

An Intellectual History of Trumpism: Populism, Paleoconservatism, and the Ideas Behind a Republican Insurgency

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1.

Ever since he began his longshot campaign for president, Donald Trump has been portrayed as a clown, a showman, an opportunist, a faux conservative, a political naif, and an egomaniac bent on nothing but power and glory—but rarely as a man with an intelligible ideology.¹⁾ That is understandable and to a large degree justified. Trump has flip-flopped so often on so many different topics, and continues to contradict himself so frequently, that it is hard to discern any philosophical consistency in his positions. He rarely shows signs of having thought deeply about issues or having engaged with fundamental questions. And his behavior is so clearly driven by ego that it would seem peculiar to suggest that he holds dear any set of principles about the proper ends of government, or America's role in the world, or any other basic political issues.

Nonetheless, underneath the noise and inconsistencies, I believe that many of his signature promises and policies do add up to a set of ideas, and one that has deep roots in American history. These ideas include elements that are populist, nationalist, and authoritarian, and they represent a seismic challenge both to the liberalism of the Democrats and the variety of conservatism that still dominates the Republican Party. After more than two years of dwelling on Trump the personality, it is worth turning our attention to Trumpism and the ideas—dare we say the ideology—that the American president represents.

That ideology starts with two different but sometimes overlapping intellectual streams: *populism* and *paleoconservatism*. Populism is not so much a fixed ideology but rather a language, sensibility, or logic. Populism views political struggles invariably as contests between a virtuous, dispossessed “people” and a self-serving elite, which illegitimately holds power and operates (often conspiratorially) on its own behalf. The roots of populism in the United States generally are traced to the Southern and Western farmers and miners of the

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¹⁾ “The Trump I got to know had no deep ideological beliefs, nor any passionate feeling about anything but his immediate self-interest,” wrote Tony Schwartz, the ghostwriters of Trump's first book, *The Art of the Deal*. Schwartz's sentiments were widely shared across the political spectrum. Tony Schwartz, “I wrote ‘The Art of the Deal’ with Trump: His Self-Sabotage Is Rooted in His Past,” *Washington Post*, May 16, 2017.

People’s Party of the 1890s, although historians also see antecedents in other democratic upsurges such as the Jacksonian movement of the 1820s and 1830s. Though early populist movements, which focused on economic exploitation, tended to be of the left, in the course of the 20th century populism mostly migrated to the right, taking aim less at banks and corporations than at big government and cultural mandarins. Its lineage runs from Charles Coughlin, the 1930s radio broadcaster, through the Red-baiting Wisconsin senator Joseph McCarthy and the segregationist Alabama governor George Wallace. In some manifestations, such as the politics of television commentator, White House aide and presidential candidate Pat Buchanan, populism merged with *paleoconservatism*.²⁾

The word *paleoconservatism* is an example of what linguists call a back-formation—a word like “snail mail,” invented after the invention of email to name old-fashioned posted letters; or “landline,” coined after the rise of cell phones to identify non-mobile lines. Paleoconservatism, similarly, arose to label that variety of conservatism that predated and remained antagonistic to *neoconservatism*, itself a distinctive set of ideas that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s among former leftists and liberals and helped to modernize the Republican Party. Paleoconservatism largely fell from favor in the 1990s and early 2000s, for reasons discussed below.³⁾

In recent years, however, this left-for-dead ideology has made an unlikely comeback, albeit in altered form. One catalyst for its resurrection was the dramatic revolution in the news and communications media. The emergence of the internet as a tool of communication has allowed people who hold fringe ideas to find one another online and organize into movements. It has also helped them bypass the gatekeepers of mainstream media outlets who had previously deemed their ideas too far beyond the pale to merit publication or broadcasting. Social media in particular have been a boon to paleoconservative ideas, many of which have been adopted by today’s so-called “alt-right.”⁴⁾

But changes in the media are not solely, or even mainly, responsible for the return of paleocon ideas. The ideas wouldn’t have caught on if they didn’t have some intrinsic appeal to certain constituencies. Above all, three events conspired to bring paleoconservatism back: the Iraq War, the financial crisis of 2008, and the election of Barack Obama—the last of which symbolized the demographic changes in a country that was no longer overwhelmingly white

²⁾ On the history of American populism, see Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

³⁾ The origins of the term paleoconservatism are obscure but it seems to have caught on in the late 1980s and early 1990s when their ideology was being marginalized within the larger conservative movement and the neoconservatives were moving to the center.

