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**A DIVIDED MEDIA: FILTERED RHETORIC
AND THE RISE OF DONALD TRUMP**

by

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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
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The Ancient Greek rhetorician Isocrates, believed that strong words made strong leaders and strong leaders made strong states.¹ This belief, shared by Plato, made their country into “a culture of language,” for “true words, words in conformity with law and justice, are images of a good and trustworthy soul.”² Therein lies the basis of our culture. America is built upon rhetoric; the words issued by our Founders, by our politicians, and even by our citizens shaping our country or better or worse. It is by the act of speech that a person shows themselves as a political being, and so “a leader exists because he seizes verbal territory.”³

Most of the time, however, a politician’s words are not directly transmitted from their mouth to their audience; instead, the media filters the information. What reaches the public is generally a condensed form, summarizing what was said and pulling out only a few direct quotes. Although politicians speak at length, what the people receive are short articles offering an overarching view of what was said, without many details, or an in depth look at one point, which excludes the rest. If the media is doing its job, this reporting fact checks what the politician said and puts it in context, so that citizens know what they are doing when they reach the voting booth.

That would be the case if this was the world of *The Newsroom*, however we live in reality and in reality the media has its own biases. When the media covers a story, what perspective the reader gets is influenced by the source. Fair and balanced reporting is a rare thing to find, as all authors and their employers have their own points of view, and although they may strive for a neutral point of view, there will still be biases that occur in their reporting. In the modern age, when people can choose the news they like by only getting their news from those sources they

¹ Quiring, “Hollywood’s White House,” 243.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 234.

trust. As such, people on the right and left of the political spectrum get their much of their information from different sources; in 2014, the Pew Research center produced a study showing beyond local news, those with liberal views tended toward getting their news from places like CNN and NPR (although no news source was dominant), while conservatives overwhelmingly turned to Fox News.⁴ Fox and Breitbart are trusted by conservatives more than they are distrusted, while liberals distrust them more than they trust them.⁵ The Huffington Post fares the opposite; it is trusted by liberals but not conservatives.⁶ These differences in reception and coverage displayed themselves widely throughout the 2016 election season.

On the sixteenth of June, 2015, at Trump Tower in New York City, the indeterminately rich man Donald J. Trump came down the elevator and announced his bid to become the Republican nominee for President of the United States.⁷ He proceeded to give a speech in which, among other things that were unprecedented for coming out of the mouth of a presidential candidate, he called Mexican immigrants rapists and accused them of bringing drugs and crime into the United States.⁸ Almost a year later, on the third of May, 2016, the Indiana Republican presidential primary was held.⁹ Trump slaughtered his two remaining opponents, Senator Ted Cruz and Governor John Kasich and by the next morning, he was the last one standing in a race that had once held seventeen candidates.¹⁰ Two months later, he accepted the GOP nomination for President at their convention in Cleveland, Ohio.¹¹

⁴ Mitchell et al., "Section 1."

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Post, *The Runaway Campaign*; Stein, "It's All But Official."

⁸ Staff, "Here's Donald Trump's Presidential Announcement Speech."

⁹ Burns, "Indiana Primary Takeaways."

¹⁰ New York Times, "Indiana Primary Election Results 2016"; The New York Times, "Who Is Running for President?"

¹¹ Flores, "Donald Trump Offers Dark Vision of America in GOP Convention Speech."

Then came November 8, 2016. Across the country, across the globe, people sat and watched and waited to see Hillary Clinton become the first non-male President of the United States, shattering the glass ceiling into little tiny particles. Instead, a sick feeling grew in the stomachs of thousands of people as states were first proclaimed too close to call, or too early to call—and then finally were settled into the Trump column. As it grew later and later, it became clear. Somehow this man, had been elected President of the United States. Feeling sick, or numb, crying and/or laughing hysterically, Americans who hadn't supported Trump asked, "How could this have happened? How, on the eve of 78th anniversary of Kristallnacht, did America elect a President of the United States who prompted the following editor's note on Huffington Post articles about him?"¹²

Editor's note: Donald Trump regularly incites political violence and is a serial liar, rampant xenophobe, racist, misogynist and birther who has repeatedly pledged to ban all Muslims — 1.6 billion members of an entire religion — from entering the U.S.

How did he become the GOP nominee, and how did he win in the general election?

The answer is complex. Pollsters will spend weeks, if not months prying apart the exit polls to see where and when everything went wrong, analyzing their own models to understand how they failed to properly predict the outcome. Scholars will pick up the baton and write whole books on the subject. However even before Donald Trump won the GOP nomination, some had begun to attempt explanations of the Trump phenomenon, with answers from Trump being the

¹² Stein, "It's All But Official."

apotheosis of a populist year, to it being a backlash response to political correctness and liberal media bias.¹³

Several scholars, even in the days of the primaries, set about explaining Donald Trump's successes. These explanations vary widely. Some focus on how Trump's outsider status helped him attract a discontent populace. Institutional changes are also given some of the blame. Still further are arguments about populism and Trump's rhetoric.

To begin, much of the focus was on how odd of a candidate Donald Trump was. Alan Ware evaluates four aspects of Trump's success, beginning by explaining Trump's background.¹⁴ Donald Trump is a celebrity businessman who has never held elected office, although he did run in 2000 for the Reform Party's nomination, which he lost to Pat Buchanan.¹⁵ To add to Ware's short commentary, Trump's image was formed on his TV show, *The Apprentice*, where he told contestants, "You're fired," building up the idea that he was a strong businessman who spoke what he thought. His participation as a keystone of the birther movement made him a well-known right wing figure. In April 2011, as the country was looking toward the 2012 election, then private citizen Trump said on the *Today* show, "I would like to have him show his birth certificate, and can I be honest with you, I hope he can. Because if he can't, if he can't, if he wasn't born in this country, which is a real possibility ... then he has pulled one of the great cons in the history of politics."¹⁶ Even after the long form of President Obama's birth certificate was released, Trump continued to question its validity, speaking of conspiracy theories until September of 2016, when he finally publicly said, at the end of a campaign rally,

¹³ Oliver and Rahn, "Rise of the Trumpenvolk Populism in the 2016 Election"; Dodo, "My Theory on the Trump's Phenomenon. Why Donald Trump?"

