, in the same position, they inhabit a world ideologically so structured that each can be made to provide the other with its negative reference group, the ‘manifest cause’ of each other’s ill-fortune. As economic circumstances tighten, so the competitive struggle between workers is increased, and a competition structured in terms of race or colour distinctions has a great deal of mileage. [...] So the crisis of the working class is reproduced, once again, through the structural mechanisms of racism, as a crisis within and between the working classes. It sets one colonised sector against another.« (333)

But for this fantastical 'enemy from within' to have ever posed a viable threat to the broader population, moreover a majority 'white' population, this required a particularly vocal group to effectively conjure up this devil into flesh and bone.

19 The Left-Wing of the Petty Bourgeoisie

» *Members of the working class also have a considerable stake in the notion (and the achievement) of social justice; they want a fair return for their labour and are antagonistic to those who obtain easy money parasitically upon the work of others. Bourgeois ideology plays upon this genuine fear, arguing that all will be rewarded according to their utility and merit, and that those who cheat at these rules will be punished. In this way, ideology aspires to acceptance as a universal interest, although in reality it conceals the rampant particular interests of the ruling classes as displayed in both their legal and illegal aspects*

— Jock Young as quoted in *Policing the Crisis* (Hall et al. 1978: 147-148)

«

As we have observed, the Folk Devil was not the product of mere conspiracy, but the result of an accumulation of contradictions, most pronounced over the course of the implementation of the global War on Terror and the Great Recession. It was only *a posteriori* that the Folk Devil was constructed first by the law and its very particular interpretation of hate crimes and right-wing extremism averse to addressing the roots of these problems, if not actively enflaming them, and second by the media which faithfully reproduced these primary definitions. With all that said, for the threat to find its very articulation into ‘*right-wing* extremism’ and its universality as ‘the greatest threat to *the nation*,’ this required a specific grouping of social forces—the moral entrepreneurialism of the middle- and lower-middle-classes, a social grouping which we’ll henceforth refer to as that most vocal and organized segment of the left-wing of the petty bourgeoisie.

The group, as suggested in its very name, finds itself in an intermediary position, lodged between two world historical classes, the working class and the ruling class. However, as Hall et al. note, lacking the ‘rewards of solidarity’ from the former as well as the ‘wealth’ from the latter, the only rewards this social group can claim are those *moral* in nature. This factors into the very identity of the group, which the authors write, as having:

» maintained the traditional standards of moral and social conduct; they have identified – over-identified – with ‘right thinking’ in every sphere of life; and they have come to regard themselves as the backbone of the nation, the guardians of its traditional wisdoms. Whereas working people have had to make a life for themselves in the negotiated spaces of a dominant culture, this second petty-bourgeois group projects itself as the embodiment and last defence of public morality – as a social ideal.« (1978: 161-162)

However, because of the structural position of this group, both on the brink of *proletarianization* and the promise of social recognition and material prosperity—a position as contradictory as it is precarious—it is exactly in such moments of social change and intensifying competition, when the walls begin to close in, that this segment of the petty bourgeoisie enhances its competitive advantage by playing on its moral superiority. In such instances, some of its members, as the authors write:

»become more strident, more entrenched, more outraged, more wracked with social and moral envy, *and* more vigorous and organised in giving public expression to its moral beliefs. This is the spear-head of the moral backlash, the watchdogs of public morality, the articulators of moral indignation, the moral entrepreneurs, the crusaders.« (162)

It is in such instances where the petty bourgeoisie exhibits, so the authors, »the tendency to speak, not on its own behalf or in its own interest, but to identify its sectional morality *with the whole nation* – to give voice on behalf of everybody« (162). The petty bourgeoisie achieves this *universalization* of moral outrage and indignation by essentially *mediating* and *synthesizing* the very real experiences across the working class, petty bourgeoisie and ruling class when a given society finds itself in a moment of crisis. In the clasps of the petty bourgeoisie, these disparate concerns are, as Hall et al. put it, »welded together into a single common cause« (162)—a cause most readily found in the image of the nation under attack.

Thus, as we return to our present investigation, the solder that was used to bind together the otherwise competing interests across civil society and the state against a mutual enemy, all rested on a single and spellbinding notion: that of *social justice*.

We mustn't look far to spot the 'moral guardians' who routinely spoke not on their own behalf or in their own interest but in the quasi-universal interest of humanity (e.g., in the name of human rights, antifascism, antiracism, communism) or particular identity groups (e.g., in the name of Muslims, Blacks, Women). It is these petty bourgeois advocates who consistently pushed the government to crackdown on Islamophobia, hate crimes, and right-wing extremism.

Such was instanced at the 2009 signing of the HCPA, which according to the Anti-Defamation League's 'An Introduction to Hate Crime Laws' (2017), saw »nearly 300 civil rights, religious, educational, professional, and civic organizations« in lockstep with »virtually every major law enforcement organization in the country.« Besides throwing its own support behind this purely punitive policy, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) stood side by side with the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations, the National Organization for Women, as well

as the Arab American Institute (AAI) and the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) in supporting the enhancement of the repressive arm of the state.

Similarly, as earlier inferred, during the 2012 hearing on ‘Hate Crimes and the Threat of Domestic Extremism,’ alongside the return of the ADL, AAI, ADC, HRC, and NAACP, recalling the words of Senator Durbin, the ‘overflowing’ attendance, also included a raft of other representatives across civil society who showed up to support broadening the expanse of United States counterterrorism efforts, among which included the Southern Poverty Law Center, ACLU, and Human Rights Foundation, as well as the Council on American-Islamic Relations and Islamic Society of North America, Muslim Advocates, Muslim Public Affairs Council, Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights, among countless others.

And yet, it wasn’t merely these organizations who helped to *identify* and *universalize* the symbolic danger and galvanize the broad state reaction that took shape in the form of the domestication of the War on Terror, but the appearance of social movements, most predominantly, that of Black Lives Matter. Here the role which the latter played was strikingly reminiscent of Hall et al.’s petty bourgeois activists who in their account were »devoted to stoking up and giving public expression to moral indignation and rage« (163) whose very presence helped effectively *mainstream* such headlines as *The Guardian*’s ‘Why are white people scared of black people’s rage at Mike Brown’s death?’ (20 August 2014).

