

# **The Solipsist Revolution**

## **Donald Trump and the de-collectivisation of a superpower**

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### **Part 1 'A conspiracy to thwart the will of the people'<sup>1</sup>**

Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed [ . . . W]henever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.<sup>2</sup>

### **The November Criminals**

As the votes continued to pile up and be counted, and with the result increasingly unclear, the Republican candidate began a series of legal manoeuvres to establish his seeming victory. Simultaneously, Republican party figures took a less appropriate route and orchestrated a demonstration that descended into violent disorder, in an attempt to intimidate officials and decide the result of the election by a show of brute force. Dozens of people were injured in the resultant riot. Eventually, the Supreme Court effectively determined the result of the election by ruling in the Republican candidate's favour, and halting the ongoing attempts to recount the vote.

Twenty-one years later, it nearly happened all over again. Except, in most ways, it was much worse. The Republican Party's agitations in Florida in 2000 had been an ad hoc attempt to stop a manual recount of a return that hinged

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<sup>1</sup> 'But our work must do much more than just look backwards. The cause of our democracy remains in danger. The conspiracy to thwart the will of the people is not over.' Bernie Thompson, chairman, United States House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol, 9 June 2022. Otherwise known as the January 6th Committee. See <<https://shorturl.at/npaRY>> or <<https://january6th-benniethompson.house.gov/news/press-releases/thompson-cheney-opening-statements-select-committee-hearing>>.

Unless otherwise stated, all online sources cited in this essay have been preserved in the Internet Archive (archive.org) or Archive Today (archive.today), and wherever possible in both.

<sup>2</sup> Jefferson *et al*, 4 July 1776.

on a tiny margin of error. In 2021, the votes had already been counted, and the result was settled: the Republican Party had lost the election decisively. In Florida in 2000, the disorder involved about 200 people, causing disruption outside local government offices in Miami-Dade County. In 2021, thousands of civilians forcibly occupied the US federal legislature in Washington D.C. The object of the exercise in Florida in 2000 had been to prevent a recount from overturning the declared result, a victory for Republican candidate George W. Bush. In 2021, the aim was to prevent the declared result from being certified and officially finalised, and thus block the accession of the president-elect, Joe Biden. In Florida in 2000, a few people received minor injuries in scuffles and confrontations. In 2021, some attendees brought handcuffs and weaponry, intending to take lawmakers hostage and willing even to assassinate the sitting vice-president. In both cases, the disorder was eventually quelled by the authorities.

However, the Florida free-for-all had been an ugly local skirmish, with the real action taking place through the court system, whereas the events of 6 January 2021 were indisputably an attempted coup d'état, instigated by outgoing president Donald Trump.<sup>3</sup> It only failed due to a lack of organisation, and an ultimatum delivered in the strongest constitutional terms by the rightful president-elect, Joe Biden. When faced with this ultimatum, a pre-recorded message was used to call off the coup.

The direct connection between Florida 2000 and Washington 2021 was Roger Stone (born 1952), a Republican-aligned political operative, who had been notorious as a 'dirty trickster' ever since his involvement with the Richard Nixon administration of the early 1970s. In 2000, Stone had worked on Trump's first, abortive presidential campaign, before jumping ship to the Republican Party and helping to instigate the disorder around the Florida recount.<sup>4</sup> Trump later distanced himself from Stone, by calling him a 'stone-cold loser', but the lasting political relationship between the two men (which continues at the time of this essay's publication) proves that Trump's

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<sup>3</sup> To be precise, a self-coup or *autogolpe*, a term from the Spanish language since *autogolpes* have been relatively common in modern Latin America.

The risk of Donald Trump executing a self-coup was noted six months before it happened, by Dean Falvy of the University of Washington, in an essay titled 'Selfie Coup: How to Tell If Your Government Is Plotting to Overthrow Itself' in *Justia.com*, 23 July 2020. See <<https://tinyurl.com/57df8vs>> or <<https://verdict.justia.com/2020/07/23/the-selfie-coup-how-to-tell-if-your-government-is-plotting-to-overthrow-itself>>.

<sup>4</sup> The exact nature of Stone's role in the Florida agitation is disputed, and he seems to have embellished his own account to enhance his reputation as a political fixer. However, no one disputes that he was involved and played a significant, albeit unclear, role. *The New Yorker*, 23 May 2008. See <<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/06/02/the-dirty-trickster>>.

dismissive remark was purely for public consumption. In 2016, shortly after Trump's election campaign for his first term had begun, Stone registered a donation-seeking website called StoptheSteal.org and used it to pump out claims that Democratic Party candidate Hillary Clinton would cheat to win the election if the results looked too close to call. Which was exactly what George W. Bush had been accused of doing in Florida in 2000. Late in the 2016 campaign, Stone and his Stop the Steal staff were taken to court by voters' rights activists who alleged intimidation and voter suppression.<sup>5</sup>

On 23 December 2020, after the end of the presidential election that put Joe Biden in the White House, Stone's dormant Stop the Steal project came back to life. It began soliciting donations to fund 'a peaceful, safe public protest in our Nation's capital which has the potential to change the direction of history', this event being scheduled for 6 January 2021.<sup>6</sup> Stone had been convicted in 2019, for various acts of skulduggery related to the nebulous Russian collusion scandal that dogged Trump's first presidential term.<sup>7</sup> In July 2020, Trump commuted Stone's prison sentence, setting him free. 23 December 2020, the day the Stop the Steal project was resurrected, was also the day that Trump pardoned Stone for those offences.<sup>8</sup>

This website update happened just a few days after President Trump had announced a protest to be held in Washington D.C. on 6 January 2021, promising only that it 'will be wild!'<sup>9</sup> The idea that this would be a peaceful protest seems to have been intended to woo would-be donors. The Stop the Steal project launched a new website called WildProtest.com, which stated flatly that 'Congress cannot certify this fraudulent Electoral College'<sup>10</sup> and the project's public figurehead warned: 'If D.C. escalates . . . so do we'.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> CNN, 13 November 2020. See <<https://shorturl.at/FfR0t>> or <<https://edition.cnn.com/2020/11/13/business/stop-the-steal-disinformation-campaign-invs/index.html>>.

<sup>6</sup> See <<https://donorbox.org/stop-the-steal-3>> (page deleted, archive only).

<sup>7</sup> Talking Points Memo, 15 November 2019. See <<https://talkingpointsmemo.com/news/roger-stone-found-guilty-of-multiple-counts>>.

<sup>8</sup> White House press statement, 23 December 2020. See <<https://shorturl.at/35Wid>> or <<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/statement-press-secretary-regarding-executive-grants-clemency-122320/>>.

<sup>9</sup> Donald Trump, Twitter.com, 18 December 2020. See <<https://x.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1340185773220515840>>.

<sup>10</sup> See <<https://wildprotest.com/>> (page deleted, archive only).

<sup>11</sup> ProPublica, 7 January 2021. See <<https://shorturl.at/ZCuII>> or <[www.propublica.org/article/capitol-rioters-planned-for-weeks-in-plain-sight-the-police-weren't-ready](https://www.propublica.org/article/capitol-rioters-planned-for-weeks-in-plain-sight-the-police-weren't-ready)>.

The 'fraudulent Electoral College' referred to the formalisation of the results of the presidential vote, held on 6 January after each election. In this process, the weighted results of individual states' popular votes are presented to Congress as true, allowing the legislature to recognise the winning candidate as the new president, and finally concluding the whole election. This is a largely symbolic process, more of a ritual than a result. According to Trump's claims, the 3 November 2020 election had been rigged and the Electoral College votes were therefore invalid. On 5 November 2020, Roger Stone had dictated a detailed memo about how to subvert and negate the results returned to Congress by the Electoral College.<sup>12</sup>

Shortly after Stone's memo, on 9 November 2020, President Trump fired his Defence Secretary, Mark Esper, and replaced him with Christopher C. Miller, a special forces colonel. At the time, the Pentagon was preparing to acclimatise and orient officials of the incoming Biden administration. On his first day in post, Miller began to obstruct the Pentagon's plans, and cancelled all such transition meetings.<sup>13</sup> The next day, CIA director Gina Haspel spoke privately to Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Mark Milley about Miller's actions, and said: 'We are on the way to a right-wing coup. The whole thing is insanity.' Milley responded: '[W]e're going to be steady as a rock. We're going to keep our eye on the horizon. Keep alert to any risks, dangers. Keep the channels open.'<sup>14</sup>

On 3 January 2021, ten former Defence Secretaries (including the ousted Mark Esper) published an open letter, urging Christopher Miller to 'refrain from any political actions that undermine the results of the election or hinder the success of the new team'.<sup>15</sup>

On 5 January 2021, former Trump advisor Steve Bannon told his podcast audience:

We're now on the cusp of really reversing this . . . decertifying

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<sup>12</sup> *MSNBC*, 17 August 2023. See <<https://youtu.be/di860kS9snk>>. Archived at <<https://archive.org/details/roger-stone-pushed-elector-plot-before-2020-race>>.

<sup>13</sup> *Axios*, 18 December 2020. See <<https://shorturl.at/jOHMK>> or <<https://www.axios.com/pentagon-biden-transition-briefings-123a9658-4af1-4632-a6e6-770117784d60.html>> (page deleted, archive only).

<sup>14</sup> *Business Insider*, 16 December 2021. See <<https://shorturl.at/xOIPK>> or <<https://www.businessinsider.com/haspel-said-trump-was-like-six-year-old-tantrum-book-2021-9>>.