⁴⁾ On the alt-right see Allum Bokhari & Milo Yiannopoulos, “An Establishment Conservative’s Guide to the Alt-Right,” *Breitbart.com*, March 29, 2016; Dylan Matthews, “The Alt-Right Is More Than Warmed-Over White Supremacy,” *Vox.com*, August 25, 2016. The term first became widely discussed after Hillary Clinton discussed its ideology and its relationship to Donald Trump in the 2016 campaign. See Alan Rappeport, “Hillary Clinton Denounces the ‘Alt-Right,’ and the Alt-Right Is Thrilled,” *New York Times*, August 26, 2016.

and Christian. In the wake of these events, paleocon ideas—some of which had always had a certain populist cast—came even more to express the grievances of voters who had learned to regard both parties as captive to elite interests and neglectful of ordinary Americans. As a result, a populist paleoconservatism was reconstituted under Trump's candidacy—let's call it Trumpism—pulling together an odd assortment of ideas and policy positions to fashion something that was both old and new:

- On race and immigration, it speaks mainly for older and white constituencies who hold to an older conception of the United States as white and Christian in its character. If widely adopted within the Republican Party, they would carry an already conservative party even further to the right.
- On a few economic issues, such as infrastructure and entitlement spending, Trump has, at least rhetorically, rejected the small-government conservatism that has dominated the Republican Party for decades. If widely adopted, these positions could direct the party not toward the extremes but toward the political center.
- On trade and foreign policy, Trump has broken most starkly with Republican Party orthodoxy. He has generally come out against the international trade agreements that presidents of both parties have supported more or less since Franklin Roosevelt. If widely adopted, these ideas threaten to demolish the internationalism that has held sway within the GOP since Dwight Eisenhower's presidency.

In each of these ways, Trumpism represents a significant break with the conservatism that has pervaded the Republican Party for decades.

2.

In looking for the origins of Trumpism, it is easy to find a great many conservative ideas that have appeared throughout in the American past. There has long been a cult of the self-made man, of the entrepreneurial businessman; a belief in economic self-reliance has been especially pronounced in the Republican Party. Many Americans have also been receptive to a socio-cultural conservatism in America that is hostile toward, or at least wary of, immigration from non-European lands, racial equality, women's rights, and other egalitarian projects. Perhaps the single thread that has united conservatives over many years has been a shared opposition to government interventions in the economy aimed at redistributing wealth. Conservatives have also by and large tended to support business, the military, and traditional moral values.

All of these ideas and ideological strains have had a more-or-less continuous home in the Republican Party. More interesting—and in some ways more important to understanding why Trump defeated sixteen accomplished conservative leaders to win the party's nomination last

year—is a facet of Trumpism that began as a mutation of the early 20th century progressivism.

Progressivism is the name we give to the bipartisan reform movement in the century's first decades that called for an activist president and a strong federal government to address urgent new social and economic problems brought on by the industrial revolution. Led first by Republican Theodore Roosevelt and then by Democrat Woodrow Wilson, progressivism sought to tame corporate power, protect workers, assimilate immigrants, provide new social services, expand democracy and, on the global stage, bring order to a fractious world. Both the idea of a strong federal government and the specific goals that progressives cherished would also undergird Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal and, in time, postwar liberalism more generally.⁵⁾

But as the nation journeyed from progressivism to New Deal liberalism, not everyone came along for the ride. After World War I, many Midwestern and Western progressives of a populist bent swung hard to the right. In some cases these politicians retained their economic egalitarianism, but they also took up reactionary stands on cultural and foreign-policy issues. "Somewhere along the way," as Richard Hofstadter wrote in his classic work *The Age of Reform*, "a large part of the Progressive-Populist tradition has turned sour, become illiberal and ill-tempered."⁶⁾

The reasons for this swing are complicated, but they can be summarized as a form of backlash. The 1920s, though remembered as a raucous time of cultural innovation and modernization, also witnessed profound social change. Fueled by decades of immigration, as well as migration from the farms to the cities, America's urban population overtook its rural population in size. "The New Woman" and the "New Negro" demanded equality in gender and race. Secular ideas about religion and morality and lifestyle created a "revolution in manners and morals," as Frederick Lewis Allen put it, that was as significant as that of the 1960s.⁷⁾