None of this is to suggest that the *rage* that had existed was not well founded (indeed as is suggested in this very undertaking, there are very real antagonisms resulting in the depreciation of human life). Nor that civil society or Black Lives Matter were simply constituted by, or geared towards, the interests of the petty bourgeoisie. This is exactly not the case. As we noted, it is the petty bourgeoisie who crucially *mediates* the ambiguities across and between the very real experiences of the working class and the ruling class through their own intermediary position. In other words, the issue at hand is not the rage itself, but its *repackaging* and *representation* by this specific middling class.

If civil society organizations had been responsible for so effectively cultivating and articulating public outrage in regard to *Islamophobia*, then Black Lives Matter was surely a key player in driving the discourse of a widespread and omnipotent resurgence of *racism* that slowly but surely saturated the media and pop culture. While segments of the working class were drawn onto the identitarian political terrain of the petty bourgeoisie—let us not forget that it was under the Obama administration that the national guard was sent to Ferguson—those segments would quickly become overshadowed by the vetted and verified class of ‘Black activist’ spokespeople (e.g., Shaun King, Deray McKesson) and ‘Black intellectuals’ (e.g., Ta-Nehisi Coates, Kimberlé Crenshaw) who acted as the primary definers of ‘the Black community.’

Of course, one degree removed from civil society organizations and Black Lives Matter, academia provided another wellspring from which universalistic discourses were tried and tested. The academy served as a conveyor belt for academic shibboleths that helped invert the reality of working-class life in abstract problems for academics to solve. There, issues of widespread home foreclosures became problems of *discrimination* (e.g., 'Patterns of discrimination against Blacks and Hispanics in the US mortgage market,' *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, 2010), unemployment a matter of 'white privilege' (e.g., 'Stereotypes, social networks and white privilege: What the media are not saying about unemployment among African American college graduates,' *American Sociological Association*, 29 January 2015), social alienation eclipsed by the threat of 'toxic masculinity' (e.g., 'Suicide by mass murder: Masculinity, aggrieved entitlement, and rampage school shootings,' *Health Sociology Review*, 2010), the legacy of the global War on Terror reduced to a mere discursive *othering* (e.g., 'Gender, Orientalism and Representations of the 'Other' in the War on Terror,' *Peace & Security*, 2011), the social function of State and local police as mere sexist and racist acts of 'police brutality' (e.g., 'Say her name: Resisting police brutality against black women,' *Center for Victim Research Repository*, 2015); or the blight of mass incarceration revamped as *The New Jim Crow* (Michelle Alexander 2011). In each of these instances, the working class was either dissolved into the ether of universalistic identities or evacuated of its agency and flattened into its own abstract identity grouping.

However, the most crucial segment of the petty bourgeoisie was none other than that of the political left-wing which had, buried deep within it, the structural imperatives to breathe life into that very common denominator underlining this Folk Devil. *As an institution, no matter how disjointed, it was, by definition, diametrically opposed to the political right-wing.* All while in outward competition with one another, the existence of one intrinsically relied upon the existence of the other. From this perspective, it wasn't the political left-wing that necessarily followed the lead of the federal government, the State and local police or the media, it was itself the force which set the rhythm to which the domestication of the War on Terror would unfold. One must only recall the drumbeat of left-wing publications long before the rise of the far right phenomenon had ever shown its public face (e.g., 'Globalization, Theocracy and the New Fascism: the U.S. Right's Rise to Power,' *Race & Class*, 2006; 'White Power USA: The Rise of Right-Wing Militias in America,' *Democracy Now!*, 11 January 2010; 'Preparing for a Republican comeback?,' *International Socialist Review*, 14 September 2010, 'The Dangers of American Fascism,' *Truthout*, 28 February 2011, 'No, Actually, This Is What a Fascist Looks Like,' *Truthout*, 18 January 2013; 'Time to get serious about right wing extremism,' *OpenDemocracy*, 3 October 2014). A rhythm only perpetuated in the later reporting of left-wing outlets like *Salon*, *ThinkProgress*, *Common Dreams*, *Jacobin*, *OpenDemocracy*, and *The New Republic* by 2015.

For this rhythm to become universally adopted, the political left-wing presented itself as the exclusive proprietor of the *holy grail* that was social justice. Of this there was only one, and it belonged exclusively to the rights of the political left-wing. This wing became the moral guardian, and essentially the primary definer, of all that was good and righteous. In this instance, it was the very abuse of history which reinforced this effective monopolization of the notions of equality, justice, democracy, progress, truth, and science as the historical inheritance of the political left-wing. It was from its avowedly universalistic vantage point that the left-wing could successfully speak on behalf of not only *all* Blacks, Women, Immigrants, Muslims, but the working class and society itself. But to convincingly weld together these otherwise disparate segments of the petty bourgeoisie (civil society, social movements, academia), the working class (popular support, unions) and the ruling class (capital, the state, the media), the political left-wing necessitated a focusing element. This was done through the unrelenting concentration of moral indignation invested into *the right-wing label* which progressively became imbued with all that had been wrong with society. From this point onwards, the right-wing label became increasingly synonymous with hate, Islamophobia, racism, white supremacy, neo-Nazism, xenophobia, sexism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, transphobia, bigotry, intolerance, nativism, nationalism, imperialism, capitalism, colonialism, the patriarchy, gun violence, toxic masculinity, and lest we forget fascism. With this label now imbued with multifaceted moralistic meaning, the emotionality which followed horrific incidents of violence that could be labeled right-wing extremism then only served to further concretize this image of an all-encompassing, to recall then Vice President Biden's following the Charleston Church Shooting, 'pure evil.' In essence, the political left-wing became the greatest common denominator for all these disparate interests to counter what was depicted as their common enemy.

But if the political left-wing first emerged as an expression of the revolutionary bourgeoisie, and later the revolutionary working class at the turn of the century, what explained its most recent participation in what had essentially become a racializing, anti-working class and antidemocratic project? What was the driving force behind the contemporary formation of this particular iteration of the political left-wing? From where did 'it' and its creation of the right-wing label emerge? It is from this perspective we must now turn to answer why the rise of the far right phenomenon appeared *when* and *where* it did.

