

Trump's Populism Is Not Mob Rule

The country, bloody, bowed, is yet lumbering determinedly forward, toward the last year of the Obama economic, social, and geopolitical miracle. All polls, from right to left, show the administration's disapproval rating 10 to 20 points ahead of its approval rating; all show 65 to 80 percent of the people think the country is heading, generally, in the wrong direction. And to swaddle the tableau in perfect bipartisanship, the approval rating of the Republican-controlled Congress peaks, as it did when control was divided and when it was in the hands of the Democrats, at 12 to 15 percent, just one of seven or eight adult citizens. I first started following American politics as a Canadian aged eleven or twelve years. We had in Canada all the American television networks and, as I was on the outskirts of the city where I lived, with few neighbors my own age, I watched a lot of television. In the impressionable manner of the young, and especially as television was a very new and enticing medium, I became something of an authority on current American political events, and have maintained that interest, with some fluctuations, these 60 years. I came home early from school to watch some of the Joseph R. McCarthy hearings on television, and remember my (40 years) subsequent friend David Brinkley giving the daily count on aircraft losses in the Korean War.

At that time, the U.S. government was dominated by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Vice President Richard Nixon, Senate majority leader Lyndon B. Johnson, and House speaker Sam Rayburn. The elder statesmen of the parties were Presidents Harry S. Truman and Herbert Hoover and Eleanor Roosevelt, and the unofficial opposition leader was former presidential candidate Adlai E. Stevenson. All were widely respected; they were by me then, and they are still. Partisanship ended at the

water's edge; there was no opposition statement after the president addressed the nation, as he never utilized such occasions for partisan purposes. Hollywood movies dominated the world and Cary Grant, Jimmy Stewart, Katharine and Audrey Hepburn, Grace Kelly, Marilyn Monroe, Bette Davis, Ronald Reagan, Gary Cooper, Henry Fonda, Gregory Peck, Elvis Presley, Frank Sinatra, and all the others were professionally patriotic Americans, as were Samuel Goldwyn, Louis B. Mayer, Cecil B. DeMille, Darryl Zanuck, Walt Disney, and other legendary directors. So were the television and radio bosses, William Paley, David Sarnoff, and others.

There were no sick myth-makers like Oliver Stone, to claim that Lyndon Johnson murdered John F. Kennedy or that Richard Nixon was a pawn of corrupt oil interests. Howard Zinn's pedestrian Marxist counter-history of America had not been heard of; Noam Chomsky's transportation of his talents as a linguistic scholar to semi-anarchist contrarianism (presaging the antics of many later movie stars and other instant political experts who had achieved celebrity in other fields, from Benjamin Spock to Muhammad Ali) had not begun. America's greatest sports hero was Ted Williams, whose proudest moment was being awarded the Navy Cross as a U.S. Marine combat pilot (and whose saddest moment as a citizen, he told me 40 years later, was "what we as a country did to Dick Nixon"). The myth-making of Grant Wood's *American Gothic* and of Norman Rockwell's God-fearing decent America were prevalent, but they were not such myths as they now seem to many. Kate Smith sang Irving Berlin's "God Bless America" at many public events, always with the prelude: "As the storm clouds gather across the sea, let us pledge allegiance to the land that is free."

Given the real state of race relations, the prevalence of political "bossism," the long march on which the United Auto Workers and General Motors Corporation and the rest of the industry had begun, toward grossly overpriced, poorly designed, shabbily crafted automobiles, and the paroxysms of

amoral avarice which Wall Street and Madison Avenue were just, twitchingly, starting to seek, there was plenty of cause for concern. If the predilection of American academia to succumb to national self-hate – the prenatal treason of the intellectuals, the cowardice of the university administrations (the Grayson Kirks and Nathan Puseys and Clark Kerrs, at Columbia, Harvard, and California) – had been known, the serenity of the “Great Generation” would have been seriously perturbed. Of course, it was a great generation only because Franklin D. Roosevelt had salvaged it from unemployment, when there was no direct relief to the 30 percent of the work force that was unemployed. He gradually facilitated their integration into the work force while maintaining them in his colossal workfare and conservation programs that serve the country yet as infrastructure (the Triborough Bridge, Lincoln Tunnel, Inland Waterway, Tennessee Valley Authority, Chicago waterfront, etc.). Then they were subsumed into defense-production industries and the armed forces in response to the trans-oceanic war crisis; mobilized in the most just war in history since the Civil War; conducted to victory under Marshall, Eisenhower, MacArthur, and Nimitz; and then launched, with all their formative and motivational strength and comradeship, into the middle class, through the G.I. Bill of Rights. They were good solid Americans, who became great because great leaders led them to great victories in great causes and desperate times and equipped them to be the greatest mass of citizenry any nation ever had.