<sup>15</sup> *Washington Post*, 3 January 2021. See <<https://shorturl.at/KCbkb>> or <[https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/10-former-defense-secretaries-military-peaceful-transfer-of-power/2021/01/03/2a23d52e-4c4d-11eb-a9f4-0e668b9772ba\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/10-former-defense-secretaries-military-peaceful-transfer-of-power/2021/01/03/2a23d52e-4c4d-11eb-a9f4-0e668b9772ba_story.html)>.

this.<sup>16</sup> . . . [W]e're on, as they say, the point of attack, the point of attack tomorrow . . . it's going to kick off, it's going to be very dramatic<sup>17</sup> . . . This is going to be very controversial. We are going into uncharted waters, we're going into something that's never happened before in American history. Tomorrow, we're pulling the trigger on something that's going to be, it's going to be . . . minute by minute, hour by hour, what happens, the stakes couldn't be higher.<sup>18</sup>

Purportedly, the original plan was to interrupt the Congressional certification of the Electoral College votes, and forcibly introduce fake Electoral College votes instead, to certify Trump as the president-elect. But what transpired on 6 January bore no resemblance to this. Instead, Congress was besieged for hours by an angry mob, who managed to break into the Capitol building and endanger the lives of the country's elected representatives. The rioters had been encouraged to march on Congress by Trump himself, who held a rally in the Ellipse, a large public park south of the White House. A security official later said: 'We were all in a state of shock [ . . . ] I don't know if you want to use the word insurrection, coup, whatever. We all knew that this would move from being a normal, democratic, you know, public event, into something else.'<sup>19</sup>

Having stirred up his audience of some 2,000 people, Trump disappeared. The presumption has always been that he returned to the White House, to monitor and to some extent coordinate the events of that day. However, his actions remain largely unknown due to a deliberate breakdown that created a large gap in the official record. Trump's daily diary for 6 January 2021 begins at 8:23 am, and comprises 33 separate entries (some of them less than one minute in duration). The entries end at 1:21 pm, then resume at 04.03 pm with the entry 'The President went to the Rose Garden.'<sup>20</sup> Four minutes later,

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<sup>16</sup> *War Room* podcast, 05 January 2021; video deleted, archive only. See <<https://archive.org/details/war-room-podcast-05-january-2021>> commencing at two minutes, 35 seconds.

<sup>17</sup> *War Room*, 5 January 2021. See note 16 above. Commencing at 3 minutes, 25 seconds.

<sup>18</sup> *War Room*, 5 January 2021. See note 16 above. Commencing at 7 minutes, 55 seconds.

<sup>19</sup> Anonymous White House security official, undated deposition to the January 6<sup>th</sup> Committee. See <<https://shorturl.at/HzFLw>> or <<https://customer-uh7tqhki3bpanql6.cloudflarestream.com/009710fb8044db380188d2d08f98c264/watch>>, archived at <<https://archive.org/details/white-house-security-official-jan-6-committee>>.

<sup>20</sup> *The Daily Diary Of President Donald J. Trump*, date: Wednesday 6 January 2021. See <<https://shorturl.at/A2BIT>> or <[https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-J6-DOC-CTRL0000036629\\_00011/pdf/GPO-J6-DOC-CTRL0000036629\\_00011.pdf](https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-J6-DOC-CTRL0000036629_00011/pdf/GPO-J6-DOC-CTRL0000036629_00011.pdf)>.

the diary records Trump going back indoors. There is there another gap until 6:27 pm. This is not a trivial matter. The office of the presidency is obliged by law to keep proper records of the president's actions and activities.

01:21 PM		The President met with his Valet.
04:03 PM		The President went to the Rose Garden.
04:03 PM	04:07 PM	The President participated in a video taping session of a message to supporters asking them to peacefully leave the U.S. Capitol.
04:07 PM		The President returned to the Oval Office.
06:27 PM		The President went to the Second Floor Residence.

Extract from the presidential diary, 6 January 2021,  
showing the sparsity of entries for five hours.

There have been varying and inconsistent attempts to explain the two sequential gaps in the presidential diary for that afternoon. An early rumour was that Molly Michael, Trump's executive assistant, had been absent from work that day, and that this had somehow caused a breakdown in normal record-keeping activities.<sup>21</sup> This doesn't resolve the issue, since Ms Michael recalled arriving at the White House between approximately 2:30 pm and 3:30 pm, thus almost in the middle of the first gap.<sup>22</sup> It later emerged that Trump's presidential diarist was being 'iced out' in the days leading up to 6 January along with other staff who would normally keep records of White House activity. A source within the Congressional investigation into the January riots told CNN:

'The last day that normal information was sent was the 4<sup>th</sup>. So, starting the 5<sup>th</sup>, the diarist didn't receive the annotated calls and notes. This

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<sup>21</sup> Axios, 31 March 2022. See <<https://wwwaxios.com/2022/03/31/trump-molly-michael-jan6-white-house-call-logs>>.

NB that this story appears to rely on former Trump administration figures, as the report refers to 'three sources with direct knowledge of the situation'.

<sup>22</sup> Molly A. Michael deposition, 24 March 2022 (page 177, lines 7–9). See <<https://shorturl.at/qTnan>> or <<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-J6-TRANSCRIPT-CTRL0000060751/pdf/GPO-J6-TRANSCRIPT-CTRL0000060751.pdf>>.

The depositions referred to here are interviews given to the Congressional committee later tasked with investigating the events in Washington DC on 6 January 2021.

was a dramatic departure. That is all out of the ordinary.<sup>23</sup>

Questioned about this gaping hole in the timeline of Trump's actions that day, Trump advisor Eric Herschmann said:

[T]here was definitely never a discussion about not keeping the records of January 6<sup>th</sup>, like, "look what happened, don't do it." That type of thing never happened.' [ . . . ] '[I]f somebody had suggested, don't keep records, because this is happening, we would have gone crazy [ . . . ] It would never -- I can't imagine that discussion even taking place, let alone who would the discussion be with. <sup>24</sup>

The fact remains that the diary-keeping broke down, and the timing of the breakdown was clearly not coincidental.

The only clear detail of Trump's afternoon on 6 January is the diary's mention of his 4:03 pm to 4:07 pm visit to the White House Rose Garden. This four-minute glimpse of presidential activity is said to have been the creation of a short but notorious video that was published online 10 minutes later.<sup>25</sup> This video supposedly shows Trump disowning the chaos he had caused, disavowing the violence at the Capitol, and telling the rioters to go home peacefully.

In other words, this video represents the moment at which Trump realised his plan to overturn the election and keep himself in power had failed. But the video appears to be a fake, created in advance and kept in reserve, for use by the former reality TV star as a get-out clause, to absolve himself of responsibility. It was also designed to be recognised and dismissed by his supporters as a fake, a feint, an act of insincerity. It was a retraction that was not a retraction.

## **Fake news**

In Trump's short video, he spoke in conciliatory tones, seemingly telling

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<sup>23</sup> CNN, 3 April 2022. See <<https://shorturl.at/FfAaC>> or <<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/04/01/politics/white-house-diarist-january-6-committee-interview/>>.

The identity of the presidential diarist is evidently a sensitive matter. He or she was (per CNN) interviewed in mid-March, but the deposition may have been made in closed session, as it does not appear to have been published.

<sup>24</sup> Eric Herschmann, unsworn deposition, 6 April 2022 (page 111, lines 13 to 25 and page 112, lines 1 to 10). See <<https://shorturl.at/mb9Bo>> or <<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-J6-TRANSCRIPT-CTRL0000062567/pdf/GPO-J6-TRANSCRIPT-CTRL0000062567.pdf>>.

<sup>25</sup> Widely reported and reproduced at the time, by e.g. *Washington Post*, 6 January 2021. See <<https://shorturl.at/ITIVC>> or <[https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/politics/trump-to-mob-that-stormed-capitol-you-have-to-go-home-now/2021/01/06/515e227c-0a1b-4397-91cd-f4542bb9ec0e\\_video.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/politics/trump-to-mob-that-stormed-capitol-you-have-to-go-home-now/2021/01/06/515e227c-0a1b-4397-91cd-f4542bb9ec0e_video.html)>.

rioters: 'We have to have peace. So go home, we love you, you're very special [...] but go home, and go home in peace.' All his remarks were generic, and did not refer to specific times, locations, or incidents. In the video, published on Trump's personal Twitter account at 4:17 pm, Trump's hair was unmissably a very light grey, verging on white, and parted on the right.<sup>26</sup> But a few hours earlier, at midday, his hair had been its usual dyed dark golden colour, and parted on the left.<sup>27</sup> Trump's hair was back to its dark dyed colour less than 24 hours later, on 7 January 2021, when he made a speech about the previous day's disturbance.<sup>28</sup>



Donald Trump, 6 January 2021. On television at around noon (left)  
and on social media four hours later (right).

This would appear to indicate that the January Rose Garden video had been recorded in advance. The most likely identifiable date for such a pre-recording would have been on or around 13 November 2020, while Trump's inner circle was already preparing to overturn the election results. On that date, Trump appeared in public to deliver a speech, with his usually dyed hair conspicuously its natural colour. The president's sudden decision to change from golden to grey prompted widespread speculation, and he returned to

<sup>26</sup> See e.g. coverage by *CNN*, broadcast live on 6 January 2021, at <[https://youtu.be/3\\_JxN9CwIMU](https://youtu.be/3_JxN9CwIMU)>, archived at <<https://archive.org/details/trump-rioters-go-home-election-lies>>.

<sup>27</sup> See e.g. video published by the *Washington Post*, on 6 January 2021, at <<https://youtu.be/mh3cbd7niTQ>> (commencing at 33 seconds), archived at <<https://archive.org/details/trump-crowd-before-mob-storms-capitol>>.

<sup>28</sup> *ABC News*, 7 January 2021. See <[https://youtu.be/rYKkQ3BOo\\_E](https://youtu.be/rYKkQ3BOo_E)>. Archived at <<https://archive.org/details/trump-concedes-condemns-rioters>>.

dying his hair the usual colour a few days later.<sup>29</sup> The speech was a significant milestone: it was the first public address Trump had made since losing the election. He was wearing the same blue suit and red tie, and the speech was also delivered in the White House rose garden.