20 Approaching the Class Struggle

» *Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes [emphasis added].*

— Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848: 14)

Throughout this undertaking, while we have recurrently hinted at the competing class interests between the ruling and working classes, we have yet to formally address the subject of the class struggle head-on. We will attempt to do so in the following pages.

To begin with, classes are composed of individuals with *common relations* as they pertain to the *production process*. As Marx wrote in *Wage Labour and Capital*:

»In the process of production, human beings work not only upon nature, but also upon one another. They produce only by working together in a specified manner and reciprocally exchanging their activities. In order to produce, they enter into definite connections and relations to one another, and only within these social connections and relations does their influence upon nature operate – i.e., does production take place.« (1847: 13)

As human beings began settling and developing more complex and efficient modes of production, they underwent a shift from primitive hunter-gatherer societies to agrarian societies based on agricultural production. In so doing, for the first time, these early societies produced a sizeable *surplus product*—that is to say, they produced *more* resources than was necessary to replenish the social base. This surplus product in turn resulted in a *division of labor* that saw the formation of a select *class* of individuals who now were freed from the toils of socially necessary manual labour to pursue spiritual and scholarly pursuits. This class also oversaw the management of their societies and its production process through the formation of *the state*. Of course, for the state to dictate *social order* from what had previously been *free* human beings, besides protecting its own privileged existence, it relied on *domination*, and thus the *ruling* of society. It is here, where the common relations forged in the early production process between the divisions of those working and those ruling inevitably took on their class character.

In modern class society, there exist two primary classes in competition with one another: the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Lacking ownership of the means of production, the former is existentially driven to sell its *labor power*—that being, the exertion of its human faculties (whether physical or mental) when applied to the production process.

When its labor power enters into the production process, the proletariat produces *use value*—simply put, the production something *useful*. Here, it is important that we avoid misunderstanding this concept in its narrow sense (e.g., shelter, warmth, food, water), but as that which *human beings* find useful (e.g., shelter, warmth, food, water, *and* art, culture, science, spirituality). As Marx made clear in *Capital*:

»Use values become a reality only by use or consumption: they also constitute the substance of all wealth, whatever may be the social form of that wealth. In the form of society we are about to consider, they are, in addition, the material depositories of exchange value.« (1867: 27)

For the bourgeoisie on the other hand, its ownership of *capital*, and therefore the *social means of production* and the ability to purchase of the labor power of the proletariat, this class is existentially driven to extract the *surplus value* that is produced amid the production process. Like with the surplus product, the surplus value denotes the production of use value which goes over that originally required for the production process. In this capacity, the bourgeoisie extracts surplus value in an effort to accrue *exchange value*—in short, profit. This latter value represents the shift from *quality* as found in use value to *quantity*. Furthermore, it is this quantification of value that allows for its *commodification*. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels lucidly illustrate this process of commodification and its deleterious repercussions:

»The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his “natural superiors”, and has left no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous “cash payment”. It has drowned out the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom - Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.« (1848: 15-16)

However, as Marx would later write in *Capital*, this race to accumulate exchange value was not merely exploitative, but a deeply *irrational* from the perspective of *human* society as a whole:

»The simple circulation of commodities – selling in order to buy – is a means of carrying out a purpose unconnected with circulation, namely, the appropriation of use-values, the satisfaction of wants. The circulation of money as capital is, on the contrary, an end in itself, for the expansion of value takes place only within this

constantly renewed movement. The circulation of capital has therefore no limits.«
(1867: 107)

In this instance, rather than dictated by the wants and needs of human beings, the production process in this new bourgeois society was dictated by the logic of the market. A logic which operates *for its own sake*, to assure the reproduction of market relations underwritten by exploitation and the pursuit of profit. Where *individual* members of the bourgeoisie continue to make *use* of human society, from the perspective of the *society as a whole*, today, the once progressive role of the bourgeoisie no longer provides society with any use of its own. Where its competitive instincts had once played a part in revolutionizing the means of productions vis-à-vis technological innovation, at the twilight of its historical mission, this class has become helplessly useless and outmoded from the perceptive of humanity. Still, the underlying irrationality from this abstract perspective of *humanity* was beside the point, as Marx understood, it was in the rational interest of the ruling class to pursue and prosper off of this destructive course and thus required an organized working class force, structurally opposed to exploitation, to throw it off its course. As Marx and Engels put it: “The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win” (1848: 34).

Thus, already here we begin to see how these class relations are effectively entrapped with particular *class interests*. There exists a minority which have a material stake in the perseverance in class society, and large contingent that do not. Since the nature of such a relationship is *objectively antagonistic*, in the sense that it is in the objective self-interest of those existentially driven to exploit to exploit, and in the objective self-interest of the exploited not to be exploited. As such, class societies inevitably entail *contradictory* class interests. How this contradiction is engaged with, and/or repressed, is a whole other matter. For now, however, what is important is that kernel of objective truth which is encapsulated within this contradiction: the natural tendency towards *struggle* between emancipation and exploitation.

According to Marx and Engels, this tendency towards struggle has been the force behind the continual shaping and reshaping of *world history*: »The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles« (1848: 14). For them, the class struggle not only produces history *as we know it to be*, but it is the very force which propels it *forward*. Some important points flow from this premise as it relates to the organization of the state under capitalism.