¹⁴ Ware, "Donald Trump's Hijacking of the Republican Party in Historical Perspective."

¹⁵ Clift, "The Last Time Trump Wrecked a Party."

¹⁶ Krieg, "14 of Trump's Most Outrageous 'Birther' Claims -- Half from after 2011."

that "President Barack Obama was born in the United States."¹⁷ Although he is not the first celebrity to become a politician and run for president, most enter at lower levels of government, such as President Ronald Reagan, who was governor of California, and Senator Fred Thompson, who shifted back and forth between the entertainment industry and government.¹⁸

Trump could not have succeeded however, without institutional shifts that allowed him and candidates like him—ones from outside the party who the party elites do not favor—to win the nomination. Ware primarily attributes this to the shift in nomination arrangements towards selecting delegates via primaries, where the behavior of Republican voters constrains elites' abilities to act. The nominee is no longer picked in smoke filled rooms behind closed doors, and the state elites can no longer use their power to block candidates' ambitions. The voters are appealed to directly instead, which makes momentum more important. If a candidate can develop momentum and hold it through the debates and into the first primaries and caucuses, then they are well-positioned for the nomination season. Trump mastered this early on, throwing himself to the front of the pack with "highly unusual, and controversial, behavior."¹⁹ Rather than reinventing himself for voters, Trump continued to play to his already well-known public persona as an outspoken, dramatic, and abrasive businessman, "more insulting, more extreme and inconsistent in some of his policy ideas and more aggressive in how he conducted himself than would normally have been regarded as appropriate for a presidential candidate."²⁰ This message, he describes, plays on a Republican electorate that is broader than it once was and discontent with the state of the government. The institutional shifts cannot explain how Trump

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Stack, "Fred Thompson, Former Senator, Actor and Presidential Candidate, Dies at 73."

¹⁹ Ware, "Donald Trump's Hijacking of the Republican Party in Historical Perspective," 408.

²⁰ Ibid.

was elected, but they do show that it is necessary to look at Trump's message, how it was received, and by whom.

Many authors, including those mentioned here, lay some of the blame at the feet of a people discontent with the status quo in Washington. For thirty years, Ware states, the Republican electorate has received promises that conservative principles will be upheld and conservative policies enacted, to little effect.²¹ J. Eric Oliver and Wendy M. Rahn's detailed rhetorical analysis upholds this. They find that 2016 bears similarities to the mid-1990s—in that we are post-recession, in a time of visible racial tension, and that both party unity and voters' feelings that government is unresponsive are high—and this suggests why Trump is successful now instead of when he ran for the Reform nomination in 2000.²² The American People feel that Congress is unresponsive to their needs, and as Ware discussed, conservative voters see politicians as having promised them changes that have not been fulfilled. Trump was one of three Republican outsider candidates, positioning him to capitalize on these feelings of discontent. While Ben Carson also scored high in many of the same areas as Trump on Oliver and Rahn's analysis, Trump's advantage came in other areas, which they do not point out.²³

The most prominent of these areas is Trump's name recognition. In July of 2015, a Gallup poll had Trump's fellow outsider, Carson, at a high net favorability rating, but he was known by less than of the survey's respondents.²⁴ Trump, who had a much lower net favorability rating, had a 92% familiarity.²⁵ This was due to not only his prior celebrity, but also the large amount of media coverage that Trump received from the earliest days of his campaign.

²¹ Ware, "Donald Trump's Hijacking of the Republican Party in Historical Perspective."

²² Oliver and Rahn, "Rise of the Trumpenvolk Populism in the 2016 Election," 196.

²³ Ibid., 194; The New York Times, "Who Is Running for President?"

²⁴ Dugan, "Among Republicans, GOP Candidates Better Known Than Liked."

²⁵ Ibid.

Culpability also falls upon the last two Democratic presidents for fostering the ineffective Republican party that has increased gridlock in Washington and causing discontent in the electorate. In general, Dodo blames, “the inability or sheer incompetence of the Members of Congress from both parties... to address the economic needs and social concerns of a large segment of the American voters... is at the root of the anger that millions of Trump supporters are showing today.”²⁶ Ware corroborates Dodo, saying that the income stagnation experienced by the majority of Americans has contributed to the rise of populist candidates on *both* sides. Trump built his campaign on the very issues the electorate see as not having been addressed, voicing the outrage and concerns of people who do not have a public outlet for these frustrations. By this view, Trump is “just a Messenger.”²⁷

What is not brought up, is that much of the ineffectiveness of Congress during the Obama administration is not the fault of Democrats or the president himself, but of the Republican congress, as Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein have repeatedly pointed out.²⁸ While Dodo criticizes the mainstream media for having liberal media bias, he falls into the same trap that they often do, in ascribing blame for governmental gridlock to both sides, instead of blaming those who are actually causing it by their refusal to compromise.²⁹

Populism is one of the predominant theories as to how Trump garnered as much support as he did, as at its core, populism pits a ‘virtuous’ people against the parasitic elites, with a goal of restoring the people to their proper place in the political order—on top and in charge.³⁰ This is

²⁶ Dodo, “My Theory on the Trump’s Phenomenon. Why Donald Trump?”

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 597.

²⁸ Thomas E. Mann and Ornstein, *It’s Even Worse Than It Looks*.

²⁹ *Ibid.*; Dodo, “My Theory on the Trump’s Phenomenon. Why Donald Trump?”

³⁰ Oliver and Rahn, “Rise of the Trumpenvolk Populism in the 2016 Election.”

“infused with a sense of urgency that a crisis exists.”³¹ Furthermore, nativism and racism often accompany populist appeals, especially in European democracies facing immigration pressure. The rhetoric of such populists is “simple, emotional and frequently indelicate,” which provides voters with symbols of their authenticity. Trump’s rhetoric was “quintessentially populist,” distinctive for its simplicity, political anti-elitism, and high degree of collectivist language.³² He was a populist candidate, coming from the outside, rebelling against the ‘establishment,’ and provoking potent sentiment among his supporters. Oliver and Rahn analyzed the seven leading presidential candidates at the time of their writing, and found that Trump often targeted political elites, used blame language, invoked foreign threats and collective notions, and used simplistic, repetitious language.³³ By this they mean that Trump’s speeches were filled with briefer sentences and less variety in word choice. Perhaps when Trump said, “I know words, I have the best words,” he truly meant that he had the best words to get the votes of his electorate.³⁴ History would seem to bear out the notion.