A video recorded while the insurrection was still being planned would mean that this was a 'Hail Mary pass', intended for broadcast if the insurrection had to be abandoned, akin to the crossing of one's fingers to avoid committing to a promise. The interpretation is that a subtly conspicuous act was being used to hint at Trump's pretence of normalcy, alerting perceptive observers to the deception without overtly acknowledging it. At the same time, such a video could be called upon later, as a testament to Trump's peaceable intentions. Deliberately sending covert personal messages via broadcast media is an unusual ploy, but by no means an unknown one. It was famously used in 1966, when US airman Jeremiah Denton was paraded on TV by his North Vietnamese captors, and surreptitiously blinked his eyes to spell out 'Torture' in Morse code, so that US military viewers would understand what was happening.<sup>30</sup>

## Behind the lens

Only two individuals were ever identified by the subsequent congressional investigation as being involved in the creation of Trump's Rose Garden video. Trump personal aide, Nick Luna, said he had no idea why Trump had made the video at all.<sup>31</sup> Trump advisor Eric Herschmann concurred, adding that he couldn't remember whose idea it was.<sup>32</sup> Herschmann and Luna each said that a short script had been prepared for Trump to use (but neither of them could remember who wrote it). Although at first, Luna had stammered that he had no knowledge of any script, and then said he thought Herschmann had written it.<sup>33</sup> Herschmann said that he was only involved in discussions about the script

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<sup>29</sup> *New York Post*, 13 November 2020. See <<https://shorturl.at/MRt1p>> or <<https://nypost.com/2020/11/13/internet-reacts-to-trumps-new-gray-hair-at-press-conference/>>.

<sup>30</sup> US Naval Education and Training Command, 24 September 2021. See <<https://shorturl.at/kdQpR>> or <<https://www.netc.navy.mil/Media-Center/News-Stories/News-Stories-Display/Article/3912384/remembering-the-courage-faith-and-endurance-of-a-former-pow/>>.

<sup>31</sup> Nicholas Luna deposition, 21 March 2022, page 159, lines 6 to 14. See <<https://shorturl.at/z7ieH>> or <<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-J6-TRANSCRIPT-CTRL0000060749/pdf/GPO-J6-TRANSCRIPT-CTRL0000060749.pdf>>.

<sup>32</sup> Herschmann unsworn deposition (see note 24), page 93, lines 1–9.

<sup>33</sup> Luna deposition (see note 31), page 147, lines 21–25; and page 148, lines 1–10.

and couldn't remember the details.<sup>34</sup> Then he said he was involved in writing it,<sup>35</sup> but that Trump had not used it and had spoken extemporaneously instead.<sup>36</sup>

Trump's press secretary, Kayleigh McEnany, remembered things more clearly. She had seen Trump compose and send a social media post in the White House at 2:38 pm, and then she left to attend to something else. Prior to her departure, she recalled, there had been no thought by anyone of getting Trump to issue a statement telling the rioters to go home.<sup>37</sup> When Ms McEnany returned to the White House at shortly after 3 pm<sup>38</sup> the script was ready and she did not know who had written it.<sup>39</sup> Ms McEnany assumed that the idea for a script must have arisen, and the document itself then completed, during her brief absence.<sup>40</sup> Ms McEnany then became involved in trying to edit the statement in preparation for the recording of the video<sup>41</sup> although she later did not recall who else was participating.<sup>42</sup> Herschman's recollection appears to fit the bill of this impromptu script 'workshop': 'I mean, it could be White House counsel, it could be Kayleigh McEnany, Meadows probably would have been involved, I was involved.'<sup>43</sup> As for who wrote the first draft of the script, as discovered by Ms McEnany at around 3pm, both of Trump's speechwriters flatly denied producing it.<sup>44</sup> Both speechwriters were direct subordinates of Trump's

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<sup>34</sup> Herschmann unsworn deposition (see note 24), page 93, lines 15–17.

<sup>35</sup> Herschmann unsworn deposition, page 95, lines 9–13.

<sup>36</sup> Herschmann unsworn deposition (see note 24), page 96, line 25 and page 97, lines 1–6.

<sup>37</sup> McEnany deposition (see <<https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/GPO-J6-TRANSCRIPT-CTRL0000036621>>), page 186, lines 11–25; page 187 *passim*; page 188 *passim*; and page 189, lines 1–3.

<sup>38</sup> McEnany deposition, page 209, lines 4–5 and page 210, lines 8–22.

<sup>39</sup> McEnany deposition page 173, line 25; page 174, lines 1–12; and page 234, lines 8–15.

<sup>40</sup> McEnany deposition, page 238, lines 21–25 and page 239, lines 1–3.

<sup>41</sup> McEnany deposition, page 233, lines 11–25.

<sup>42</sup> McEnany deposition, page 233, lines 1–17.

<sup>43</sup> Herschmann unsworn deposition (see note 24), page 96, lines 1–9.

<sup>44</sup> Vincent Haley deposition, 12 April 2022, page 108, lines 10–12. See <<https://shorturl.at/JChbI>> or <<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-J6-TRANSCRIPT-CTRL0000062440/pdf/GPO-J6-TRANSCRIPT-CTRL0000062440.pdf>>. And Ross Worthington deposition, 15 February 2022, page 41, lines 2–13. See <<https://shorturl.at/XajZe>> or <<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-J6-TRANSCRIPT-CTRL0000050582/pdf/GPO-J6-TRANSCRIPT-CTRL0000050582.pdf>>.

senior advisor, Stephen Miller, who said he didn't know who had written the script either.<sup>45</sup>

This is worth emphasising and recapitulating. During Ms McEnany's approximately 25 minute absence from the White House's administrative 'Outer Oval' offices, a completed script had appeared on a computer, with no identifiable author, to address an issue no-one had yet talked about. After Ms McEnany's return, there was an informal meeting to edit the script. When the edited script was put to him, Trump refused to use it, and a video of him saying something different was then promulgated. Three hours earlier, Trump had been photographed in public with his habitual dark golden dyed hair, parted on his left hand side. But in the video Trump's hair is white and parted on the right. And the entries in the presidential diary about Trump going into and then returning from the Rose Garden are the only actions recorded during the overarching five-hour gap in the presidential diary. Since the presidential record-keepers were being 'iced out' and losing access to Trump's actions, whoever had been obstructing the flow of daily information actively wanted the diary to state that Trump really did record his video at the time in question.

Asked why Trump hadn't walked through the White House and delivered his remarks in the press briefing room, Ms McEnany said she did not know. She surmised that the decision to record the video in the Rose Garden must have been taken at the same time the idea itself was conceived and the script itself was written, i.e. during her brief absence from 2:38 pm to approximately 3 pm.<sup>46</sup> The natural and obvious answer is that Trump did not want any independent witnesses.

Eric Herschmann said that he was the only senior White House official standing anywhere near Trump at the time the statement was recorded,<sup>47</sup> but couldn't remember whether Trump took more than one 'take' to get the statement recorded,<sup>48</sup> then claimed he had given Trump advice while filming, but couldn't remember what that advice was.<sup>49</sup> Finally, Herschmann could not recognise the script that was put to him as the draft he might or might not

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<sup>45</sup> Stephen Miller deposition, 14 April 2022, page 184, lines 16–23. See <<https://shorturl.at/GyrOf>> or <<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-J6-TRANSCRIPT-CTRL0000062444/pdf/GPO-J6-TRANSCRIPT-CTRL0000062444.pdf>>.

<sup>46</sup> McEnany deposition (see note 37), page 238, lines 21–25; and page 239, lines 1–11.

<sup>47</sup> Herschmann unsworn deposition (see note 24), page 98, lines 5–9.

<sup>48</sup> Herschmann unsworn deposition (see note 24), page 99, lines 4–10.

<sup>49</sup> Herschman unsworn deposition, page 99, lines 16–22.

have worked on.<sup>50</sup> It is fair to say that, for a man who knew he was at the very epicentre of a truly historic crisis, Herschmann's vagueness strains credulity.

There were apparently White House videographers present during the Rose Garden recording, but Eric Herschmann couldn't name any of them.<sup>51</sup> Ms McEnany thought there were videographers present, but couldn't identify them.<sup>52</sup> Trump's executive assistant Molly A. Michael recalled a video team going to the Rose Garden, but couldn't remember who they were.<sup>53</sup> There are also still photographs of the activities surrounding the recording of the (or 'a') Rose Garden video. Like the video itself, these photographs were transferred to the National Archive Records Administration after the end of Trump's first term, and later accessed by the investigation into the 6 January insurrection. It is not clear whether these recordings were ever examined for digital forensics, such as metadata, or whether such metadata had even been preserved. Some, all, or none of the photos may have been taken on 6 January 2021.

A handful of other details suggest that photographs purporting to show Trump's Rose Garden video are from other dates. For example, in one such photograph, foliage in the background is an autumnal golden-brown colour, which is incongruous for a video supposedly recorded in an east coast city during winter. Nick Luna was present at the 6 January 2021 recording, and had helped to set up the shot.<sup>54</sup> Luna specifically recalled the use of a boom (overhead) microphone to record Trump's remarks.<sup>55</sup> The photos purporting to show a 6 January filming only depict a ground-standing tripod microphone.

Luna also recalled that Trump recorded one take, and then Eric Herschmann interjected to offer advice. Specifically, Luna said Herschmann's advice was that Trump should record a second 'take', using more emphatic language to tell the rioters to disperse. (As mentioned above, Herschmann agreed he had given Trump advice of some kind while filming, but couldn't recall what it was.)<sup>56</sup> Luna recalled that Trump rebuffed Herschmann by saying

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<sup>50</sup> Herschmann unsworn deposition, page 95, lines 10–25.

<sup>51</sup> Herschmann unsworn deposition, page 97, lines 22–15; and page 98 lines 1–2.

<sup>52</sup> McEnany deposition (see note 37), page 94, lines 17–25.

<sup>53</sup> Molly A. Michael deposition, 24 March 2022, page 148, lines 22–25 and page 149, lines 1–10. See <<https://shorturl.at/E6HRw>> or <<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-J6-TRANSCRIPT-CTRL0000060751/pdf/GPO-J6-TRANSCRIPT-CTRL0000060751.pdf>>.

<sup>54</sup> Luna deposition (see note 31) page 141, lines 11–14.

<sup>55</sup> Luna deposition, page 162, lines 11–23.