Historically, the ruling class has managed the class struggle by openly leveraging the coercive powers of the state to secure its narrow interests over its subjects. However, because in bourgeois society, because the state machine is bound up with a system built around the notions of *free* individuals, *freely* buying and selling commodities and labor power in *free* competition with one another, which *ideologically* serve, according to Hall et al., »to render the economic aspect of class relations invisible« (1978: 203), the state

took on a distinctly new character, one cut loose from class distinctions. Where the state initially underlined class distinctions, limiting itself to the purview of property owning men, as the authors have illustrated:

»Gradually, through a prolonged political struggle, the emergent working classes won a position in ‘political society’, and were by the early twentieth century incorporated formally into it. This gradual, uneven, often bitterly resisted drawing of all the political classes within the formal framework of the state, at one and the same time, widened its representative base (and thus its legitimacy), and forced it to appear increasingly ‘autonomous’ of any one particular class interest.« (203-204)

It was in this exact moment, when the bourgeois state, unlike earlier overtly coercive state formations, began to *appear* as if autonomous from the class struggle, that the very nature of the state began to take on an entirely new form and function. Whereby particular class interests remained operative in bourgeois society, these classes were, as Hall et al. explained, » represented, politically, as if composed only of ‘individual citizens’« (203). According to the authors:

»The relation of citizens to the state is defined in the law (legal subjects) and through the political institutions (political subjects). The state represents itself as the repository of all these individual wills – it is the ‘general will’, while standing above and apart from the sordid struggle between particular interests.« (203)

In this arrangement the bourgeois state positioned itself as a neutral arbiter of society as a whole all while *containing* and *repressing* the natural tendency of the class struggle. With this new formation and outward appearance of the bourgeois state, as opposed to the strict reliance on domination to secure legitimation as all previous class societies had, it increasingly relied on the *consensuality* inherent in democracy as its primary mode of legitimation. However, as the class struggle developed, the function of the bourgeois state, as Hall et al. have critically note: »as an ‘organiser of consent’ thus becomes more critical – as well as more delicate, more problematic. Only by winning consent can the state exact both obligation and obedience« (204). At the same time, just as the laboring classes became free individuals in market competitions with one another and disaggregated and atomized into legal and political subjects, so too had the ruling class been rendered *anarchic* as competitive market actors and legal and politics subjects. Thus, with the outgrowth of democracy, the bourgeois state increasingly exposed the anarchic and disorganized constituents of the ruling class to the will of the exploited masses, and by extension, to their contradictory class interests. To evade this threat of democracy and retain their very existence, the anarchic constituency of the ruling class was existentially driven to form what Antonio Gramsci has referred to as *hegemonic alliances*. Hall et al. summarize such a moment as follows:

»When a ruling-class alliance has achieved an undisputed authority and sway over all these levels of its organisation – when it masters the political struggle, protects and extends the needs of capital, leads authoritatively in the civil and ideological spheres, and commands the restraining forces of the coercive apparatuses of the state in its defence – when it achieves all this on the basis of consent, i.e. with the support of ‘the consensus’, we can speak of the establishment of a period of hegemony or hegemonic domination.« (213)

Thus, in the same way that the state *disorganizes* classes into atomized legal subjects, in the very same instance it encourages the *organization* of the ruling class vis-à-vis the formation of a *hegemonic bloc*. It is with the securing of such ‘consensus’ through the democratic process, that the class struggle can be both addressed and hidden from sight. As the authors go on to write:

»Thus what the consensus really means is that a particular ruling-class alliance has managed to secure through the state such a total social authority, such decisive cultural and ideological leadership, over the subordinate classes that it shapes the whole direction of social life in its image, and is able to raise the level of civilisation to that which the renewed impetus of capital requires; it encloses the material, mental and social universe of the subordinated classes, for a time, within its horizon. It naturalises itself, so that everything appears ‘naturally’ to favour its continuing domination. But, because this domination has been secured by consent – on the basis of a wide consensus, as the saying goes – that domination not only seems to be universal (what everybody wants) and legitimate (not won by coercive force), but its basis in exploitation actually *disappears from view*.« (Ibid.)

However, and importantly for our purposes, all this rests on what Hall et al. remind us was »underpinned by its base in popular representation and popular consent« (203). As is suggested in such an uneasy balancing of class forces, the more the state relied upon popular consent for its ‘universalization’ and ‘legitimation’ as organized through the formation of hegemonic alliances, the more difficult it became for those particular alliances to place additional demands on the populace. This point is of critical importance, quoting Gramsci the authors remind us how in moments of crisis:

»the ruling class has failed in some major political undertaking for which it has requested, or forcibly extracted, the consent of the broad masses.... Or because huge masses ... have passed suddenly from a state of political passivity to a certain activity, and put forward demands which, taken together, albeit not organically formulated, add up to a revolution. A ‘crisis of authority’ is spoken of: this is precisely the crisis of hegemony, or general crisis of the State.« (213)

If before such a ‘crisis of hegemony,’ the class struggle remained effectively hidden from view, in the heat of such an event, so Hall et al., »*the whole basis of political leadership*

and cultural authority becomes exposed and contested« (214). Furthermore, it is in such moments when, as the authors express »the temporary balance of the relations of class forces is upset and new forces emerge, old forces run through their *repertoires* of domination« (Ibid.). From which point they grimly conclude how: »Such moments signal, not necessarily a revolutionary conjuncture nor the collapse of the state, but rather the coming of ‘iron times’« (Ibid.). In these moments where the ruling class ‘tilts’ away from consent towards coercion, it often does so in an attempt to *fill the gap* left open by crises or in preparation for, what the authors describe as, »the larger economic tasks which a failing and weakened capital requires« (Ibid.). And yet, it is in the turbulence of such moments, that the relative autonomy of the bourgeois state is *unmasked* as it openly engages in class struggle.

It is from this perspective of the class struggle, the incorporation of the working class into the bourgeois state, the contradictory relationship between popular consent and the ruling class, and the ways in which the authoritarian turn in a bourgeois state triggered by a hegemonic crisis lay bare the hidden reality of class struggle, which provides us with valuable coordinates for situating the emergence of the rise of the far right phenomenon and the domestication of the War on Terror in anticipating its future course.

20.1 The End of History

As it happens to be, in this final analysis, we begin where *Policing the Crisis* ended, with the rise of ‘authoritarian populism.’ Shortly following its original publication, this concept forwarded by the authors was made explicit in the election of the British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher voted into office the very year next year. Like her contemporary, the United States President Ronald Reagan, the two political figures embodied the *consensual* turn towards authoritarianism by their respective governments. In their execution of the ‘class war from above,’ the two administrations became notorious for their broad deregulatory agendas and near-total destruction of trade unionism as a bona fide political force. The latter point is best illustrated in two seismic events that shook the foundation of the labor movement in the United States and the United Kingdom. In 1981, with its unapologetic firing of some ten-thousand federal air traffic controllers on strike, the Reagan administration made its message clear to those daring to wager any future strike actions. Meanwhile, several years later in the United Kingdom, during the historic 1984 miner’s strike, the Thatcher administration brought the working-class revolt to a swift end by fast-tracking the importation of coal shipments into the country and thus rendering both the miners and their workplaces as redundant. Not only did these two administrations disembowel the organized sections of the working class, but by actively restructuring the quality of the global economy through financialization, they made certain this repression of the class struggle would remain terminal.