Now, in the December of Obamaism, a light that has failed, America’s young adults, if not quite the “pride of our nation” Roosevelt proclaimed their counterparts to be on D-Day (1944), remain motivated and alert, if granted the rewards of unambiguous leadership. This is not a cry for fascistic authoritarianism, only the well-precedented American respect for unambiguous leadership toward democratically approved and creditable objectives. What is now needed, and what the

country prayerfully (much of it, despite the oppressive atheism of the governing ethos) hopes for, is a realistic definition of national-security interests abroad and provision of the means to defend them effectively, and an attack on the failures of the justice, education, health, and social-services systems at home, with originality and not in pursuit merely of fractional voting advantages in wedge issues.

It would be premature to select and exalt a candidate ten months before the election. But it is reasonable to look at what is arising from an evident, and entirely respectable, public revulsion at decades of gross and intellectually and often financially corrupt mismanagement of the federal government by administrations and Congresses of both parties. This week, there was a warning against being “consumed by the mob” – written by an editorial-page columnist for the *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review* (which was, in the piping days of the late and fondly remembered Richard Mellon Scaife, a go-to source for pretty aggravated complaint about the shortcomings of modern American witless liberal government) and republished in the very respectable RealClearPolitics. Salena Zito wrote: “Every political movement has a tipping point. It goes too far, or loses its original purpose – or it becomes so self-enamored, under the influence of anger and mob rule, that ugliness shades all the good of its original intent.” (There is no such arbitrary historical rule, but that is not really the point.) “Such is true of the populism that peaked this summer in America. . . . With Donald Trump’s emergence, and with a chorus of talk-radio hosts suddenly behind him, the mob-rule crowd deems everyone who was elected to office (with the exception of Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas), to be a Republican-in-name-only or part of a dark establishment cult intent on crushing the souls of average white voters.” Ms. Zito claims that this is “pure populism, and it is radically contaminating conservatism’s values”: “What we see today is a very angry populism run amok. It is a pitchforks-and-torches political ideology that insists that anyone that has been involved in or

elected to public office is just plain bad, part of the problem. . . . The problem of populism is that those holding the pitchforks rarely look in the mirror and those seeking office are running in a vacuum that needs leadership, not victors."

It is very late for this sort of call to arms to support the elected class. They have failed terribly; they took the mighty moral and material and political strength of America and dissipated it for decades, and now the United States enjoys minimal respect in the world and, on its recent performance, does not deserve much. Those of us who know, in Mr. Churchill's phrase, "what free men can do," and what a mighty force for carefully selected and singlemindedly pursued good America has been and can be still, understand Ms. Zito's reservations. But Donald Trump, her target, is right that the elected officials have failed; the system has failed. For decades it would not deal with illegal immigration, abortion, wealth disparity, campaign financing, a contemporary definition of the national interest, entitlement reform, the shredding of the Bill of Rights in the fascistic criminal-justice system, or the requirements of fiscal responsibility. Now the country faces a shambles less deadly and threatening than those that greeted the incoming presidents Abraham Lincoln, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Richard Nixon, but more daunting than those that greeted any other inductee to that great office, except, perhaps, George Washington. It is a challenge to put Donald Trump in the category of those presidents just named, but he is the only serious candidate who is describing the crisis in its rightful terms, even if he has exaggerated on some points and been less precise on others than the country would wish and has a right to expect. These shortcomings can be remedied, and the elected political class has earned a collective suspicion, reversible in many cases, of incompetence or even turpitude; Ms. Zito is a bit late filing her defense and claiming that the skeptics are all anarchists.

It is an outrage to claim that Donald Trump's support constitutes mob rule. Trump has not incited violence or any dilution or disrespect for democratic principles, and mob rule has never been described by a serious writer before as being the espousal of uncorrupted capitalism. As we head into Iowa, this election is already a contest between Hillary Clinton – a tired but semi-plausible resurrection of Clintonism, minus its most egregious tawdriness, after the interments of George W.'s mindless adventurism and Obama's feckless, profligate, appeasement –and the orthodox Republicans. The most likely winner among these is probably Marco Rubio, who is not unencumbered by limitations but gives flag-waving a provisional respectability, or Ted Cruz, a heady but not necessarily felicitous combination of ferocity and intelligence, or Trump.

About Trump, we don't really know. He could be a charlatan – though he is certainly more serious and estimable than Ross Perot, who put the Clintons in over the Bushes in the first place by splitting the Republicans – or he could be a candidate for Mount Rushmore. But he is not mob rule and RealClearPolitics and the *Pittsburgh Register-Tribune* have no moral or factual right to claim that he is. He may be the last person that stands between this horribly misgoverned country and mob rule, though even I don't think the cumulative inanities of the Clintons, George W., and Obama have reduced the United States to the point where mob rule is a legitimate consideration. The political atmosphere is riven by the shrieking of epithets, but surely RCP and even the *Tribune-Review* can maintain some altitude still, and not plunge into the Yeatsian masses "full of passionate intensity." All anyone really wants is good government, which the U.S. has often enjoyed before in its history, and well within memory.

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