With populist candidates, populist sentiment within the electorate must also be explored. Oliver and Rahn looked for populist sentiment within the 2016 electorate and found that their survey questions “load on three separate dimensions related to populism;” anti-elitism, national affiliation, and mistrust of expertise.³⁵ Feelings of marginalization relative to wealth and political power is captured by anti-elitism, while mistrust of expertise shows skepticism in the opinions of scientists and experts, and national affiliation indicates how strongly respondents feel connected and similar to the American people on whole.³⁶ Each of these dimensions correlates with

³¹ Ibid., 191.

³² Ibid., 202.

³³ Ibid., 193.

³⁴ *Donald Trump “I Know Words, I Have The Best Words” Obama Is “Stupid.”*

³⁵ Oliver and Rahn, “Rise of the Trumpenvolk Populism in the 2016 Election,” 196.

³⁶ Ibid., 196–98.

different attitudes. For instance, the largest correlation for anti-elitism is the conspiracy theory scale and they are also more likely to hold fundamentalist beliefs and be nativists.³⁷ Those who score high on mistrust of experts are most highly correlated with fundamentalist beliefs, with high scores in conservatism, nativism, and belief in conspiracy theories, making this aspect look ideologically tinged.³⁸ These two contrast with national affiliation, with the only two strong correlations being negative, with anomie and anger, suggesting that those who heavily value their American identity are less angry at the government and more trusting of people.³⁹ However, fundamentalists also score slightly higher in this area. Paradoxes that can be highlighted by these findings are often resolved in the persona of the populist politician, who often portray themselves as an outsider against the establishment, fighting for the average American against inequalities of the system and inequalities in the system.⁴⁰ Trump and Carson's supporters, in late February 2016, on average, had higher scores for all three populist dimensions.⁴¹ Trump's supporters scored highest in mistrust of expertise, and national affiliation for the entire sample, while they were second highest in anti-elitism. Only Sanders was higher in that area, although his other scores were strongly in the opposite direction, the lowest of any in the sample.⁴² Carson's scores read as a slightly less extreme version of Trump's. This data suggests that Trump's supporters found a candidate who allowed them to love America while simultaneously blaming its government for their ills. They also believed in conspiracy theories about the Democratic candidate and president to be true, and continued supporting their candidate long past the point where left wing media believed Trump had doomed his own candidacy, because no one could

³⁷ Ibid., 198.

³⁸ Ibid., 199.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 200.

⁴² Ibid.

conscionably vote for him. Oliver and Rahn also looked at the distribution of the populist attitudes, plus a scale of financial pessimism, arranged by candidate preference, finding that Trump's supporters were different from other Republican voters as they are far more nativistic and socially alienated.⁴³ His supporters were the mirror opposite of Hillary Clinton's in every way, with all her values trending negative and all his positive. Sanders and Trump also have a strong contrast, where although Sanders' supporters have low tendencies toward conspiracism and anomie, they have slightly lower anger and financial pessimism, but the lowest nativism scores, compared to Trump's which are highest.⁴⁴ Although the two were both populist candidates, their supporters were populist in very different ways. Oliver and Rahn's article is thorough, with a large quantity of data. However, while their article has many correlations, they cannot prove causation, and because the article was done only midway through the primary season, they do not form an argument for Trump's success over his Republican rivals. They also, because of the article's timing, do not explain why Trump's form of populism was successful in capturing the GOP nomination, but Sanders' form of populism failed to capture the Democratic nomination. They also do not look at the racial, class, or age breakdown of their respondents. The exit polls for the 2016 election showed a huge split in the way different races voted, and younger voters were also had different tendencies than older voters.

To these reasons, Mahamat Dodo would add several more, calling "what the Donald has done so far... a political revolution" with long-term effects.⁴⁵ His reasons are as follows: 1) the legacy of the Clinton administration; 2) free trade deals; 3) globalization; 4) immigration; 5) the middle class; 6) China's economic power; 7) global terrorism; 8) "OBAMA;"⁴⁶ 9) American

⁴³ Ibid., 201.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Dodo, "My Theory on the Trump's Phenomenon. Why Donald Trump?," 594.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 604.

Exceptionalism; 10) Trump's foreign policy doctrine.⁴⁷ Some of these points have been touched upon previously, and work into the larger discourse. Immigration, for instance, ties into Oliver and Rahn's discussion of the nativism displayed by Trump and his supporters. Fears of immigration, globalization, and global terrorism feed nativist sentiments, as does a fear that America is no longer as exceptional as it was. Trump took a hard-right track on immigration, with his early comments on Mexicans, and then with later comments on refugees and Muslims. Part of the reason, Dodo ascribes, that immigration is such a large issue, is that Congress has failed to pass comprehensive immigration reform that satisfies all stakeholders in the issue, leaving the work to the executive and judicial branches, and the debate has become, as nearly all things have, partisan and politically charged.⁴⁸ Trump capitalizes on those still worried about border security, creating a threat for the future of America tied to the existence of physical borders. Beyond this, Dodo claims that Trump's supporters use immigration "as a new battle ground for social, political and cultural preservation of what America used to be and ought to be."⁴⁹ This is the underlying message in the supporters demands to have their country back and to make America great again. Trump comes across as a strong leader capable of accomplishing all that he boldly talks about, regardless of the likelihood any of his comments could come to pass, and his supporters have embraced this aspect. They wanted someone like President Putin, a strong leader seemingly unafraid of backlash on an international stage, who could do all that he claimed to return to a fully 'American' society, a shiny country on a hill, where people like themselves had the advantage. Immigration was this election's vehicle for that.

⁴⁷ Dodo, "My Theory on the Trump's Phenomenon. Why Donald Trump?"

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 599.