Of course, the developments in the class struggle were not simply limited to leading powers in the West. By the 1980s, having divested the working class of its power, let alone any democratic input, the Soviet Union as now managed by its bureaucratized and decaying political class increasingly capitulated to international pressures and began to embrace free market economics, albeit first in small doses. Such measures were most vigorously pursued by the President Mikhail Gorbachev and his administration. Within a few years' time, as the Eastern bloc began to collapse, so would its socialized economies, which one after the other, were quickly absorbed by the influence of Western capital.

Although by the late eighties, the situations in the East and West had differed in many ways, what these two world powers shared was a massive devaluation in the political power of the laboring masses which had been funneled upwards through the state and market mechanisms.

Remarking on the period, rather than understand it as a new era *within* world history, for Francis Fukuyama, »the unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism« (1989: 3) instead signaled *its very end*. For the political scientist and public figure, this new era of undeterred market fundamentalism indicated what he determined to be »the total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives« (3). This 'total exhaustion' in turn gave way to a new political settlement, a final hegemonic consensus that would close the chapter on the class struggle, and usher in 'the end of history.' Discarding the social democratic Welfarism and Keynesianism of old, by the 1990s, the politics that Reagan and Thatcher had once spearheaded, soon infused the entirety of political spectrum. What others have labeled *Thatcherism, Reaganomics, free market fundamentalism, the new world order, laissez-faire capitalism, globalization, neoliberalism*, for our purposes, we will refer to this *mode* of politics as the *Washington Consensus*. In his book, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005), David Harvey identified the four core elements of this new 'Consensus', beginning with (i) its 'more open financialization' of the economy; (ii) its increased reliance on the 'geographical mobility of capital' made possible by numerous innovations in communication and transportation technology; (iii) its formation of the 'Wall Street–IMF–Treasury complex' and its dictation of economic matters; (iv) and lastly, what he describes as its »global diffusion of the new monetarist and neoliberal economic orthodoxy [which] exerted an ever more powerful ideological influence« (2005: 93). This last point was especially poignant as it related to attaining the necessary *popular support* (or rather *depoliticization*) to usher in what was essentially an outright assault on the working and middle classes and their living standards. The guiding ideology for this consensus, in the words of Harvey, »had to be backed up by a practical strategy that emphasized the liberty of consumer choice, not only with respect to particular products but also with respect to lifestyles, modes of expression, and a wide range of cultural practices« (2005: 42). Of course, this ideological discipline did not

appear out of nowhere, but was the result of a 'long march' through the institutions. As Harvey notes:

»Powerful ideological influences circulated through the corporations, the media, and the numerous institutions that constitute civil society—such as the universities, schools, churches, and professional associations. [...] the organization of think-tanks (with corporate backing and funding), the capture of certain segments of the media, and the conversion of many intellectuals to neoliberal ways of thinking, created a climate of opinion in support of neoliberalism as the exclusive guarantor of freedom. (40) These movements were later consolidated through the capture of political parties and, ultimately, state power.« (40)

And just as the cultural mood began to accommodate the shifting tides of the Washington Consensus and its 'new economy,' soon the political landscape was to follow. Politics began to undergo a period of renewal. As old parties and political tendencies contorted and accommodated the *homogeneity* of the Washington Consensus, they increasingly were repackaged and rebranded as 'new' (e.g., 'New Democrats,' 'New Labour,' 'New Right,' 'New Left'). At the same time, this *newness* only served to further estrange these institutions from their former constituents. With the specter of communism vanquished, and the labor movement largely defanged, for these parties, the interests of the working class had not only become an afterthought but was understood as a liability that might impede with the dynamism of domestic and regional economies struggling to participate in the highly competitive and fast-paced global marketplace. No longer limited to the political right-wing, it was the political left-wing that not only adopted *Thatcherism* and *Reaganomics* wholesale, but it was this political tendency, which had historically represented the working class, that was the most effective in implementing this devastatingly anti-working-class political project. As Harvey notes: »It was [...] Clinton and then Blair who, from the centre-left, did the most to consolidate the role of neoliberalism both at home and internationally« (93).

These cultural and political changes were of course necessary in facilitating the destabilizing developments of declining wages, job losses, rising consumer debts, widespread deindustrialization and deskilling—not to mention the upward transfer of wealth—that followed the triumphant celebrations of the *Washington Consensus*. However, it was not merely the *interests* of the working class that were interpreted as a liability, but democracy itself. For the *newly* reinvigorated ruling class, who through the politics of the Washington Consensus, only further augmented its power in society, so Harvey, not so coincidentally, became increasingly 'suspicious of democracy.' From the perspective of this class, he went on to write:

»Governance by majority rule is seen as a potential threat to individual rights and constitutional liberties. Democracy is viewed as a luxury, only possible under

conditions of relative affluence coupled with a strong middle-class presence to guarantee political stability. Neoliberals therefore tend to favour governance by experts and elites. A strong preference exists for government by executive order and by judicial decision rather than democratic and parliamentary decision-making. Neoliberals prefer to insulate key institutions, such as the central bank, from democratic pressures.« (66)

As such, it was this very period which ushered in the incremental outsourcing of democratic processes into the hands of non-democratic and avowedly non-partisan, multilateral institutional arbiters that would oversee the increasingly interconnected and financialized activities of the 'world market.' Among them were *international* and *central banks* (e.g., International Monetary Fund, World Bank, Federal Reserve, European Central Bank), *international trade arrangements* (e.g., World Trade Organization, North American Free Trade Agreement, European Union), and *international nongovernmental organizations* (e.g., Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch).