<sup>56</sup> Herschman unsworn deposition (see note 24) page 99, lines 16–22.

'These people are in pain' (meaning, rioters at the capitol).<sup>57</sup> However, the complete raw footage of the Rose Garden video was found by Congressional investigators, and it does not record any events resembling those that Luna described. Herschmann does not offer advice after the first 'take', and Trump does not protest 'These people are in pain'.<sup>58</sup>

### **Implausible deniability**

Taken in totality, the look of all this is that Trump deliberately isolated himself in the White House Rose Garden, a familiar oasis of privacy for presidents throughout US history. He may have recorded some kind of video statement there, but he subsequently published a video that had been prepared in advance and kept back. The first draft of the script is apparently lost forever, (another clear breach of the Presidential Records Act 1978) but Kayleigh McEnany distinctly recalled seeing (at around 3 pm) that it contained the words 'Go home', intended as an instruction from Trump to the rioters – a detail which stuck in her mind because it was so important.<sup>59</sup> This important instruction was retained in the final draft of the script, which Trump ignored.<sup>60</sup> However, the statement that Trump delivered bore no resemblance to the final draft of the script, yet also contained the clear instruction 'Go home'. It would be reasonable to infer that the original script that mysteriously appeared at 3 pm might well have been a closer match with the video address that was eventually published.

The final and apparently clinching detail that shows a substitute Rose Garden video was broadcast on 6 January is a chronological contradiction between events in the White House and events in the outside world. Kayleigh McEnany told congressional investigators that she was still working on the script for Trump's Rose Garden video when president-elect Joe Biden made a TV address calling on Trump to make a statement. This was not McEnany's delayed recollection: she was reading from journal entries she had made as the 6 January 2021 insurrection unfolded in real time.<sup>61</sup> Biden's TV address

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<sup>57</sup> Luna deposition (see note 31), page 181, lines 12–25; and page 182, lines 1–12.

<sup>58</sup> Archived at <<https://archive.org/details/trump-jan-6-rose-garden-unedited>>.

<sup>59</sup> McEnany deposition (see note 37), page 232, lines 6–11.

<sup>60</sup> The final draft is read into the record in Nick Luna's deposition (see note 31), page 160, lines 15–25; and page 161, lines 1–10.

<sup>61</sup> McEnany deposition (see note 37), pages 232–233 *passim*.

that day began at 4:05 pm and was broadcast live throughout the country.<sup>62</sup> Thus, McEnany and co were still working on the script at 4:05 pm, and they then handed it to Trump before he went out into the Rose Garden. There is no reason to doubt the veracity of Ms McEnany's contemporaneous journal, so Trump had not begun recording his video at 4:03pm. The timed entry in the Presidential Daily Diary is false. It was presumably intended to make it look like Trump began recording his video before Biden had suggested it. One thing that Eric Herschmann, Nick Luna, and Kayleigh McEnany all agreed on was the involvement of Mark Meadows, Trump's White House Chief of Staff. Luna said that 'to [his] knowledge' it had been Meadows who proposed that Trump make a short video statement.<sup>63</sup> Herschmann described the discussions that led up to the creation of the video, and said that Meadows was probably there.<sup>64</sup> McEnany specifically recalled that after finding the unattributed script had appeared, she walked into a meeting at which Meadows and Herschmann were both present.<sup>65</sup> As Chief of Staff, and thus in overall charge of information flowing in and out of the White House, Meadows would also have been able to make sure that the falsified timing of the video recording was entered in the daily diary, standing alone, right in the middle of the five hour gap.

Mr Meadows has never testified about his role in the 6 January 2021 insurrection, having ignored two subpoenas issued by the subsequent Congressional investigation.<sup>66</sup> In December 2021, Meadows was held in contempt of Congress,<sup>67</sup> and his case was referred to the Department of



Mark Meadows

<sup>62</sup> See for example timestamped live coverage of the 6 January insurrection from *MSNBC*, at <<https://youtu.be/5UBXZV-cLls>> (Biden address commencing at 3 hours, 6 minutes). Archived at <<https://archive.org/details/msnbc-2021-jan-6th-live>>.

<sup>63</sup> Luna deposition (see note 31), page 159, lines 6–14.

<sup>64</sup> Herschmann unsworn deposition (see note 24), page 96, lines 7–9.

<sup>65</sup> McEnany deposition (see note 37), page 210, lines 17–25; and page 211, lines 1–4.

<sup>66</sup> Mark Meadows (no-show deposition dated 8 December 2021). See <<https://shorturl.at/5WcSF>> or <<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-J6-TRANSCRIPT-CTRL0000034606/pdf/GPO-J6-TRANSCRIPT-CTRL0000034606.pdf>>.

<sup>67</sup> House of Representatives, Resolution 851, dated 14 December 2021. See <<https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-resolution/851/text>>.

Justice.<sup>68</sup> Mr Meadows's deputy, Dan Scavino, was also referred to the Department of Justice,<sup>69</sup> having avoided and ignored<sup>70</sup> investigative subpoenas.<sup>71</sup> In June 2022, the Department of Justice announced that neither Meadows nor Scavino would face prosecution.<sup>72</sup> The Department of Justice offered no public rationale for the decisions, causing widespread disbelief and outrage. The simplest natural explanation is that prosecutors had decided there was not a realistic chance of obtaining convictions. Both Meadows and Scavino had received letters from Trump, in late 2021, telling them to refuse to comply with any Congressional subpoenas.<sup>73</sup> While not by any means a watertight procedural alibi, the ex-president's intervention may have created enough confusion to stymie prosecutions, giving Meadows and Scavino a seemingly authoritative good faith excuse for their refusal to cooperate.

## **A rebel without a cause**

The insurrection of 6 January 2021 drew widespread – and wholly justifiable – comparisons with the failed Munich Beer Hall putsch of 1923, when Adolf Hitler used mob violence to try to seize control of the regional Bavarian government as a springboard for overthrowing the German government itself.<sup>74</sup> The analogy was accentuated by Trump's courtship of the so-called alt-right, throughout his first 2017-2021 term. This was a conglomeration of political groupuscules, who were attracted to Trump because of various grandiose

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<sup>68</sup> *NPR*, 14 December 2021. See <<https://shorturl.at/EHw0z>> or <<https://www.npr.org/2021/12/14/1064068696/the-house-votes-to-hold-mark-meadows-in-contempt-sending-a-criminal-referral-to->>.

<sup>69</sup> House of Representatives, Resolution 1037, dated 6 April 2022. See <<https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-resolution/1037/text>>.

<sup>70</sup> *CNN*, 6 October 2021. See <<https://shorturl.at/ni8kz>> or <<https://edition.cnn.com/2021/10/05/politics/house-committee-january-6-subpoena-serve-dan-scavino>>.

<sup>71</sup> Scavino subpoena and cover letter, dated 23 November 2021. See <<https://shorturl.at/7Dyrj>> or <<https://docs.house.gov/meetings/IJ/IJ00/20220328/114565/HMTG-117-IJ00-20220328-SD020.pdf>>.

<sup>72</sup> *CNN*, 4 June 2022. See <<https://shorturl.at/21aEw>> or <<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/06/03/politics/justice-department-declines-charge-meadows-scavino-january-6/index.html>>.

<sup>73</sup> *Politico*, 7 October 2021. See <<https://www.politico.com/news/2021/10/07/trump-jan-6-committees-subpoena-515593>>.

<sup>74</sup> For example, the *Washington Post*, 15 January 2021. See <<https://www.thenation.com/article/politics/trump-hitler-coup/tnamp/>>. See also *The Nation*, 3 January 2022 at <<https://www.thenation.com/article/politics/trump-hitler-coup/tnamp/>>.

ethnocentric promises he had made, such as building a wall on the Mexican border. Most of these groupuscules could be realistically described as fascist-adjacent at best, and many of them were represented among the rioters who attacked the Capitol in January 2021.<sup>75</sup>

In particular, Steven Bannon was a prominent figure among the alt-right, and had served as Trump's chief strategist (a non-position in the presidential executive office) from January 2017 to August the same year, when he was forced to resign in disgrace. However, like Roger Stone before him, Bannon privately stayed in touch with Trump<sup>76</sup> and they evidently continued to work toward their shared goal of overthrowing the US federal government. (See pages 4 to 5, above.)

Bannon famously described himself as 'a Leninist', explaining: 'Lenin wanted to destroy the state, and that's my goal too. I want to bring everything crashing down, and destroy all of today's establishment.'<sup>77</sup> Lenin famously did not destroy the state and then replace it with nothing. The January 2021 insurrection offered obvious attractive possibilities to modern fascists, having Hitler's political career trajectory firmly in mind.

And yet, no-one ever found out what Trump's plan for the post-putsch USA was.<sup>78</sup> While cavorting with fascists and neo-Nazis for four years, Trump remained silent about his own ideological leanings. People drew inevitable conclusions from that association, projecting them on to the blank screen of Trump's political identity. The only whisper that emerged from Trump about his hopes for the 6 January insurrection came via a White House insider on that day, who leaked word that Trump was making 'anarchist comments'.<sup>79</sup> This revelation did not get the attention it deserved, perhaps because popular perceptions of anarchism were such a jarring mismatch with what seemed the very real prospect of Trump as an aspiring dictator. Trump evidently did not

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<sup>75</sup> *Insider News*, YouTube.com, 17 January 2021. See <<https://youtu.be/blxT61F-Ris>>, archived at <<https://archive.org/details/storming-of-the-capitol-decoded>>.

<sup>76</sup> *Washington Post*, 21 October 2017. See <<https://shorturl.at/RBI2m>> or <[https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/the-presidents-wingman-absent-in-the-west-wing-bannon-stays-close-to-trump/2017/10/20/85c45c3a-b4e0-11e7-be94-fabb0f1e9ffb\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/the-presidents-wingman-absent-in-the-west-wing-bannon-stays-close-to-trump/2017/10/20/85c45c3a-b4e0-11e7-be94-fabb0f1e9ffb_story.html)>.