Conservative forces, especially in the rural Heartland, regarded the changing complexion of America with suspicion. They considered the looser morality of the cosmopolitan cities a threat to their old-fashioned Protestantism. Reactionary movements arose. The Ku Klux Klan went mainstream and marched through Washington D.C. Fundamentalist Christians banned the teaching of Darwin. Prohibition became the law of the land.⁸⁾

Midwestern and Western progressives, previously committed to liberal goals, could now often be found fighting the liberal tides. They championed, for example, the 1924 Immigration Act, which tightened the gates at America's borders. Economic conservatives who favored the Republican Party's pro-business policies joined with cultural conservatives to make the GOP

⁵⁾ On progressivism, see Arthur S. Link and Richard L. McCormick, *Progressivism* (Arlington Heights, VA: Harlan Davidson, 1983).

⁶⁾ Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 20.

⁷⁾ Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2010 [1931]).

⁸⁾ A good discussion of the cultural conservatism of the period can be found in William Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914–1932* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

the majority party of the 1920s, through the elections of Warren Harding, Calvin Coolidge and Herbert Hoover.

In foreign policy, too, nationalistic populism gripped many onetime progressives. After World War I, Western and Midwestern progressive senators such as William Borah, Hiram Johnson and Robert La Follette, who were less attuned than Eastern progressives to the importance of remaining involved in Europe's affairs, had killed Woodrow Wilson's plan for the United States to lead a League of Nations, rooting their opposition in the fear of a loss of American sovereignty. Some progressive intellectuals, such as the historian Charles Beard and the sociologist Harry Elmer Barnes, promoted conspiracy theories that blamed America's involvement in the First World War on bankers or the arms industry. Barnes eventually became one of the earliest and most influential Holocaust deniers.⁹⁾ In 1934, Senator Gerald Nye, another Midwestern progressive, chaired a committee that, by investigating these dubious claims, fanned popular fears.¹⁰⁾

Former progressives also fought against easing the neutrality laws that kept Franklin Roosevelt from doing more to fight fascism. Historians today tend to avoid the word isolationist, because, as its critics note, many of those who opposed the liberal internationalism of Wilson and FDR didn't want to extract the U.S. altogether from global affairs. Still, in the absence of a pithy alternative phrase, popular habit still relies on this useful shorthand term—and there were antiwar leaders who believed America could and should steer clear of Europe's strife, and some of them supported Hitler and espoused anti-Semitism. Since the original Populists of the late 19th century, those movements have been suspicious of banks, internationalism, and concentrated power and have frequently scapegoated Jews as well.

This populist right was a powerful force in the 1920s and 1930s. But the success of the New Deal and the Allied victory in World War II together dealt the movement a severe blow. The open anti-Semitism that had flourished in the Depression, stoked by demagogues like the radio priest Charles Coughlin—an exemplar of this philosophy—was thoroughly discredited. Instead, a newly pervasive liberal tolerance took hold in the post-World War II era, giving way to a common view of the United States as home to “Protestant, Catholic, Jew” (and later to people of all religions).¹¹⁾ Civil rights for black Americans moved to the center of the political agenda. The election in 1952 of America's first Republican president in a quarter-century, Dwight Eisenhower, confirmed the rout of the populist right. Eisenhower vowed to beat back isolationism in his own party and espoused a “modern Republicanism” that acquiesced in

⁹⁾ On Beard, see Lewis Mumford, *Values for Survival* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1946), 39fn. On Barnes, see Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (New York: Free Press, 1993), 67–83.

¹⁰⁾ Wayne S. Cole, *Senator Gerald P. Nye and American Foreign Relations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962).

¹¹⁾ The phrase comes from Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955).

the permanence of the New Deal order, including liberal welfare-state programs like Social Security.