Overall, the literature suggests Trump's candidacy was one marked by strong populist sentiments, a discontent electorate, and extreme rhetoric. In some ways, it looks like a perfect storm occurred. There were enough candidates that their bases overlapped significantly and the party was internally divided. Devastating terror attacks at home and abroad occurred, which provided high sentiments to prey on with anti-immigrant, anti-refugee, and anti-Muslim rhetoric. Into this stepped a candidate with an advantage more useful than a campaign treasure chest, a presidential name, or any kind of experience: celebrity. Trump was able to gain the media's attention, because he was already a nationally known figure. From the very beginning, Trump's words and actions were scrutinized extensively by both sides, and this coverage was markedly different. In the last few weeks of the election and the weeks after, both sides discussed media bias, albeit in different ways. The left—including the Clinton campaign after her defeat—criticized the media for treating Clinton as if she had already won, focusing on her mistakes.⁵⁰ Beyond this was a larger critique that the media had created a false moral equivalency between the two candidates and highlighted too much of what was wrong about politics without showing what was right, showing too much of Trump without a filter and heightening the anti-government message of the right.⁵¹ The right spent much of the campaign complaining about Trump getting an excess of negative press, which they 'confirmed' after the election with a Media Research Center poll, saying that Americans have rejected the leftist media.⁵² While these are the views of the op-eds, little scholarly work has been done on the issue. None of the authors

⁵⁰ Parnes, "Clinton Aides Blame FBI Director, Media for Devastating Loss."

⁵¹ Ibid.; Sutton, "Harvard Study"; Huddleston, "Here's Why CNN Became a Lightning Rod for Accusations of Media Bias."

⁵² Swoyer, "Post-Election Poll"; Westervelt and Mayur, "Media Malpractice?"; Harper, "America Now Shunning the News Media after 2016 Election."

discussed above focused on the role of the media, and the differences in how the right wing and left wing media perceived Trump's candidacy.

Putting together how Trump won the presidency will require not only determining what pieces are needed, but how they fit together. One piece that is necessary is to look at the different ways that news sources that are considered to be right wing or to the left covered certain issues as they clearly received Trump's message in different ways. I propose that understanding Trump's success requires looking at who was most receptive to his message and analyzing news coverage from the right and left to see the way they filtered the same message for their various audiences. This combination of rhetoric and audience will shed light on one of the factors that contributed to Trump's victory.

Donald Trump's rhetoric matched his incoming image to form a strong message about the type of candidate he intended to be. A candidate's message is more than just the words he says, it is how he says them, how he stages their saying.⁵³ Campaigns take all these factors into account when they attempt to craft a candidate's public persona. While they do not usually have a blank slate to work with, they usually have the chance to refocus the candidate's image and refine it for the national stage. The 2016 election saw two major candidates where this was not the case: Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. While other candidates had run before, they were not as well known; even Rick Perry, who ran in 2012, was only familiar to about seventy percent of Republican voters in July of 2015. Trump, with over ninety percent recognition, was already a familiar personage. Due to his time as a prominent birther and his time as a television star, an

⁵³ Lempert and Silverstein, *Creatures of Politics: Media, Message, and the American Presidency*.

image existed in the minds of those inclined to believe such things of an honest man who told things as he saw them and who questioned the political elite.

His message reached a people who had been promised Change over and over, but received more of the same, and while much of his rhetoric may have been perceived as execrable, it reached a significant segment of the population. Most, but not all of this segment was white, many of whom were also older. In the general election, whites accounted for 70% of the vote, according the CNN exit polls, and 58% of them went for Trump.⁵⁴ All non-white respondents made up 30%, but broke overwhelmingly for Hillary Clinton; 74% for her, 21% for Trump.⁵⁵ In fact, whites are the only group that did go for Trump, and did so at all age levels, although white woman were less supportive than white men, and those under 30 supported Trump by less than 50%.⁵⁶⁵⁷ Among whites there is also one key breakdown that should be noted. White college-graduate women went 51%-45% Clinton. Non-college women and both groups of men went for Trump, however the margins were far stronger for both non-college men and women, than with non-college men. In comparison, while whites went overwhelmingly for Trump, every non-white category went strongly for Clinton, every age group in varying strengths. However, their overall turnout numbers were low. The 30% of the Latino vote that went to Trump mattered, especially in states such as Florida, but they were only 11% of total voters.⁵⁸ Their overwhelming support could not counteract the Trump supporters when they were so outnumbered.

⁵⁴ “2016 Election Results.”

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ 43% of whites 18-29 supported Clinton, 48% supported Trump, and 9% supported someone else or did not give an answer.

⁵⁷ “2016 Election Results.”

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Age is also important to take into account, as age, race, and voting habits are intertwined. 44.2% of millennials are part of a minority race or ethnic group, but voters under 40 accounted for only 36% of voters. Voters over the age of 65, the oldest of the baby boomers and the silent generation as well, account for 15% of the vote and are 21.7% minority, less than half the diversity of the youngest voting generation.⁵⁹ When combined with the other voters over the age of 40, they were 64% of the vote.⁶⁰ Over 40 went for Trump. Under 40 went for Clinton.

It is not however, that young voters did not feel a need for change and a need to combat the unreceptiveness of government, nor were these feelings limited to the Republican party—the Democrats felt it too, as was represented by the candidacy of Bernie Sanders. Both Trump and Sanders were populist candidates, yet they spoke to different segments of the population. The message given out by Sanders to young voters was one of populism, like Trump’s, however, it was a much different kind of populism. In Oliver and Rahm’s analysis, Sanders’ language scored high in economic populism, blame attribution, and invocations of America.⁶¹ Sanders also struck out against big businesses, Wall Street, and the top 1%. Although both candidates are ostensibly populist, Trump blamed the political elite for the wrongs of the world, whereas Sanders blamed the economic elite. Sanders overwhelmingly won over young voters; in April, the Harvard IOP Survey showed that Sanders had a 54% favorable to 31% unfavorable rating among young Americans.⁶² Trump failed with this same group; three quarters of young Americans had an unfavorable view of Trump in April and he was viewed favorably by only 17%.⁶³ In the general

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Oliver and Rahn, “Rise of the Trumpenvolk Populism in the 2016 Election,” 193–94.

⁶² Agiesta, “Poll.”