<sup>77</sup> Cited in e.g. the *New Yorker*, 14 November 2016. See <<https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/steve-bannon-will-lead-trumps-white-house>>.

<sup>78</sup> Just as no-one had inquired too deeply after the presidential election of 2012, when Trump had called for a revolution and then tried to incite the public to march on Washington DC. *New York Magazine*, 7 November 2012. See <<http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2012/11/trump-is-election-nights-most-unhinged->>.

<sup>79</sup> *Vanity Fair*, 7 January 2021. See <<https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2021/01/after-a-day-of-violence-and-25th-amendment-chatter-trumps-allies-jumping-ship>>.

mean mere chaos, since the noun 'anarchist' was used, not the adjectival 'anarchic'. But an anarchist dictator might be the ultimate political oxymoron. What form of anarchism, then, did Trump have in mind?

When Trump had been elected in 2016, neo-Nazi Richard Spencer was exultant, telling a crowd of fascist supporters 'Hail Trump! Hail our people! Hail victory!'<sup>80</sup> Trump had gathered a coalition of supporters by pandering to the modern and loosely-organised neo-fascist tendency that had recently erupted in the USA. These were the voters referred to by Hillary Clinton, Trump's electoral opponent, as a 'basket of deplorables'.<sup>81</sup> But despite refusing to condemn the so-called 'alt-right', Trump ultimately delivered little or nothing for them. By mid-2020, Richard Spencer was disillusioned and had had enough. 'Trump is an obvious disaster,' Spencer announced, 'but mainly the paradigm contained flaws that we now are able to perceive. And it needs to end.'<sup>82</sup> On election day 2020, Spencer flatly stated: 'To Hell with Libertarian ideology.'<sup>83</sup>

Spencer had switched his allegiance and voted for the ultimately victorious Democratic Party candidate Joseph Biden, a choice which seems remarkable for an avowed neo-Nazi. However, even though Biden was plainly no Führer, Spencer's choice was entirely consistent with his own ambitions. Inflicting Spencer's preferred ideology on America would require preserving the institution of supremely powerful centralised government ruled by a one-man executive. A vote for Biden would further Spencer's ambition, meaning that the same would not be true of a vote for Trump. Spencer's insight turns out to be the key that unlocks the supposed mystery of Trump's political objectives. Trump is the personification of the revolutionary paradox: the autocratic leader who will force the people to be free.

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<sup>80</sup> *New York Times*, 20 November 2016.

See <<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/21/us/alt-right-salutes-donald-trump.html>>.

<sup>81</sup> *Time*, 10 September 2016. See

<<https://time.com/4486437/hillary-clinton-donald-trump-basket-of-deplorables/>>.

<sup>82</sup> @RichardBSpencer, Twitter.com, 24 August 2020. See

<<https://x.com/RichardBSpencer/status/1297785982515732480>>.

<sup>83</sup> @RichardBSpencer, Twitter.com, 3 November 2020. See

<<https://x.com/RichardBSpencer/status/1323758963968520194>>.

## Part 2 Alone, together

I heartily accept the motto – ‘That government is best which governs least’; and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which I also believe – ‘That government is best which governs not at all’; and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have.<sup>84</sup>

### All mankind minus one<sup>85</sup>

Before Donald Trump had even become the Republican Party’s official 2024 presidential candidate, he took the unusual step of seeking another political party’s nomination. Such an ex-presidential ‘defection’ is so unusual that the *New York Times* said ‘Mr. Trump’s speech was without modern precedent’. The event was the Libertarian Party’s national convention, and it was held in May 2024 in the final straits of primary season. Trump told the Libertarian Party attendees: ‘You can either nominate us and put us in the position, or give us your votes’, meaning that he would accept the Libertarian nomination or move on and accept the Republican nomination. Some members of the audience booed him vociferously and denounced his authoritarian tendencies. Others cheered him enthusiastically.<sup>86</sup> There was no consensus. In fact, since the title ‘Libertarian Party’ is almost an oxymoron, it would have been more surprising if any consensus had emerged at all.

One variation on a joke popular among libertarians states that: ‘If you put half a dozen libertarians into a room together, you will eventually end up with four factions, two conspiracies, three newsletters, two splinter groups and four withdrawals of sanction.’<sup>87</sup> A libertarian magazine editor famously summarised

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<sup>84</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *Resistance to Civil Government* (1849).

<sup>85</sup> ‘If all mankind minus one, were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind.’ John Stewart Mill, *On Liberty* (1859), chapter 2, ‘Of The Liberty Of Thought And Discussion’.

<sup>86</sup> *New York Times*, 25 May 2024. See <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/25/us/politics/trump-libertarian-convention.html>.

<sup>87</sup> Jennifer Burns, *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right*, (Oxford University Press, 2009) p. 259.

the situation with the slogan 'Everyone in this publication is in disagreement!'<sup>88</sup> Very broadly, the word Libertarianism denotes a school of political philosophy that can be considered as occupying a continuum between anarcho-capitalism at one extreme and minarchism at the other. The former seeks the outright abolition of the centralised state; the latter seeks the curtailment of the centralised state to an utterly basic 'Night Watchman' role. What all strains of Libertarianism share is a fundamental belief in the proposition that civil society can be deregulated and then maintain itself in a commerce-like 'Free Market' manner.<sup>89</sup>

The inherent and very obvious problem with both models (minarchism and anarcho-capitalism) is that regulated capitalism has always created oligarchies, and totally unregulated capitalism would inevitably do the same thing, only more quickly and with greater severity. Libertarians tend to gloss over this, and make dubious ideological remarks about giving everyone the unimpeded freedom to attempt to attain great wealth.

On the ideological foundation of absolute capitalist individualism rest a number of other principles, perhaps the three most important of which are: universal or very far-reaching privatisation; low or no taxation; and the absence or near absence of interference in the lives of citizens. Libertarian factions only disagree about the degree to which societal self-maintenance is possible. In the anarcho-capitalist case, this deregulation would be total, leaving wealth and trade as society's sole organisational principles. Since organising libertarians is, of its nature, almost impossible, there is a bewildering variety of opinions about the extent to which such principles should be pushed. At its most extreme, libertarianism could embrace the commercial production of child pornography,<sup>90</sup> the private ownership of nuclear weapons (debated – albeit inconclusively – at the Libertarian Party conference in the

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<sup>88</sup> Samuel Edward Konkin III, editor of the *New Libertarian*. Cited by the Libertarian Futurist Society, 6 September 2019. See <<https://shorturl.at/YIIG4>> or <<https://www.lfs.org/blog/interview-lfs-founder-michael-grossberg-on-how-he-became-a-writer-critic-sf-fan-helped-save-the-prometheus-awards/>>.

<sup>89</sup> For a useful summary of the differences and the similarities between minarchism and anarcho-capitalism, see David S. D'Amato, 'Minarchists and Anarchists in Libertarian History', Libertarianism.org, 17 November 2018 at <<https://www.libertarianism.org/columns/minarchists-anarchists-in-libertarian-history>>.

<sup>90</sup> One of the Libertarian Party's prospective presidential candidates in 2008 called for the legalisation of child pornography, on the questionable grounds that keeping it illegal makes it artificially lucrative and thus incentivises its creation. *Reason*, 23 April 2008. See <<https://reason.com/2008/04/23/suffer-the-little-children-3/>>.

first post-Cold War year, 1991)<sup>91</sup> and the abolition of biological death.<sup>92</sup>

However, the Libertarian Party does not have a monopoly on the concept, and libertarian principles are found in both of the main US political parties. Naturally, in view of the inherently capitalist qualities of libertarian thought, the tendency is more organised in the right-wing Republican Party, which has long paraded its own belief in smaller government. Perhaps not coincidentally, Trump's crony, dirty trickster Roger Stone, had defected from the Republican Party to the Libertarian Party in 2012, proclaiming an imminent 'Libertarian moment'.<sup>93</sup> The Republican Party's own Liberty Caucus has existed since April 1991, quietly setting up shop just as the USA's Cold War rival, the USSR, was slowly winding down and adopting the principles of free market capitalism.<sup>94</sup>

Trump's 2024 appeal to the Libertarian Party convention was therefore not so much a case of fraternising with the enemy as it was one of exploiting a fraternity.

### **The problems of victory**<sup>95</sup>

The blossoming of libertarianism within the Republican Party at the very end of the Cold War is a fascinating instance of historical irony. Arguably, this paradoxical blossoming itself was an instance of enantiodromia, the psychological process by which concepts eventually turn into their opposites. As the Soviet government collapsed and was forced into 'free fall' market capitalism, so the need for a strongly centralised USA suddenly seemed to attenuate.

The distinguished US historian, diplomat, and philosopher George Kennan

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<sup>91</sup> *Reason*, 22 May 2020. See <<https://shorturl.at/IFQ4U>> or <<https://reason.com/2020/05/22/that-time-the-libertarian-party-debated-the-private-ownership-of-nuclear-weapons/>>.

<sup>92</sup> An ambition of libertarian billionaire Peter Thiel, as disclosed in *Cato Unbound*, 13 April 2009. See <<https://www.cato-unbound.org/2009/04/13/peter-thiel/education-libertarian/>>.

<sup>93</sup> *Washington Post*, 16 February 2012. See <<https://shorturl.at/rhQ0m>> or <[https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/reliable-source/post/gop-trickster-roger-stone-defects-to-libertarian-party/2012/02/16/gIQASIVUIR\\_blog.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/reliable-source/post/gop-trickster-roger-stone-defects-to-libertarian-party/2012/02/16/gIQASIVUIR_blog.html)>.

<sup>94</sup> Indeed, the RLC held its first conference in July that year, just one month before the abortive August coup against Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev. For the Caucus's own *History of the RLC*, see <<https://rlc.org/history-of-the-rlc/>>. There is no formal equivalent organisation within the Democratic Party.

<sup>95</sup> 'The problems of victory are more agreeable than those of defeat, but they are no less difficult.' Winston Churchill, Hansard; HC Deb; 11 November 1942; vol. 385, col. 39. See <<https://shorturl.at/CjAR8>> or <<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1942-11-11/debates/419495ec-098b-4215-b076-b038b7f8014f/DebateOnTheAddress>>.