Amid this liberal environment, activists and intellectuals on the right felt marginalized. They sought to organize to reclaim the GOP from moderates like Eisenhower and gain a wider hearing for what they deemed truly conservative ideas. William F. Buckley's magazine *National Review* emerged in the 1950s as the intellectual organ for what would soon be called the New Right. Some historians began to call the older populist-nationalist conservatism the "Old Right"—a rough synonym for paleoconservatism.¹²⁾

The conservative movement of the 1950s sought to rebuild the 1920s alliance between religious traditionalists, who bemoaned the erosion of old values by the acids of modernity, and free-marketeers, who attacked high taxes, government spending and regulation as the weapons of a bureaucratic leviathan. Cementing the alliance now, too, was a militant Cold War anti-Communism. Communism was, after all, was both anti-market and anti-God. (William Buckley himself, in the words of George Nash, the foremost intellectual historian of postwar conservatism, "was at once a traditional Christian, a defender of free-market economics, and a fervent anti-Communist.") Anti-Communism also won over some old isolationists to the new ideology, as they considered the Soviet Union a grave enough threat to world freedom to suspend their qualms about getting involved in foreign conflicts or agreements.¹³⁾

Within this new conservative coalition, paleoconservative voices remained. But Buckley and other political and opinion leaders policed the boundaries of their budding movement. There was always a tension between populist fervor and the desire to court establishment respectability. The former was necessary to fuel the conservative movement's drive for power, but the attainment of political and cultural power inevitably had a moderating effect, on not only Buckley but on all politicians, journalists, activists, and intellectuals. *National Review* was without question a staunchly right-wing magazine; it assailed Eisenhower and the era's non-doctrinaire Republican leadership and continued to wage war on Republican moderates for decades to come. But even in the 1950s, *National Review* made a bid for respectability by pointedly contrasting itself with far-right rival publications such as *The American Mercury* and *The Freeman*, which espoused an unreconstructed conservatism that could be openly anti-Semitic and racist. Buckley also famously excommunicated from his movement extremists like the leaders of the John Birch Society, a radical populist-nationalist group of the late 1950s and early '60s that imagined Communist conspiracies everywhere and even insisted that Eisenhower was one. Buckley and other conservative intellectuals also warred with libertarians like Ayn Rand, whose atheistic "objectivism" had no place in his campaign against "secular humanism." After the civil rights revolution, finally, conservatives began to reject explicit

¹²⁾ Leo P. Ribuffo, *The Old Christian Right: The Protestant Far Right from the Great Depression to the Cold War* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983).

¹³⁾ George H. Nash, "The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America: Then and Now," *National Review*, April 26, 2016.

racism, too. They continued to oppose most civil-rights legislation but now they accepted or at least paid lip service to the underlying liberal premise of civil rights for all.¹⁴⁾

3.

The new conservative coalition came to power with Richard Nixon's election to the White House in 1968. True-blue conservatives always eyed the opportunistic Nixon warily, recognizing that he was not an ideologue from their camp the way that Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan were. But Nixon preached a divisive cultural populism that was a world apart from Ike's modern Republicanism. On drugs, crime, religion, abortion, sex, child-rearing, gay rights, busing, affirmative action, patriotism and dozens of other "wedge issues," Nixon and the two generations of Republican politicians who followed his lead assailed the liberal "cultural elite"—Hollywood, academia, the media, the courts—for corroding traditional American values. Even on foreign policy, Republicans framed conflicts in terms of a cultural contrast with their liberal rivals: their willingness to stand up to the Soviet Union reflected patriotism and strength, while the Democrats' desire to avoid conflict bespoke a weakness and even an un-American set of values. All of these arguments helped the Republicans move from being the minority party in the 1960s to becoming the dominant party in the 1980s. With Ronald Reagan's election to the White House in 1980, conservatives even found a populist key for expressing their anti-government ideology. Reagan framed his anti-tax, anti-government message as a defense of the ordinary taxpayer who was being taken advantage of and then ignored by Washington.

But there is an important distinction to make here among styles of populism. In the late-20th century debates over social and cultural issues, conservative politicians adopted what were commonly called populist stands. But in other realms they rejected older, paleocon ideas. On foreign policy, for example, the Republicans' new muscular posture constituted a wholesale repudiation of the Old Right's isolationism. The conservative movement's regnant free-market philosophy, similarly, consigned protectionist views to the sidelines in debates about trade. Criticisms of finance and business were rendered almost unheard of within their ranks. On these issues, conservatives may have used populist stylings, but they did not go after entrenched corporate or financial power.