As opposed to reacting to some militant working-class presence, with the latter nowhere to be found, these 'suspicions' were not simply the result of an irrational and free floating fear but arose out of the widening contradiction that was to be found at the heart of liberal democracies, *that between the narrow logic of capital accumulation and the will of humanity*. What in fact was occurring was a ruling class offensive to *undo* the great reliance of bourgeois state on popular support. From the perspective of the ruling class, democracy not only interfered with, but threatened, an increasingly globalized and highly volatile financial markets. Thus, these antidemocratic sentiments espoused by the ruling classes that found their form in the burgeoning of international institutional infrastructures, was the direct response to this growing contradiction, which already by the 1990s, could be expressed in terms of the unpredictability of democracy and the predictability *required* for managing an ever complexifying global web of capital. From the perspective of the ruling class, to *adequately* control and safeguard the market, this could only be done by insulating it from disruptive, outside forces. As these precautions were incrementally put into practice to secure the imperatives of the ruling class, such measures simultaneously functioned to erode its very source of legitimacy that underpinned the free market system as a whole. With the incremental liquidation of democratic universal suffrage, for which the system and its exploiting class had for so long relied, soon marked the liquidation of its very legitimacy.

Such events however, as Hall et al. had correctly anticipated, could only ever have been realized following the ideological work that secured the authoritarian consensuses, like those which Reagan and Thatcher had successfully orchestrated and implemented in their respective nations. Like with the political projects of the former two, if the state had once sought to contain and manage the class struggle, it now became an active mechanism to fight it from above. Here, the renovation and expansion of legal powers

spearheaded by the ruling class served as a necessary step to successfully carry out the detrimental attacks on the working class while at the same time restraining it. Rather than a deviation from *normal* politics, the changes that intensified under the auspices of Thatcher and Reagan, and later Blair and Clinton, indeed represented something yet even deeper.

20.2 The End of Politics

It is at this point, where we wish to place the proposition originally forwarded by Fukuyama on its head. Rather than the end of *history*, we argue that as a moment *in* history, the Washington Consensus represented the *beginning* of the end of *politics*. For as the Washington Consensus increasingly eroded working-class power, and in turn the veneer of democracy, it simultaneously contained within it the very seedbed for which the working class might remerge in a *direct* and *open* class struggle with the entire political-economic-cultural establishment that had been complicit in the piecemeal destruction of working-class life. Thus, we argue, it was precisely the effective *neutralization* of class struggle set in motion by what Fukuyama in a certain sense rightly observed as the »triumph of the West, of the Western idea« (1989: 3) that ushered in the end of *politics* as it had hitherto existed and, in doing so, reopened the door for history to *resume* its course. Put differently, in the past decades, whether operating from the left-wing or the right-wing of bourgeois politics, as already made patent in the articulation of the *consensus* in the Washington Consensus to which *both* wings subscribed, as politics became increasingly subordinated to the will of *the market*, it did so in direct contestation with that of *the body politic*. With the remnants of working-class institutions all but destroyed, or brought under the purview of this market logic, left entirely unrestrained, the imperatives of the market translated into the ever-growing transfer of power and control *away* from the democratic procedures of sovereign nation-states and *towards* those unelected governing bodies. And as the politics contingent on the *illusion* of the left-right political spectrum continually forewent the interests of its respective constituents, *so it sowed the seeds for its very dissolution*. Stripped of its primary ideological veneer, it exposed the essential *class character* of politics and with it signaled a crisis of hegemony, one only hastened by the deleterious effects of the Great Recession. In the decade that began with Occupy Wall Street and the Arab Spring, slowly but surely, class struggle began to find its form in a variety of heterogenous populist struggles as they arose around the globe.

20.3 The Populist Moment

If we previously understood the function of law enforcement was to produce order, then as we have argued the function of the state is to ensure the reproduction of the social order, a task which it achieves vis-à-vis the production of law itself. It is from this angle, considering the hegemonic crisis of what we are forwarding as the end of politics, that

we must take into account the appearance of populism as it relates to the role of the bourgeois state and its 2009 threat assessments on left-wing and right-wing extremism, the bourgeois media, the rise of the far right phenomenon, and the domestication of the War on Terror. However, before we return to the subject matter of the latter, let return to the emergence of the very *extremes* which the federal government and its national security agencies had most feared: the return of class struggle in its now open form, a struggle pit against ‘the establishment.’

By the mid-2010s, nowhere was the political force of economic populism more apparent than in the United States and Europe. There, in the long shadow of the Great Recession, as the material concerns of rising prices, decreasing wages, job loss, social atomization, declining welfare, substance dependence, crime, and consumer debt met with the spiritual concerns experienced in the loss of identity, community, tradition, sense of security and purpose, these developments culminated into a popular consciousness.

Coalescing most forcefully around the issues of economic inequality, political corruption, civil liberties, trade and immigration, within time these concerns underwent a *political* transformation and found expression in the *organized* calls around economic inequality, employment, health care, criminal justice, immigration, electioneering, the family, financial regulation, civil liberties, offshoring, welfare, foreign policy, infrastructure, cultural heritage, taxation, education, minimum wage, social security, poverty, and national sovereignty.

Over the past century, as *politics* progressively receded away from its fundamental character and contradiction (those emanating from the class struggle) and instead drifted towards its *ideological expressions* (e.g., liberals, socialists, fascists, progressives, conservatives), by virtue of arising out of a society intellectually disciplined by such ideologies contingent on the left-right political spectrum, the economic populism naturally drew from these preexisting political repertoires. Moreover, given the structural nature of a political process increasingly dominated by money, these developments naturally emerged on the unpolished fringes of the left- and right-wings, alongside political independents and the politically uninitiated. Neither fluent in Marx or Smith, nor adopting the terms set by Stalin or Hayek, far from a utopian endeavor, while distinctly irresolute on matters of ideology, this economic populism was resoundingly resolute in its attacks against both the left- *and* the right-wing of politics and their, by now, long embrace of the ‘centrist’ and ‘status quo’ politics of the establishment. It was exactly in its vehemence and unwillingness to *properly* engage with the established political order that proved the economic populism to be an unwavering political force.