- designer of the Marshall Plan, architect of the USA's containment strategy, and one of the 'Wise Men' of US foreign policy throughout the Cold War
- reflected in the immediately post-Soviet year of 1993 that:

The passing of the Cold War, in presenting us a world which appears to be devoid of anything that could be seen as a major great-power enemy of this country, also obviously presents us with a problem for which few of us are prepared [.. A] demand for nothing less than the redesigning of the entire great pattern of American interaction with the rest of the world.<sup>96</sup>



George Kennan

As Kennan saw it:

We [Americans] have a moral duty to put our own house in order, if we are to take our proper part in the affairs of the rest of the world.<sup>97</sup>

Kennan felt that, from the 1930s onward, the US federal government had expanded beyond all reason, and that the US population had grown too rapidly. In Kennan's view, the ideal population size for the USA was 'at very maximum two hundred million people, and perhaps a good deal less'. As he put it: 'There are far too many of us.'<sup>98</sup> The expansion of the government and the population had led to a counter-intuitive situation in which few people felt connected to the system that governed their lives. Simultaneously, the USA was falling victim to what Kennan called 'the hubris of inordinate size', an irrational sense that America's future global importance should be directly related to its social, political, and geographical dimensions.<sup>99</sup>

Kennan's envisioned solution was decentralisation. Noting that generally, '[a] great country has a vulnerability to dreams of power and glory to which the smaller state is less easily combined',<sup>100</sup> Kennan advanced a proposal to break up the USA for its own good. In this scheme, the federal government

<sup>96</sup> George F. Kennan, *Around the Cragged Hill: A Personal and Political Philosophy* (London: W. W. Norton and Company Ltd, 1993) pp. 180-181.

<sup>97</sup> Kennan p. 182.

<sup>98</sup> Kennan p. 142.

<sup>99</sup> Kennan pp. 144-145.

<sup>100</sup> Kennan p. 146.

would be reduced to a largely co-ordinatory body and its former functions would be farmed out to an America reorganised into a dozen republics. It mirrored the way in which the over-extended USSR had disassembled itself back into the independent nations it had subsumed. His idea for the composition of those new republics was:

Let us say, New England; the Middle Atlantic states; the Middle West, the Northwest (from Wisconsin to the Northwest, and down the Pacific coast to central California); the Southwest (including southern California and Hawaii); Texas (by itself); the Old South; Florida (perhaps including Puerto Rico); and Alaska; plus three great self-governing urban regions: those of New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles.<sup>101</sup>

In the same year that Kennan put forward his decentralisation thesis, political scientist Samuel Huntington felt reassured enough to write that, in retrospect,

The conflict between liberal democracy and Marxism-Leninism was between ideologies which, despite their major differences, ostensibly shared ultimate goals of freedom, equality and prosperity.<sup>102</sup>

It seemed like history had determined the winner in a fair fight. During the revolutionary year of 1989, with the end of the Cold War in sight, neo-conservative political scientist Francis Fukuyama had already concluded that capitalist liberal democracy was the final and unimprovable iteration of rational governance. He therefore concluded his paper 'The End of History?'<sup>103</sup> by observing:

The end of history will be a very sad time. The struggle for recognition, the willingness to risk one's life for a purely abstract goal, the worldwide ideological struggle that called forth daring, courage, imagination, and idealism, will be replaced by economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns, and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands. In the post-historical period there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history.

But as the anticipated sense of purposelessness began to settle over America

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<sup>101</sup> Kennan (see note 96) pp. 149-51.

<sup>102</sup> Samuel Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilizations?' in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3 (Summer, 1993), p. 48. See <<https://shorturl.at/oAu2c>> or <[https://www.guillaumencaise.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/huntington\\_clash-of-civilizations.pdf](https://www.guillaumencaise.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/huntington_clash-of-civilizations.pdf)>.

<sup>103</sup> Published in *The National Interest*, No. 16 (Summer 1989), pp. 3-18. Text available at <<https://shorturl.at/5VYuL>> or <<https://pages.ucsd.edu/~bslantchev/courses/pdf/Fukuyama%20-%20End%20of%20History.pdf>>.

at the end of the century, libertarians found themselves unexpectedly freed to spread their ideological wings. Psychologically speaking, the grand narrative of the Cold War had been snatched out from under the country's political establishment, who responded by 'doing everything possible to maintain and justify the status quo', namely consolidate and preserve US global hegemony. Whereas America's domestic dissidents hoped to fill the sudden ideological vacuum and 'create new differentiations in [their] own favor'.<sup>104</sup>

Without the arms race and the inflated threat of global communism to justify itself, the US federal government suddenly seemed more bloated and burdensome. The libertarians began to vigorously promote their nostrum that, like communism, democratic government was oppressive, and should be likewise overthrown in favour of (their version of) free market capitalism.

In both the Marxist and the libertarian scheme of things, the state would wither on the vine, leaving the citizenry in charge. In the case of the Soviet Union, concerns about national security meant that not only had the state not withered, but the opposite had occurred, with the prolongation of supposedly temporary governance under Lenin and then the strengthening and expansion of that governance under Stalin. In the minds of the US libertarians, the historical growth of the federal government represented the same omnipresent and insidious oppression, to such an extent that the word 'statist' – meaning any proponent or even supporter of centralised government – is a snarl word and a severe insult among modern libertarians. The most surprising aspect of this enantiodromic irony is that libertarianism itself started off as a branch of pre-Soviet communism in the 19th Century. Understanding what has happened in America since 2016 requires unearthing the tangled historical roots of the present crisis.

### **Nothing to lose but their chains**

Modern libertarians have appropriated some figures from the early liberal tradition – e.g. Adam Smith or John Locke – to represent the supposed vulnerability of their philosophy. There is some justification for doing so, since one of the few definite attributes of libertarianism is its capitalistic nature, making libertarianism seem like a late-period manifestation of 'hyper-liberalism'. But ultimately these opportunistic appropriations are selective,

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<sup>104</sup> This two-way reaction to upsets in power dynamics was described *inter alia* by psychologists Tajfel and Turner, in their 'The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior'. See <<https://www.christosaiouannou.com/Tajfel%20and%20Turner%201986.pdf>>.

partial, and obfuscative.<sup>105</sup> The term 'libertarian' (in its modern political sense) comes from a completely different tradition, and specifically from an 1857 letter sent to the 'father of anarchism', Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, accusing him of not being a serious anarchist due to his anti-feminist views.<sup>106</sup>

The author of the letter, French anarchist Joseph Déjacque (1821–1865), castigated Proudhon as 'A middle-of-the-road anarchist, liberal and not LIBERTARIAN.'<sup>107</sup>

Déjacque, an anarcho-communist, had taken part in the French revolution of 1848 but fled after the coup d'état of 1850, and briefly stayed in London, and then the Channel Islands, before finally ending up in America. In New York, Déjacque published a French language newspaper called *Le Libertaire*, to keep the flame of his anarcho-communist dream alive among his fellow exiles. It was from New York City that he wrote his withering words to Proudhon. (The upheavals of 1848–1850 were an underlying source of tension in the Déjacque/Proudhon correspondence, because Proudhon had suddenly decided to seek election to the new French parliament, and redefined himself as a federalist.)

Examining Déjacque's erratic travels in exile, historians at the University of Cincinnati have concluded that he was probably involved in an international mutual aid network, which operated through masonic lodges.<sup>108</sup> In London, Déjacque had lived in Soho, a short walk from the Grand Loge des Philadelphes, headquartered in a backroom at 18 Denmark Street. That lodge was a co-ordination body for exiled radicals, uprooted during the wave of European



Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

<sup>105</sup> Liberalism has of course appropriated various non-liberalist historic figures for its own mythos, e.g. Martin Luther and Niccolò Machiavelli.

<sup>106</sup> NB the feminism of the 1800s did not bear much resemblance to the current ideology of the same name. Proudhon was broadly dismissive of women's rights, and supportive of male-dominated societies, which he justified in terms of physical inferiority.

<sup>107</sup> In original 'Anarchiste juste-milieu, libéral et non LIBERTAIRE'. For the full text of Déjacque's letter, see <<http://joseph.dejacque.free.fr/ecrits/lettreapjp.htm>> (source in French).

<sup>108</sup> Janine Hartman, *In the Sphere of Humanity: Joseph Déjacque, Slavery, and the Struggle for Freedom*, (University of Cincinnati Libraries, 2012) pp. 10–11. See <<https://files.libcom.org/files/Le%20Humanisphere.pdf>>.

revolutions in 1848, who were now assisting the efforts of the British Chartist movement.<sup>109</sup> Karl Marx was also living in Soho during this febrile period, and published *The Communist Manifesto* in February 1848, almost at the moment the European upheavals began. Marx's lodgings at 28 Dean Street were almost literally just around the corner, a five-minute walk from the Grand Loge des Philadelphies. The lodge was also an organ of the 'irregular' Order of Memphis, which boasted of roots in Egyptian mysticism, but was in actuality the creation of Alessandro Cagliostro, an occultist and fraudster who also claimed to have been initiated into the Bavarian Illuminati. Cagliostro had died in prison in 1795, but the Order of Memphis had lived on. When Déjacque was living in London, the Order had recently been suppressed in France, but was still active in both the United Kingdom and the United States.

In America, Déjacque had no need for such subterfuge and skulduggery. Post-revolutionary Freemasons were triumphantly erecting monuments and designing urban landscapes as testaments to their enlightened beliefs. The Masonic architect Pierre L'Enfant,<sup>110</sup> who set the famously symbolic street layout of Washington D.C., intended the capital city to embody the egalitarian principle, with no residential centre and an even distribution of open spaces.<sup>111</sup> Construction of the Washington Monument, a 500-ft obelisk in an explicitly Masonic Egyptian style, commenced during the turbulent European year of 1848.