Although paleoconservative voices were to a large extent sidelined, they occasionally roared. Pat Buchanan—the most prominent apostle of Old Right ideas in the 1980s and 1990s—held influential positions in the Nixon and Reagan administrations, bestrode the TV talk shows as a ubiquitous pundit, and ran for president in 1992 on an "America First" slogan

¹⁴⁾ John B. Judis, *William F. Buckley: Patron Saint of the Conservatives* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988).

that echoed the 1940s isolationists (and previewed Trump).¹⁵⁾ Phyllis Schlafly, best known for her role in defeating the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1970s, also opposed the Vietnam War, Bill Clinton's humanitarian intervention in Bosnia, and most international agreements since.¹⁶⁾ Other defiantly paleocon writers included Joseph Sobran, a Holocaust denier, and Taki Theodoracopulos, whose anti-Semitic and racist views were presented under the thinnest of veneers. Both writers were largely ignored or treated as crackpots by policymakers and the mainstream media yet commanded small but hardy followings on the hard right.

In retrospect, the first stirrings of a paleoconservatism comeback can be seen in the 1990s. With the fall of the Soviet Union, anti-Communism receded as a unifying principle, and paleoconservatives revived the case for isolationism. When Democrats held the White House, they rallied Republicans in Congress to oppose interventions in Bosnia, Kosovo and elsewhere. Meanwhile, the exploding number of undocumented immigrants made border control a leading paleoconservative cause, as it had been in the 1920s. The international trade pacts backed by both parties, meanwhile, fueled a new zeal for protectionism.

But paleoconservatism struggled to gain adherents, because of both the prosperity of the Clinton years and the nation's growing toleration on racial and social issues. Paleoconservatism had always been associated with the neo-Confederate, white supremacist and ideologically anti-Semitic causes that respectable conservative leaders now took pains to shun. In 1992 Buchanan fared surprisingly well in the 1992 New Hampshire primary in a challenge to the sitting president, George Bush, Sr. But when he gave a fiery speech at the 1992 Republican convention—delivered in prime time, as a reward for his success—he described a war for the soul of America in starkly racial and ethnic terms. The speech backfired, drawing uniformly negative notices, and may have hurt Bush in his fall defeat at the hands of Bill Clinton.

In the 1990s and 2000s, the appearance of overt bigotry in magazines like *National Review* began to provoke dissent among conservatives who had grown up in the more tolerant post-civil rights movement era. This came at a time when the musty odor surrounding *National Review* was causing it to lose luster and readers on the right. Neoconservatives such as William Kristol and John Podhoretz, seeing an opening, founded the *Weekly Standard*, which seemed fresher, more dynamic, and more brainy, and for a while surpassed *National Review* as the preeminent conservative magazine.¹⁷⁾ It had been four decades since Buckley burst on the scene, and now most of the conservative movement's intellectual firepower was to be found among the neocons. Seeking to stave off irrelevance, Buckley and his successors as editor of *National Review* felt compelled to banish bigots and cranks from their pages. In late 1991, Buckley took the brave step of addressing Buchanan's anti-Semitism in the course of an entire

¹⁵⁾ Timothy Stanley, *The Crusader: The Life and Tumultuous Times of Pat Buchanan* (New York: Thomas Dunne, 2012).

¹⁶⁾ Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

¹⁷⁾ Elizabeth Kolbert, "Debut for a Conservative Weekly," *New York Times*, September 11, 1995.

issue of *National Review*. In 1993, he fired Joseph Sobran for similar writings.¹⁸⁾ And while mainstream conservatives still supported *policies* that in practice might disadvantage racial, religious or ethnic minorities, they could no longer countenance overt expressions of prejudice and bigotry. After Buckley retired, a younger generation of editors was even less willing to indulge such sentiments. In 2001, the magazine's young new editor, Rich Lowry, dropped Ann Coulter as a contributor after she wrote, just after 9/11, "We should invade their countries, kill their leaders and convert them to Christianity."¹⁹⁾ In 2012, Lowry fired another paleocon, John Derbyshire, for racist writings that appeared in Theodoracopulos's webzine, *Taki's Magazine*—which, not coincidentally, is now one of the favorite outlets of the alt-right.²⁰⁾ In these same years Buchanan, who had for decades been one of the most popular conservative pundits on TV and in print, fell into disrepute after publishing a book in 2008 arguing that going to war against Hitler was a mistake. Eventually, even the television shows mostly dropped him.²¹⁾

4.