⁶³ Ibid.

election, Secretary Clinton won voters under 29 by 18 points.⁶⁴⁶⁵⁶⁶ These results are consistent with Pew polling data from 2015, which concluded that millennial voters are increasingly liberal, with 45% expressing mostly or consistently liberal views.⁶⁷ Just 15% expressed mostly or consistently conservative views, the rest falling into a mixed category.

What in Trump's message then attracted older votes, especially white ones? An examination of a variety of articles in which people were interviewed about their support of Trump yields trends. They liked that he was an outsider candidate, un beholden to the political establishment, or especially donors.⁶⁸ They saw a candidate who was a regular guy, like themselves, whose seeming abuses of the system (not paying taxes and going bankrupt, for instance), made some think that he was "hustling" the same way they themselves did when they went out looking for work, and who spoke the things they themselves felt they would say.⁶⁹ They also saw his attitude on immigration and liked it. One man from California blamed soaring housing prices and drains on social services on illegal immigrants, and felt Trump would be able to crack down on them. An Ohio woman, one of many women who pushed past Trump's comments on women to vote for him, cited her feelings on the border wall, the immigration of Muslims, and refugees as part of her reasons for voting for Trump.⁷⁰ Another woman, an immigrant herself at one point, also worries that illegal immigrants are using social services that

⁶⁴ CNN, "Exit Polls."

⁶⁵ Clinton's number of 55% was actually 5 points lower than Obama's 60% with young voters in 2012.

⁶⁶ There is one group of voters under the age of 29 who did break for Trump: whites. 48% of whites 18-29 voted for Trump, with only 43% voting for Hillary Clinton.

⁶⁷ Street et al., "A Wider Ideological Gap Between More and Less Educated Adults."

⁶⁸ Barabak and Duara, "'We're Called Redneck, Ignorant, Racist. That's Not True'"; Johnson and DelReal, "Here's Who Supports Trump — and Why."

⁶⁹ Barabak and Duara, "'We're Called Redneck, Ignorant, Racist. That's Not True'"; Johnson and DelReal, "Here's Who Supports Trump — and Why"; Delaney, "Trump Bragged at the Debate about Not Paying Taxes and Taking Advantage of Bankruptcy Laws."

⁷⁰ Barabak and Duara, "'We're Called Redneck, Ignorant, Racist. That's Not True'"; "Why Do Some Women Support Donald Trump?"

are ballooning the national debt.⁷¹ While these people see Trump as responsible enough to deal with these topics, they do not ask that he take responsibility for many of his comments, such as those regarding overturning *Roe v. Wade*, or those about women's looks.⁷² Beyond this, they also blame the media for being out to get Donald Trump, with one man even accusing the mainstream right channel Fox News of not wanting to see the businessman elected president.⁷³

To what do these comments point? Some commentators have suggested that Trump's appeal is part of a backlash of white voters against racial progress and from the beginning have said that large portions of the populace support him for his rejection of PC (politically correct) culture, in which people are forced to respect the sentiments of others by curbing their language and warning when sensitive topics are to be discussed so that students (and others) who might have strong reactions to the content can be ready for it.⁷⁴ Based on the summaries of the above viewpoints, the latter is most certainly true, and the former has inklings of truth as well, although one cannot by the evidence so far given make such a conclusion. What can be concluded, is that Trump supporters clearly heard things in his speeches that those against him did not, much like a dog can hear a high pitched whistle while humans remain oblivious. Dog-whistle politics is nothing new, but is the likeliest way to explain Trump's support amongst the groups discussed above; they heard something in his language the left, and much of the media, did not. In order to explore this phenomenon and attempt to explain how Donald Trump was elected President of the United States, I will examine the differences between the right and the left in their coverage of

⁷¹ Johnson and DelReal, "Here's Who Supports Trump — and Why."

⁷² Barabak and Duara, "We're Called Redneck, Ignorant, Racist. That's Not True"; Johnson and DelReal, "Here's Who Supports Trump — and Why"; "Why Do Some Women Support Donald Trump?"; Gushee, "Why the Christian Right Still Supports Trump."

⁷³ Johnson and DelReal, "Here's Who Supports Trump — and Why."

⁷⁴ "No More Political Correctness' for Trump Supporters"; CNN, "This Is What 'Whitelash' Looks like."

Trump's announcement speech, focusing most directly on the way his discussion of immigration was covered.

This research will examine three news sites from the right and three from the left, looking at multiple print articles (not videos) they published on the day of Trump's announcement covering his speech. For the left, MSNBC, Salon, and The Huffington Post will be used. For the right, Fox News, Breitbart, and VDare will be utilized. Articles drawn from both sides will be analyzed as to how they covered the announcement and the speech, looking at what they focused on, what they left out, and their treatment of Trump and his claims. This analysis will demonstrate clear differences in coverage and show the difference in how each side received Trump's words.

When Donald Trump announced his candidacy, he gave a rambling 6000-word speech full of policy and took 2000 words to get to his announcement. The speech ran the gamut of topics when not focused on Trump's self-aggrandizement, from the economy and trade, to immigration, terror, foreign policy, healthcare, education and infrastructure. Clearly embedded in the speech were populist appeals. In a section built to incite fear of debt, Trump appealed to a mistrust of experts, saying, "According to the economists — who I'm not big believers in, but, nevertheless, this is what they're saying— that \$24 trillion— we're very close— that's the point of no return."⁷⁵ He also appealed to anti-elitism, saying, "Well, you need somebody, because 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."⁷⁶ And he appealed to nativism when he said:

⁷⁵ Staff, "Here's Donald Trump's Presidential Announcement Speech."

⁷⁶ Ibid.