An early example of this force could be seen in Greece, where the left-wing actively courted this economic populism in its electoral strides. There, resonating with the mounting animosity towards the European Union and its socially destructive economic policies, the SYRIZA party successfully mobilized enough popular support to form a

government. In this earlier instantiation of economic populism, while differentiating itself from the establishment, as already suggested in SYRIZA's syllabic abbreviation (The Coalition of the Radical Left—Progressive Alliance), its politics were nevertheless bound up in the language of *unity* across the left-wing.

Where in Greece the emphasis had been placed on the internal cohesion of the left-wing, by 2015, on the British and American left-wing, this emphasis had been notably left absent. Rather, it was precisely the language of *disunity*, of breaking with the establishment of the left-wing, which became the very ethos with which the emergent economic populism had rallied around. Nowhere had this been more visible than in the political developments coalescing around the insurgent campaigns of Jeremy Corbyn, the British backbencher, and Bernie Sanders. There, by running *in*, and yet *against* the Labour Party and the Democratic Party in their respective 'Blairite' and 'Clintonite' configurations, did they launch their electoral bids for party leadership in the very parties they sought to take on.

While economic populism greatly succeeded at the level of public relations, by lifting the two *traditionally* left-wing politicians out of obscurity and into the limelight—and in so doing inspiring a number of imitations across the international left-wing (e.g., Jean Luc Mélenchon's *La France Insoumise*, Sahra Wagenknecht's *Aufstehen*)—regardless of the sincerity of their intentions, the political projects that Corbyn and Sanders had undertaken from the left-wing would only ever amount to a mere *aesthetic* economic populism.

By 2015, the outcome of this aesthetic economic populism could already be seen rearing its ugly head in Greece. There, amid the government-debt crisis which had plagued the Greek economy since the financial crisis, and with SYRIZA at the helm, the Greek public was confronted by the European Commission, European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund, who approached the country with yet another bailout proposal. Once again, this proposal entailed another round of harmful 'economic adjustments' and 'austerity measures' that would be placed upon the Greek public. However, before a decision was reached, in a rare spurt of democracy, on July 5th, the Greek public partook in a national referendum which plainly asked whether or not the proposal was to be accepted. In line with the fiery *rhetoric* espoused by SYRIZA during its electoral campaign, over sixty per cent of the votes cast by the Greek public conveyed a defiant 'No.'

Within a couple days' time however, the SYRIZA government, under Alexis Tsipras, rescinded on this democratic decision making and instead unilaterally acquiesced to undergo a three-year bailout and immediately consented to begin implementing yet another round of austerity measures on the weary Greek populace.

In this example, what portrayed itself as economic populism, in the last instance, proved itself to be none other than its *aesthetic* counterpart. Regardless of its rhetorical prowess

or positioning within the left-right political spectrum, it remained in an unbroken *continuity* with the status quo of the Washington Consensus.

A similar process occurred in the United States and the United Kingdom, but with an added complexity through the feigned transgressions performed from within the party. In this second iteration of aesthetic economic populism, by tapping into the economic populism against the Washington Consensus and its establishment, it was that very establishment and its collaborators which had by then captured the left-wing parties, and as such soon demonstrate to Sanders and Corbyn who in fact was in control. Whether the candidates themselves had been aware of the contradictions underway in their historically working-class parties was beside the point, what was significant was the way in which the Washington Consensus had in part *recomposed* the class composition of their parties' once working-class constituencies. Whether changes in the market, communications and transportation technology, access to higher education, immigration flows, trade negotiations, that together resulted in the so-called *globalization, deindustrialization, and urbanization* of Western society, along with the declining labor movement, union membership, electoral membership, party membership, these parties were progressively reconstituted, marking a shift *away* from their former working class bases and *towards* the growing ranks of the urban petty bourgeoisie.⁷ These changes aside, with Corbyn and Sanders now hitched to their respective parties, they had become increasingly dependent on them if they were to secure any degree of electoral success. This dependence, however, inevitably gave way to the very *distortion* of their economic populism as they increasingly had to accommodate their parties more recent tenants.

The corollary of these developments was also made patent on the other populist fronts, in this case, to both the left- and the right-wing establishment's dismay, that produced the 'Brexit' and 'Make America Great Again' campaigns. By 2016, in yet another national referendum, the world watched as the British public voted on whether to 'Remain' in or 'Leave' the EU, while in the United States, whether Americans would cast their ballots for Hillary Clinton, who would go on to become the nation's first female president or Donald Trump, who by then, the media had effectively portrayed as a *proto* fascist, if not outright one. By this point, both Corbyn and Sanders had decidedly closed ranks with their left-wing political establishments as exhibited in their respective campaigning to remain in the European Union and support the election of Clinton and other Democratic Party hopefuls. Here, the internal pressures emerging from within their parties were on full display. Corbyn, who had long been a Eurosceptic and vocal dissenter, not only broke with his political principles, but broke with a substantial portion of what remained from

7 A development which some media outlets have forwarded as a 'realignment' (e.g., 'Left-wing, right-wing: The case for realignment of political labels,' *The Hill*, 3 March 2018; 'Is America Undergoing a Political Realignment?,' *The Atlantic*, 8 April 2019; 'The Left's Class Realignment of 2020,' *The American Spectator*, 9 January 2021). Even the traditionally far right leaning Cato institute's journal *Cato Unbound* has explored this development in its article 'The Great Realignment: Understanding Politics Today' (10 December 2018).

the party's working-class base that made up the Labour Party's so-called 'red wall.' Instead, Corbyn preceded by locking arms with the Labour Party establishment, the conservative Cameron government, and The City of London, not to mention the European Union, in siding with the 'Remainers.' In a comparable development in the United States, Sanders, who had long campaigned against the destructive political legacy of the Clintonite capture of the Democratic Party, went on to actively and enthusiastically throw his support behind Hillary Clinton and the very same Democratic Party establishment. Furthermore, in doing so, laundering this support in terms of its opposition to the far right politics of the Trump campaign, Sanders only helped to further instantiate the threat latent in the rise of the far right phenomenon.