Just when the Old Right seemed on the verge of extinction, however, the world changed. First, George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq, which was a classic expression of the Republican Party's aggressive, muscular foreign policy, went disastrously wrong. The war was not, as many have alleged or assumed, a neoconservative project; its key decision-makers were Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, none of whom was known as a neocon. Rather, the war was a conservative project, supported by not just neocons but conservatives of almost every stripe, with the notable exception of the few remaining paleocons like Buchanan and Sobran. The war's misfire undermined support among the Republican rank and file for the hawkish foreign policy that had been GOP orthodoxy since Reagan.

Second, the 2008 financial crash was a result of Republican deregulation of finance, and it made a number of Republican voters cast a cold eye on Wall Street. The recovery that followed was unusually sluggish, and in hard times, voters, looking for scapegoats, blamed the free trade pacts that market conservatives as well as growth liberals promoted. The refusal in late 2008 of the increasingly paleocon Republican caucus of the House of Representatives to pass Bush's Troubled Asset Relief Program was, in retrospect, a harbinger of the deep fissures that erupted in the party in 2016.²²⁾

¹⁸⁾ William F. Buckley, *In Search of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Continuum, 1992).

¹⁹⁾ Jonah Goldberg, "L'Affaire Coulter," *National Review*, October 2, 2001.

²⁰⁾ Dylan Byers, "National Review Fires John Derbyshire," *Politico*, April 7, 2012.

²¹⁾ Patrick J. Buchanan, *Churchill, Hitler, and "The Unnecessary War": How Britain Lost Its Empire and the West Lost the World* (New York: Crown Books, 2008).

²²⁾ On the prematurely declared death of conservatism, see George Packer, "The Fall of Conservatism," *The New Yorker*, May 26, 2008; Sam Tanenhaus, *The Death of Conservatism* (New York: Random House, 2009).

Third, the prospect—much touted in the press, though based on dubious social science—that whites would soon constitute a minority in an increasingly multiracial, polyglot society inspired a new racial consciousness among whites.²³⁾ So, too, did the election of America’s first black president, who was swiftly branded as un-American by the populist right. The effort to question Barack Obama’s legitimacy by suggesting he wasn’t really born in the United States, or to insist he was of the Muslim and not Christian religion, was either explicitly or implicitly connected to his status as an African-American. It is not a coincidence that Donald Trump entered the political arena by loudly questioning the authenticity of Obama’s Americanness.²⁴⁾

For much of the Republican base these multiple shocks—the war, the crash, the Obama presidency—discredited the conservative political and intellectual leadership. Voters concluded that their leaders had failed to deliver on promises to contain immigration, produce prosperity and make America safer. But, strikingly, the intellectual spokesmen for these ideas were increasingly unwelcome even in a thoroughly right-wing magazine like *National Review*—which devoted a whole issue during the primaries to denouncing Trump as a sham conservative. Instead, paleocons in these years found new vehicles for their nationalist-populist ideas: *The American Conservative*, founded in 2002 by Buchanan, Theodoracopulos and Scott McConnell, an isolationist prone to conspiracy theories; Breitbart, which evolved from a right-wing curation site into an ideological organ; and VDARE, a webzine founded by the anti-immigration advocate (and immigrant) Peter Brimelow. The resulting cluster of voices, which includes but isn’t limited to the “Alt-Right,” represented a new generation of paleocon thought that stressed its differences with the establishment right on trade, foreign policy, immigration and race.

Until Donald Trump’s presidential campaign, these profound divisions on the right drew little analysis. Even in the election year coverage, Trump’s insurgency was mostly portrayed as the challenge of an outsider to the establishment—an accurate but incomplete picture. The hidden history of Trumpism suggests that the new president may be not simply an opportunistic showman but the leader of an at least semi-coherent ideology—a new iteration of the populist and nationalist paleoconservatism that has long lurked in the shadows of American politics. Now, for the first time since the isolationist 1930s, this ideology commands real influence, and for the first time in our history, it enjoys favor from a sitting American president. The prospects are more ominous.

²³⁾ Richard Alba, “The Likely Persistence of a White Majority,” *The American Prospect*, January 11, 2016.

²⁴⁾ Nicholas Confessore, “For Whites Sensing Decline, Donald Trump Unleashes Words of Resistance,” *New York Times*, July 13, 2016.