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.⁷⁷

The left covered the speech with headlines such as, “Donald Trump refers to immigrants as “rapists” in presidential campaign launch,” and “Donald Trump Is Actually Running For President. God Help Us All.” The former article, by Scott Eric Kaufman, focused on the incendiary language in the first part of Trump’s speech, when he said the above quote. commenting that, “Trump sounded less like he wanted to govern the American people and more like he wanted to go war with the Mexican(s) during his presidential announcement.”⁷⁸ Bobic, author of the latter article, is more comprehensive in his overview of the speech, but still shows that the left’s focus was on the more absurd parts of Trump’s announcement:

Entering the stage via escalator — one of the most unusual entrances in the history of presidential announcements — Trump eschewed his prepared remarks and launched into a long-winded tirade against just about everybody: President Barack Obama, Democrats, Republicans and multiple foreign nations.⁷⁹

Both authors treated Trump’s announcement with some seriousness, but their focus was on the more incredulous parts, rather than the sections that almost sound like serious policy. Their comment sections treated Trump as a joke, fodder for the late night shows—an attitude that continued until election night, when it started becoming clear that a candidate many expected

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Kaufman, “Donald Trump Refers to Immigrants as ‘rapists’ in Presidential Campaign Launch.”

⁷⁹ Bobic, “Donald Trump Is Actually Running For President. God Help Us All.”

wouldn't last until the first caucus would actually win the presidency. MSNBC articles were similar in content. Of six articles, three quoted Trump's remarks on immigration, one discussed his position as a prominent Birther, one was a short "Who is he" post and the last reported that Trump entered to a song without approval from its artist.⁸⁰ While they do carry a more serious tone, one still mentions how the candidate entered and all mention the same provocative lines.

That same day, right wing news source Breitbart published very different articles: "Donald Trump Wants To Make America Great Again, Announces 2016 Campaign," "Hannity: Trump Entry into 2016 Field 'Might Be the Shot of Adrenaline That Every Republican Needs,'" and "Peak Trump: 'I Don't Need Anybody's Money.'"⁸¹ The first, written by Alex Swoyer, is more detailed than either of the left pieces in describing the policy positions that Trump took in the speech and the contrast with the frontrunner at that time, Jeb Bush. "Trump chose to announce his formal 2016 White House run in Trump Tower because it's symbolic. He says it shows his personal success and shows he can do the same for America," Swoyer says, not commenting on the unusual choice of entering by escalator, as Bobic did.⁸² In fact, Swoyer mentions the section that Kaufman latched onto in a very different way:

He promised to bring jobs back to the United States, and crack down on illegal immigration from Mexico. Trump promised to "immediately terminate President Obama's executive order on immigration." And that's not all. "I would build a

⁸⁰ Timm, "Donald Trump, the Master of 'You're Fired,' Wants a New Job"; Timm and Howard, "Donald Trump"; Ortiz, "Trump Not Cleared to Use Neil Young Song"; Sakuma, "The 6 Most Provocative Parts of Donald Trump's 2016 Announcement"; Howard, "With Donald Trump in the 2016 Race, Will Birtherism Make a Comeback?"; Ghetto, "What People Want to Know about Donald Trump."

⁸¹ Poor, "Hannity"; Swoyer, "Donald Trump Wants To Make America Great Again, Announces 2016 Campaign"; Shapiro, "Peak Trump."

⁸² Swoyer, "Donald Trump Wants To Make America Great Again, Announces 2016 Campaign."

great wall on our southern border,” he added, “and I will have Mexico pay for that wall. Mark my words.”⁸³

No additional commentary is added to the quote, no mention of the fact that Trump referred to an entire ethnic group as rapists and criminals. Swoyer mentions only the parts that conservatives would like, that Trump wants stricter immigration and a border wall.

Additionally, Breitbart reported the reaction of right wing radio host Sean Hannity, who was excited for the energy that Trump would bring to the Republican party.⁸⁴ Although specifying that his remarks did not constitute an endorsement, Hannity was pleased that there was a candidate ready to ignore political correctness, who had a specific agenda and would be bold in seeking to enact it.⁸⁵ Hannity also asked, “How many times have I said conservative solutions work? How many times have I said, ‘Build the damn border fence?’ How many times have they not done?”⁸⁶

Then there is the third article, by Ben Shapiro, who discusses seven ‘highlights’ of Trump’s announcement speech. Among the seven, he pulls out the section on immigration and border security as one of peak moments:

Well, count Trump among those who actually believes in border security. Polls show that pretty much everybody is on board with the border fence notion. The bravado of saying he’d get Mexico to pay for the wall is also spectacular. This line was good. His description of many Mexican immigrants, not so much:

“They’re bringing drugs, they’re bringing crime, they’re rapists...and some I

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Poor, “Hannity.”

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

assume are good people.” Hrm, could have written that a bit better. As for his notion that Mexico acts as our enemy, it’s difficult to argue differently given the Mexican government’s obvious attempts to flood America’s southern border so that American money can come back to Mexico in the form of remittance payments.⁸⁷

Shapiro is the only one of the three to actually address Trump’s comments on Mexican immigrants, and even then, his words are not really a condemnation of Trump’s. Saying, “Hrm, could have written that a bit better,” is at most a half-hearted critique, suggesting that the words are true, but simply not politically correct, that if they had been said more obliquely, they might have passed muster.⁸⁸ As for the rest of Trump’s plan, Shapiro praises the man for his “bravado” in saying that he could force a foreign power to pay for a wall, and agrees that Mexico is an enemy of the United States, sending immigrants to drain our coffers. Unfortunately, the article lacks links to which polls show that “pretty much everybody” is on board with the border fence, as one Bloomberg article (dated September, 2015) cites a Monmouth University poll in which less than half of American adults support the wall, hardly the ‘everybody’ Shapiro claims.⁸⁹

Fox News is the bastion of conservatism, with nearly half of those identifying as consistently conservative naming them as their main source of political news.⁹⁰ Their coverage of Trump’s announcement, while more positive than any on the left, was different than Breitbart’s. Fox’s focus seemed to be putting Trump into context with his competitors.⁹¹ They

⁸⁷ Shapiro, “Peak Trump.”

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.; Blanks, “Trump’s Plan for Wall on Mexico Border Divides Public.”

⁹⁰ Mitchell et al., “Section 1.”