20.4 The Politics of the Rise of the Far Right Phenomenon

However, something else was occurring during this process of party discipline on display. Not only had critical stances towards the European Union, free trade, immigration, or civil liberties begun to flow away from what was historically associated with the political left-wing, but the very issues themselves became increasingly tagged with the right-wing label, and in so doing, tarred with a sense of backwardness and moral repugnance. To *politically oppose* the *politics* of the 'status quo' became conflated with 'populism,' 'anger' and 'revanchism'; the *politics* of the ruling class with 'bigotry' and 'demagoguery'; the *politics* of the 'world market' with 'nationalism' and 'protectionism'; the *politics* of immigration with 'xenophobia' and 'nativism'; the *politics* of identitarianism with 'racism,' 'sexism,' 'islamophobia,' 'antisemitism,' and 'homo-' and 'transphobia'; the *politics* of authoritarian technocracy with 'anti-intellectualism' and 'paranoid conspiracy theorizing'; the *politics* of militarism and interventionism with 'isolationism' and 'treason'; the *politics* of austerity with 'white-' and 'Western privilege'; and the *politics* of constitutional reform with a reckless encouragement of 'hate speech' and 'gun violence.' Under the rise of the far right phenomenon, those the primary and secondary definers and the political left-wing, were said to be espousing the *wrong* politics were in the same moment effectively *stigmatized* as 'hateful' and 'extremist.' Thus, in this moment, it was the moral guardians who stifled the formation of political consciousness by making it a socially, and in some cases legally untenable endeavor.

The class interests that long subordinated the political right-wing, had now effectively incorporated and dissolved *the entire political left-wing* into its purview. As we saw with SYRIZA, Corbyn and Sanders, in the last instance, the political left-wing consistently sided with the ruling class politics of the Washington Consensus. At the same time, it must be said, the Make America Great Again and Brexit campaigns, while by no means revolutionary on their own merits, it could be said stood in direct antagonism with the political establishments whether expressed on the left-wing, or on the *actually existing* right-wing. Regardless of their *political homelessness* as it relates to the left-right

political spectrum, the campaigns and their bases were swiftly branded with the right-wing label and as such were presented as part and parcel of the dangerous rise of the *far right*.

It is at this point where we must begin to seriously question the very *terminology* of the left-right political spectrum as it applies to the *real* world, moreover regarding the struggle for a socially transformative politics moving forward. What is striking about the right-wing label, is how it primarily exists in the *mind* of its opponents. In fact, the very spectacle of the rise of the far right phenomenon and its deployment of the right-wing label is strikingly similar to *Policing the Crisis*'s portrayal of a specter which had been haunting British politics throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s:

»The political polarisation which it precipitated fractured society into two camps: authority and its 'enemies'. This spectacle mesmerised the right, the centre and the apolitical, precisely because it refused to assume the recognised forms of classical class conflict and the politics associated with it.« (1978: 247)

Rather than recognize the class struggle and all that it entails, the political right-wing in Britain opted to believe in a broad 'left-wing' conspiracy, what we might retroactively term *the rise of the far left phenomenon*. As Hall et al. explained, rather than a bona fide 'left-wing threat,' this paranoid worldview overwhelming took root in the *minds* of its opponents rather than in the *actually existing* landscape of British politics:

»From *within*, the variegations appeared infinite – from life-style politics, rock music and psychedelia, to Trotskyism, libertarianism, and community politics of no known affiliation: a seemingly bewildering and diverse scenario of intense activism, lacking cohesion, theoretical clarity or tactical perspective. From *without*, however, it presented the spectacle of a hydra-headed conspiracy against a *whole way of life*, its organisational looseness, spontaneous, free-wheeling character precisely constituting its threat to a stable and orderly civil life – the return of King Mob. A sector of that largely invisible creature, the English intelligentsia, had become loosed from its proper moorings, detached itself from its traditional mode of cultural insertion, and hovered, in a pre-revolutionary ferment, suspended in its own milieu. The populist guardians awaited something further: its precipitation as an overtly political force.« (249)

Rather than illuminating contemporary politics, the left-right political spectrum, the right-wing label, and the rise of the far right phenomenon each function to corrode any attempt to better understand the material dynamics of the class war currently underway. As such, we must also recognize that in recent history, it has been the political left-wing that have acted as the foremost generators of the ideological smokescreen that has accompanied the contemporary formation of the ruling class and its domestication of the War on Terror. In the wake of what it has popularized as the rise of the far right, as the

political left-wing continues to lock arms with the economic, political and cultural establishment, and so actively and enthusiastically engage in the reactionary politics of the ruling class by dividing and disciplining the *politicized* segments of the working class, let us reflect on the words of David Harvey: »if it looks like class struggle and acts like class war then we have to name it unashamedly for what it is« (2005: 201). Going forward, let us recognize this development not in terms of the left-right political spectrum, nor as a vaunting rise of the far and its impending threat of right-wing extremism, but rather, let us approach it in terms of the ongoing and unresolved class struggle between the exploited classes who *produce* our world in the interest of humanity and the exploiting class who *dictate* how that world is shaped in the interest of capital.

» Hegel remarks somewhere that all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce. [...] Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionizing themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honored disguise and borrowed language.

— Karl Marx in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852: 5)



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The Rise of the Far Right and the Domestication of the War on Terror

Today in the United States, the notion that ‘the rise of the far right’ poses the greatest threat to democratic values, and by extension, to the nation itself, has slowly entered into *common sense*. The antecedent of this development is the object of our study. Explored through the prism of what we refer to as *the domestication of the War on Terror*, this publication adopts and updates the theoretical approach first forwarded in *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, the Law and Order* (Hall et al. 1978). Drawing on this seminal work, a sequence of three disparate media events are explored as they unfold in the United States in mid-2015: the rise of the Trump campaign; the release of an op-ed in *The New York Times* warning of a rise in right-wing extremism; and a mass shooting at a historic African American church in Charleston, South Carolina. By the end of 2015, as these disparate events converge into what we call the public face of *the rise of the far right phenomenon*, we subsequently turn our attention to its origins in policing and the law in the wake of the global War on Terror and the Great Recession. It is only from there, that we turn our attention to the political class struggle as expressed in the rise of ‘populism’ on the one hand, and the domestication of the War on Terror on the other, and in doing so, attempt to situate the role of the rise of the far right phenomenon within it.