### **In liberating strife**

By 1857, when Déjacque wrote his letter to Proudhon, the US comprised 31 states, and vast tracts of the continent were still disputed territories. The utopian possibilities of America were a huge draw for migrants, especially those fleeing political oppression or persecution, and there had been a sizeable French presence ever since the early colonial-settler period. Outside the established US states, a form of low-level anarchy existed, with semi-autonomous colonial townships technically within the jurisdiction of the federal government, but in practical terms beyond its reach, except for communication networks such as the expanding postal service. This so-called Wild West was

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<sup>109</sup> Hartman (see note 108) p. 11.

<sup>110</sup> Pierre F. de Ravel d'Esclapon, *The Masonic Career of Major Pierre Charles L'Enfant*, Supreme Council, Scottish Rite (Southern Jurisdiction, USA); undated. See <<https://shorturl.at/69QcK>> or <<https://scottishrite.org/blog/about/media-publications/journal/article/the-masonic-career-of-major-pierre-charles-l enfant/>>.

<sup>111</sup> *Smithsonian Magazine*, 30 April 2008. See <<https://shorturl.at/BCYxJ>> or <<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/a-brief-history-of-pierre-l enfant-and-washington-dc-39487784/>>.

later sanitised and mythologised by Hollywood, which presented the ethnic cleansing of Native Americans as an exciting drama of legitimate self-protection, and exaggerated common criminals into folk heroes.

According to the historian Frederick Jackson Turner, the American frontier stripped 'the garments of civilization' from its pioneers, and forced them into 'the birch canoe' wearing 'the hunting shirt and the moccasin'. Simplified, Jackson's concept of the frontier can be thought of as creating a liberation that expressed itself with a recurring 'outward, then upward' force: as the frontier advanced west, settlements sprang up in the newly-claimed land.

American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character.<sup>112</sup>

Turner was writing in 1893, and his thesis was that the frontier experience had shaped the institutions of American democracy. He later moved away from this belief. Turner died in 1932, having lived through the grand decay of the Gilded Age, the Wall Street Crash, and the early years of the Great Depression. The enduring power of his work lies in the fact that he had identified and accurately described an unconscious philosophy, a world view, which was how Americans had grown to understand themselves as people.

For European political refugees, such as Déjacque, not only did the New World offer the possibility of new forms of societies, it offered the chance to reshape the way people thought, because the process of colonising America forced people to build and constitute new societies for themselves, starting almost from the proverbial square one. The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints was a case in point. Founded in New York in 1830, by a self-proclaimed prophet who was directed by an angel to dig up gold plates bearing mysterious ancient texts, the Mormons (as they became known) were forced into pioneering. Due to their peculiarities and stubbornness, the Mormons were expelled from state after state, attracting converts as they went. These travails included participation in a minor war in Missouri (where the state governor issued an executive order for the Mormons to be exterminated), and the assassination of their founding prophet while he was under arrest for treason. The Mormons finally decided to settle down in the organised territory of Utah, the aridity of which made the farming prospects poor and thus reduced the chances of being molested by intruders from other states. The Mormons may

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<sup>112</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner: *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (1893), ch.1 <<https://www.historians.org/resource/the-significance-of-the-frontier-in-american-history/>>.

have wandered in the metaphorical desert and ended up with a real one, but they were eventually rewarded with admission into the USA in 1896. Their religion is now practised by half the state's population, or some 1.7 million Utahns, and (according to the Mormons themselves) around 16.8 million people worldwide.

In the 1880s, Déjacque's term, 'libertarian', was adopted by Benjamin Tucker (1854–1939), an American anarchist and socialist. There is – or rather was – no contradiction here. At the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the term 'socialism' was still highly amorphous. For the same reason, there is no contradiction in the fact that English socialist George Orwell (1903–1950) referred to himself as 'a kind of Tory anarchist'. Tucker had translated Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's work into English and was also an admirer of Joseph Déjacque, and in 1888 he launched an English-language US newspaper called *Liberty*, which had a small circulation but a large readership.<sup>113</sup>

In this, Tucker promoted and propounded an anarchistic philosophy of individualistic socialism, which sounds like yet another oxymoron, but was intended by its adherents to distinguish themselves from collective-oriented socialists.

Tucker's new philosophy was based on free market (but non-capitalist) economic principles. Tucker put to his readers the prospect of a money-using society of sovereign individuals, in which a worker should receive all the wealth produced by their own work. Quite how this scheme could have been put into practice, without quickly degenerating into a barter system, is another matter, but Tucker's editorials defined it as the antithesis of tyranny, and called it libertarian.<sup>114</sup>

The ultimate objective of his newspaper, wrote Tucker, was 'the abolition of authority'. This intellectual odyssey led him to some extraordinary conclusions. Among them was the proposal that, since authority was irrational and should be replaced by rational ownership, children who had not attained autonomous independence were the property of their parents. Thus, reasoned Tucker, a dissatisfied mother could legitimately dispose of her infants by throwing them into a fire.

Tucker's radical individualist-socialist appropriation of the term 'libertarian' helped to move it out of the sole ownership of anarcho-communist thinkers

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<sup>113</sup> A potted history of Tucker's *Liberty* can be read at <<https://shorturl.at/1m27v>> or <<https://oll.libertyfund.org/pages/benjamin-tucker-and-liberty-a-bibliographical-essay-by-wendy-mcelroy>>.

<sup>114</sup> *Liberty*, 10 March 1888. See <<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/benjamin-r-tucker-state-socialism-and-anarchism>>.

and toward something resembling a middle ground. His insistence on the importance of free markets and property rights also made Tucker's schemes more palatable to readers who were not socialists at all.

## Our Enemy's enemy

Albert Jay Nock (1870–1945) was also an individualist anarchist, but, unlike Benjamin Tucker, not a socialist by any definition then applicable. The son of an Episcopalian priest, Nock had followed him into the clergy, but then rejected his mission and set out to work as a journalist instead.

He took his passion for preaching into his new career. Between 1910 and 1915, he worked for the progressive newspaper *The American Magazine*. It was co-edited by the legendary muckraking journalist Ida Tarbell, whose work brought down John D. Rockefeller's corrupt petrochemical monopoly, the Standard Oil Company.<sup>115</sup> This was a period of energetic enthusiasm for social and economic reforms. Following the financial crash of 1893, the post-Civil War USA's so-called Gilded Age had fallen apart in a mess of corruption and social squalor.

Immersed in a milieu of crusading journalists, Nock began developing radical reformist proposals of his own and promoting them in print. For example, in 1914 he pre-emptively opposed America's entry into the First World War by calling for conscription into a national agriculture force instead. This, he informed readers, would benefit the country by undertaking vast land reclamation projects, including the irrigation of desert areas and the stabilisation and cultivation of the 7,000 km<sup>2</sup> Mississippi Delta.

By 1922, Nock had published an anti-war and anti-imperialism book condemning the First World War itself. His *The Myth of a Guilty Nation* argued that Americans had been deceived by America's own propaganda; that the Allied Powers were collectively guiltier than Germany for starting the war and prolonging it; and that defeated Germany had been scapegoated for the whole thing.<sup>116</sup> Presciently, the author declared that 'there is at stake an extremely important matter, one that will unfavourably affect the peace of the world for at least a generation – the treaty of Versailles'.



Albert Jay Nock

<sup>115</sup> Tarbell's investigation commenced in 1902, was published as *The History of the Standard Oil Company* in 1904, and led to the government mandated break-up of Standard Oil in 1911.

<sup>116</sup> *The Myth of a Guilty Nation* has been republished online by the Libertarian Mises Institute and can be read online at <[https://cdn.mises.org/The%20Myth%20of%20a%20Guilty%20Nation\\_2.pdf](https://cdn.mises.org/The%20Myth%20of%20a%20Guilty%20Nation_2.pdf)>. Nock's prognostication about the Treaty of Versailles can be found on page 14 of the PDF.

When Hitler rose to power in Germany by exploiting the Versailles grievance, Nock denounced Nazism. When the Second World War broke out, Nock inevitably condemned that too. For Nock, these evolving positions were consistently anti-war, anti-imperialist, and most importantly of all, anti-collectivist. Consistently inconsistent, Nock also praised the Communist revolution in Russia, simply because he saw it as the expression of people liberating themselves from a fossilised imperialist autocracy.

In 1935, Nock found his stride with a book called *Our Enemy, the State*. In this, he set out his ideological position in very frank terms. What looked like American progress had been the opposite: degradation. The US Articles of Confederation (1781) had been less constraining than, and were therefore a superior instrument to, the far-reaching US Constitution of 1789. The latter was nothing more than a power-grab, imposing federal government upon the individual states, and the document itself just a non-heritable and thus non-binding contract.

This was an idea that Nock had absorbed from the proto-libertarian Lysander Spooner (1808–1887). A lawyer by trade, Spooner had published *An Essay on the Trial by Jury* in 1852, in which he elevated the Common Law concept of the 'perverse verdict' into a vital public bulwark against government overreach. Now known as 'Jury Nullification', the perverse verdict is delivered when a Jury decides to acquit a defendant who is technically guilty, because the Jury believes that the law that was broken is intolerably unfair on the defendant, or simply unjust in general. Spooner perceived a way in which the perverse verdict could, in theory, be used by a campaign to cut down vast tracts of the law.