⁹¹ Stirewalt, “Donald Trump Identifies as a Person of Seriousness”; FoxNews.com, “Trump Announces White House Bid, Joins Crowded GOP Field”; “‘I’ll Build a Wall and Mexico Will Pay for It’.”

did include lists of policy positions, but they were not extensive. One short article, did highlight Trump's comments regarding the border wall, which was mentioned briefly in a longer article.⁹² None of the extant articles mention Trump's comments about Mexicans, however Google's search did turn up a result from Fox News' Latino section, which brings the comments up in the title. This link, however, does not result in an article, but rather a 404 error message.⁹³ The only two other results that appear if the search is limited to the day of Trump's announcement and the terms 'Mexicans' 'rapists' and 'Trump' are typed in are a transcript of a Fox News cable show, and a short article mentioning the viewpoint of a guest on that same show. No author wrote an article involving Trump's comments which remains on the Fox News website.

In addition to broader commentary, Fox News also published an opinion piece by Wayne Allyn Root, entitled "Donald Trump for president? The 2016 race just got fun."⁹⁴ The piece begins by comparing Trump to Reagan and goes into a lengthy comparison to the movie *Bullworth* (1998). Root spends the majority of his article, however, prescribing things that he thinks Trump *might* say, including, "Maybe he'll admit that the border is wide open and the illegals flowing across will destroy middle class jobs and drown our nation under a tsunami of welfare, food stamps, free healthcare and the costs for cops, courts and prison."⁹⁵ The rhetoric displayed here matches with what the voters who went for Trump said, that they fear illegal immigrants will use up social services. That this is blatantly untrue doesn't matter here, this is what they believe, and because they believe it, they feel threatened.⁹⁶ Root, like many, focuses

⁹² "I'll Build a Wall and Mexico Will Pay for It"; FoxNews.com, "Trump Announces White House Bid, Joins Crowded GOP Field."

⁹³ Digital, "404 Error Message."

⁹⁴ Root, "Donald Trump for President?"

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Santana, "5 Immigration Myths Debunked"; Barabak and Duara, "'We're Called Redneck, Ignorant, Racist. That's Not True'"; Johnson and DelReal, "Here's Who Supports Trump — and Why."

on Trump's ability to say what he wants, which allows him to be more 'honest' than his fellow candidates. Although Root does not directly mention a border wall, based on his comments about the wide open border, it is inferable that he would support Trump's comments on the border wall, just as other Fox and Breitbart articles did.

Posts from vdare.com, another source of right wing sentiment, further show how positively Trump's words regarding not only the wall, but about Mexican immigrants, were received by the right. James Kirkpatrick in an article entitled, "Trump Announces Run for President, Slammed By THINK PROGRESS For Mentioning Immigration," criticizes the mainstream media for where they laid their focus, and in doing so, block quotes a Think Progress article that calls Trump's statements nativist in its title. He introduces it by saying "Yet the MSM [mainstream media] seems angriest because Trump mentioned immigration."⁹⁷ The block quote itself contains the text of Trump's statements in which he referred to Mexicans as rapists and criminals, the following paragraph regarding immigration, and a summation that Trump would like to build a wall. Kirkpatrick brackets it with the statement, "Would it be better if more "mainstream" Republican candidates were making these arguments? Well, yes."⁹⁸ If one was looking for coded language, it seems that one need look no farther than this article's very use of the word 'immigration.' The left attacked Trump's statements not for daring to mention immigration as an action that people do, or even for discussing the immigration of persons without the legal authority to do so, but for denigrating an entire ethnic group. That he proposed to build a border wall and make the Mexican government pay for it was an additional concern because to the left, it showed a lack of seriousness and preparedness for office. Yet Kirkpatrick

⁹⁷ Kirkpatrick, "Trump Announces Run for President, Slammed By THINK PROGRESS For Mentioning Immigration."

⁹⁸ Ibid.

clearly encompasses the entirety of the block quote from Think Progress into his statement that the mainstream media is furious about immigration.

The mainstream conservative news ignored it, the far right dismissed it, and the very far right criticized the left for criticizing Trump's comments in which he called Mexicans rapists and accused them of bringing drugs and crime. The left, conversely, saw this rhetoric as evidence that the next President of the United States was a joke of a candidate. The left filtered only the outrageous sections of Trump's rhetoric, the bits that their readers would find preposterous and take umbrage at. The right also filtered Trump's rhetoric, but in a different way. Whereas the left ignored the more concrete policy sections, the right focused on those areas, affirming that Trump would oppose Obamacare, be strong on immigration, and oppose free trade deals. The right instead filtered out much of what would make Trump seem a ridiculous candidate.

What the right did filter in to their articles on Trump was a focus on his proposal to build a physical wall along the southern border. It was a concrete policy proposal, not a viable one necessarily, but a concrete policy proposal none the less. Yet the focus on this policy proposal is just as telling as the lack of a focus on Trump's comments, and it is so because to support a physical one-thousand-mile-long border wall between two countries suggests an extreme level of fear of a nation's immigrants. This fear shows up in the previously mentioned testimonials of Republicans who support Trump: they are afraid of the consequences of illegal immigration. Although the consequences that they admitted to reporters were economic in nature, the admission and focus on Trump's honesty would suggest that they do not find his words on Mexican immigrants to be false in the abstract. Fear is tied to the very idea of immigration in the minds of those on the right, and the right's media does not, apparently, feel the need to fuel that fear, but rather, to show how to assuage it.

If immigration to the right always—or even mostly—contains the kinds of sentiments that Trump stated so boldly in his announcement speech it explains why neither Shapiro, nor Kirkpatrick strongly censured Trump for his comments, and why other articles ignored the matter entirely. Shapiro simply wishes that Trump had been less blatantly offensive, while Kirkpatrick wishes that more politicians would speak as bluntly, the latter showing early evidence of a distain for political correctness that would only increase throughout the election. Fox’s original online articles ignore immigration outside of the “build a wall” comments and a mention of Trump’s desire to repeal Obama’s executive orders, which suggests the provocative statements were deemed unimportant to mention by those constructing the articles. If fear is tied to the very idea of immigration in the minds of those on the right, then to state the sentiments outright is generally unnecessary, and specifically unadvisable out of a nod to political correctness and a desire to have legal immigrants from those areas vote conservative.

If this logic bears out, it might also suggest one of the reasons why Jeb Bush, who announced his candidacy the day before Trump and came into the race as the presumptive nominee, did so poorly. Bush is fluent in Spanish and his wife is an immigrant from Mexico (Trump’s wife, while an immigrant, is European).⁹⁹ The former Florida governor has embraced his wife’s culture, and the left, and even Fox News, treated him well.¹⁰⁰ The far right wing media, however, showed its problems with Bush even before Trump announced his run.

Breitbart’s coverage of Jeb Bush’s announcement, which Trump upstaged by announcing one day later, feels uninspired. Although there is nothing extreme in the text of one article by Sarah Rumpf, there is a lot of subtext. The entire article is focused on how Bush’s announcement

⁹⁹ Liasson, “He Was Born Republican Royalty, But ‘Jebcito’ Is From Miami.”

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.; Llorente and Alvarado, “Jeb Bush Enters the 2016 GOP Fray in Latino-Flavored Event in South Florida.”

was surrounded by a celebration of Latin American culture, pointing to performers and speakers who were Latin American and spoke in a combination of English and Spanish. The article doesn't touch on the announcement speech, in fact the only time that a policy view of Jeb Bush's is mentioned is in the first paragraph, when the author mentions Bush's claims of strength with the Hispanic community; "he has also drawn sharp criticism from conservatives unhappy with his moderate positions on immigration, especially comments like when he described those who cross the border illegally as doing so "out of love.""¹⁰¹ This makes sense if immigration is viewed by those on the right, especially, as it seems, the far right, as something to fear.

In conclusion, these articles show that while the left jumped to report on the divisive, inflammatory sections of Trump's announcement speech, emphasizing the outrageous sections, the right instead immediately began to examine Trump's policies, bypassing the very areas emphasized by the left almost entirely, making way for broader areas of Trump's speech, especially those dealing with immigration, trade, foreign policy and Obamacare.

In many ways, this makes perfect sense. For the left in June 2015, the Republican nomination process was something to follow, but as a survey of the land and opposition, not as a serious look at the candidates; after all, there were ten already in the race before Trump came along, and six more would join after him. Trump garnered attention because of his extreme views on immigration; as a Republican candidate, pledging a repeal of Obamacare, announcing his intention to keep up the military and defeat ISIS, and supporting the second amendment was not news, it was an expected stance. His vehemence on immigrants, however *was* worthy of media attention, a fact only bolstered by his celebrity status. Yet this celebrity was the root of a

¹⁰¹ Rumpf, "A Celebration of Latin Culture Ahead of Jeb Bush's Announcement."

fatal flaw in the left's coverage of Trump: they failed to take him seriously until it was far too late. A month into his campaign, the Huffington Post published a short note, which read:

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.¹⁰²

Donald Trump's campaign benefited more than anything from his extant celebrity. In July 2015, he had a 92% familiarity rating among Republicans, according to a Gallup poll.¹⁰³ His favorability wasn't high, but he far outstripped the other potential presidential candidates in terms of recognition. His celebrity also drove the media, on both right and left, to cover him constantly, even in the early days, as he fed the right policy positions they wanted to hear in a manner that eschewed political correctness and demanded attention, while giving the left an ever greater string of improprieties to scold. The left treated Trump as a joke, believing that no sane person could ever vote for him if he was held up against a more reasonable candidate, assumed even then to be Jeb Bush, and then Hillary Clinton. Meanwhile, the right filtered out the outrageous sections, focusing on Trump's policies. They treated him as a serious candidate with serious policies that reflected their base.

If nothing else, the 2016 election has taught America how divided it is, with people getting a limited perspective on the news that is filtered by their political ideology. Due to this

¹⁰² Grim and Shea, "A Note About Our Coverage Of Donald Trump's 'Campaign.'"

¹⁰³ Dugan, "Among Republicans, GOP Candidates Better Known Than Liked."

filtering and the news bubbles that people experienced, there seemed to be little discussion between the two sides. The left remained convinced that Trump was unelectable, a clown candidate who could never stand up to scrutiny or attract any but the farthest right voters, the neo-nazis who came out to support him. Meanwhile, the right treated him as a serious candidate, one whose rhetoric seemed directed to address their fears, not just of immigration and the social and economic consequences of it, but also their fears that America has lost its prestige. These fears, especially those of whites who fear losing their jobs and culture to immigrants, will not fade just because Trump is president, however their presence should decrease over time, according to the numbers. America is on its way to being a majority-minority country by 2044, when non-Hispanic whites are predicted to make up less than half of the country's population.¹⁰⁴ The country will be far more diverse, which will hopefully promote understanding and tolerance.

People will also continue to grow older. The older population will shuffle off this mortal coil, leaving behind generations that are not only increasingly liberal, but also, possibly, less polarized. According to Pew data, Millennials and members of Generation X have more members who have mixed ideological views, something far more important than everyone all being on the same side.¹⁰⁵ Political polarization has crippled the government, leading to stand offs that caused a downgrading of the U.S. credit rating and the hold up for almost a year of President Obama's Supreme Court nominee.¹⁰⁶ Having people willing to compromise, who could bridge the gap between the left and right is not only important, but necessary if any governing is to happen ever again in America.

¹⁰⁴ Carr, "America's Majority-Minority Future Has Already Arrived in Our Public Schools. How Will We Confront It?"

¹⁰⁵ Street et al., "A Wider Ideological Gap Between More and Less Educated Adults."

¹⁰⁶ Thomas E. Mann and Ornstein, *It's Even Worse Than It Looks*.

If these numbers bear out, fears of immigrants should lessen over time. After all, on Trump's largest issue, immigration, a majority of Millennials support not only a path to legal status for undocumented immigrants, but also a path to citizenship.¹⁰⁷ This is an issue on which race does not play a factor in the results; both white and non-white Millennials favor them.¹⁰⁸ This suggests that the fear of immigration expressed by Trump supporters and the right wing media will lessen, if not disappear over time.

Finally, it is likely that the media in its entirety have taken lessons from this election. No longer will the left treat a candidate like they are an impossibility, and both sides will consider the amount of coverage they give a candidate, regardless of celebrity. They will likely consider what they did here, and how they filtered Trump and other candidates' messages, which will lead to a more self-conscious media that is aware of what is being left out. These changes can only benefit American society, as a whole, leading to a stronger, less fearful America, in which there is open dialogue between two sides.

¹⁰⁷ Street et al., "Chapter 2."

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

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