That the limits, within which legislation would, by this process, be confined, would be exceedingly narrow, in comparison with those it at present occupies, there can be no doubt. All monopolies, all special privileges, all sumptuary laws, all restraints upon any traffic, bargain, or contract, that was naturally lawful, all restraints upon men's natural rights, the whole catalogue of *mala prohibita*,<sup>117</sup> and all taxation to which the taxed parties had not individually, severally, and freely consented, would be at an end; because all such legislation implies a violation of the rights of a greater or less minority. This minority would disregard, trample upon, or resist, the execution of such legislation, and then throw themselves upon a jury of the whole people for justification and protection. In this way all legislation would be nullified, except the

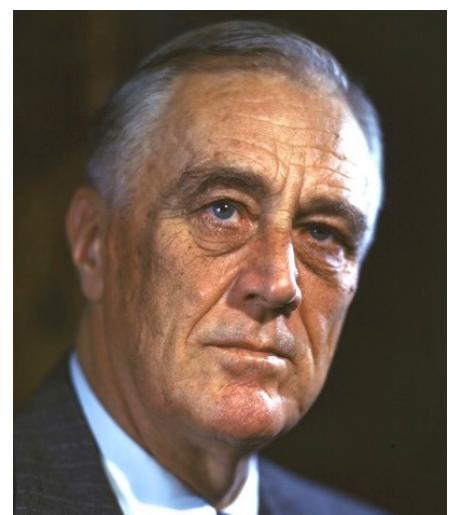
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<sup>117</sup> In English, 'Bad, because prohibited'. Broadly speaking, what an average person might regard as victimless crimes.

legislation of that general nature which impartially protected the rights, and subserved the interests, of all.<sup>118</sup>

Later, in 1867, in a series of essays entitled *No Treason*, Spooner applied the underlying principle of the perverse verdict to all relations between governments and the governed. It was a logical progression: if a jury can overrule a law, then how could any citizen be legitimately compelled to be governed by any law? Spooner's argument was that the passage of time could be allowed to create a new and legitimate will among the people and a revocation of the consent to be governed. By natural extension, Spooner's argument later became the formal philosophical underpinning of 'State Nullification'. Just two years after the deceptively inconclusive US Civil War, Spooner thereby defended the right of the Southern US states to secede from the Union, while using the same 'natural law' reasoning to attack the institution of slavery that the Southern states had been trying to defend.

Albert Jay Nock just took Spooner's arguments a little further. The federal government (wrote Nock, in 1935) was fundamentally illegitimate, nothing but an annexation of US states by a class of financiers and property-owners, akin to the Norman Conquest of Britain. Despite his own earlier calls for a national agricultural task force, Nock now denounced the ongoing public works projects of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's 1933 New Deal as a further encroachment upon personal freedom by the insidious federal government. Our Enemy, the State found a receptive readership among a major congressional bloc known as the Old Right. This was an unofficial amalgam of conservative politicians, formed in 1910, who regarded the US federal government with unrelenting suspicion and hostility. They were the paleoconservatives of their day, with little in common, but collectively personifying an ornery streak in the national character that had been preserved in the USA's rural population ever since the revolution. The sudden and unprecedented expansion of the federal government filled them with alarm and foreboding. Roosevelt, they believed, was a dictator in the making, and a threat to the Republic. Nock's book formulated, in a seemingly non-partisan way, the arguments the Old Right wanted to make, and appeared to offer a coherent theoretical



Franklin D. Roosevelt

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<sup>118</sup> Lysander Spooner, *An Essay Upon The Trial by Jury* (1852), p. 221. Available online at <<https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/32984/pg32984-images.html>>.

framework for opposing Roosevelt.

It was at this point that the issue of the sovereignty of the individual states began coming back into focus. The 1860-1865 US Civil War had ended in an ignominious defeat for the Confederacy. President Abraham Lincoln declared that the Confederate secession had been illegal, and proclaimed America to be one nation, indivisible. Lincoln's unshakable belief in a centrally-controlled Union was the reason that his assassin, John Wilkes Booth, shouted 'Sic Semper Tyrannis!' to witnesses: 'Thus always, to tyrants.' The consequences for the conquered states were dire and soon became fixations in Southern thought. The secessionist South had been left with ruined infrastructure, lost crops, a worthless currency (the Confederate dollar) and – since around a third of a million young men had died in combat – a severely depleted workforce and thousands of destitute families. The beaten Southern states were then militarily occupied by Union forces, and – with the abolition of slavery – forced through an early form of economic shock therapy.

Faced with increasing federal interference, the unfinished business of the Civil War began to resurface under Roosevelt's presidency. There was renewed curiosity about the defeated Confederacy, with increased academic study of southern states' historical grievances. The Confederate battle flag began to reappear on badges, was embroidered on the jackets of everyday citizens, and was even waved at sporting events. In 1936, Roosevelt refused to countenance a specifically anti-lynching federal law, the imposition of which he believed (correctly) would antagonise the Southern states and might imperil the union again. By 1938, Roosevelt, having failed to figure out how to paper over the national fissure left by the Civil War, began talking cautiously about 'the [economic] rehabilitation of the South'.<sup>119</sup> Even at the threshold of the Second World War, America was still trying to litigate a seven decade long armistice.

### **Everything the state has, it has stolen**<sup>120</sup>

Among Nock's readers and admirers in the 1930s and 1940s was a Russian-born author living in New York, who was busily composing broadsides against Roosevelt that made very similar charges. Like Joseph Déjacque, but with much less justification, she regarded herself as an exiled dissident. In fact, Ayn Rand (1905-1982) had been packed off to America by her parents. The previously well-to-do family found itself reduced to penury after its business

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<sup>119</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, 'Message to the Conference on Economic Conditions of the South', 4 July 1938. See <<https://shorturl.at/NURHi>> or <<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/message-the-conference-economic-conditions-the-south>>.

<sup>120</sup> 'Everything the State says is a lie, everything it has it has stolen.' Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1883), part 1, chapter 11.

was sequestered by the Russian revolution of 1917, and was determined that its precocious daughter should be safely out of harm's way. Rand was in no way an infant refugee, tossed on the waves of upheaval. She had turned 20 before leaving Russia and already wanted to work in the film industry. Her alibi for escaping the USSR was that she would gather information about what made America's Hollywood such a successful industry, and then return to invigorate the Soviet film industry with her insights. It was a lie, of course. As soon as she set foot on US soil in 1926 (a fortnight after her 21st birthday), Rand set about becoming a writer, fuelled by an oversimplified reading of the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, whose ideas she perceived through the intoxicatingly unfamiliar and distorting lens of American self-reliance.

Rand had begun reading Nietzsche while still living in a resentful state of despair in Soviet Russia, and this doubtless contributed to her desire to escape to the thriving individualism she imagined in America. Her early egocentrism was offended by a cousin, who taunted Rand by calling Nietzsche the thinker 'who beat you to all your ideas'.<sup>121</sup> Perhaps this is why in later life, Rand ostentatiously rejected Nietzsche's faith in subjectivity,<sup>122</sup> and explicitly called her own derivative philosophy 'Objectivism'. Rand gradually filled notebooks with her thoughts, strewn with remarks like 'As Nietzsche said' and 'Nietzsche and I think'. Rand's reading led her to Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*, the philosopher's call for a new 'post-God' philosophy. Naturally, Rand took this challenge as an opportunity to establish her own undoubted greatness. In America, she spent three consecutive days laboriously bastardising Nietzsche's work into an abortive theory about leaders and followers, because she had taken a dislike to a next door neighbour.<sup>123</sup> Rand's determination to prove herself Nietzsche's intellectual heir led her to some objectively terrible conclusions. In 1928, soon after Rand had arrived in the US, a horrific murder caught national headlines. Rand expressed her admiration for the killer in Nietzschean terminology, referring to his 'true innate psychology of a Superman [...] a man with no regard whatever



Ayn Rand

<sup>121</sup> Burns (see note 87) p. 16.

<sup>122</sup> Summed up in his famous aphorism 'There are no facts, only interpretations.'

<sup>123</sup> Burns (see note 87) p. 41.

for all that society holds sacred, and with a consciousness all his own'. The murderer was in fact the victim of 'the mob's murderous desire to revenge [sic] its own vanity'.<sup>124</sup>

Rand's distortions and quasi-Nietzschean ideas were uncomfortably topical. In 1928, Benito Mussolini had already been leader of Italy for six, years but his political theories were heavily influenced by Nietzsche, whose aphoristic style made his ideas very easy to misappropriate. Although Hitler would not come to power in Nietzsche's own homeland until 1933, he was also enamoured with his own twisted version of Nietzsche, and presented Mussolini with a complete set of Nietzsche's works for his 60th birthday.

Hitler had been driven on in his misuse of Nietzsche by the philosopher's sister, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, who in 1901 had adulterated her deceased brother's private notebooks into a fraudulent and heavily politicised volume published under the title *The Will to Power*.

Nietzsche himself had no time for nationalism or antisemitism, but his reputation as a proto-Nazi persists thanks to his sister's treachery. Nor would Nietzsche have been pleased with what Ayn Rand did with his work. Nietzsche's Superman was an aspiration, an achievement within the reach of those who dared self-actualise as he proposed. Rand's version of that Superman was not unlike Hitler's: a self-interested monster from the swamps of Social Darwinism. As Rand's 1928 swooning over a convicted murderer indicated, her motivation for willing the triumph of 'her' Superman was her disgust and contempt for the masses, which she had unconsciously acquired while living under the thumb of a self-proclaimed 'dictatorship of the proletariat'.

### **The boiling point of hatred**

When President Roosevelt began pitching his New Deal to the electorate, promising to use 'broad executive power' to make sure it was delivered, Rand immediately saw it as a repeat of the tribulations her family had gone through in revolutionary Russia. She invoked the title of Sinclair Lewis's recently-published satire, warning the unwary public 'It can't happen here, you think? Well, it's happened already!'<sup>125</sup>

Totalitarianism has already won a complete victory in many American

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<sup>124</sup> Burns (see note 87) p. 25.

<sup>125</sup> Burns p. 49. Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here* is a satirical dystopia set in an alternative history of the 1930s, in which a folksy populist, Burzelius Windrip, is elected president and rapidly turns the USA into a badly-run fascist dictatorship. Rand does not appear to have noticed that the fictional tyrant seizes power by defeating Roosevelt at the ballot box and rescinding the New Deal.

minds and conquered all our intellectual life [ . . . ] The money, home, or education you hope to leave [to your children] will be worthless or taken away from them. Instead, your legacy will be a Totalitarian America, a world of slavery, of starvation, of concentration camps and firing squads.<sup>126</sup>

For all her clamouring about Roosevelt's dictatorial ambitions, Rand kept suspiciously silent when Roosevelt eventually did round up innocent people and force them into concentration camps. She didn't even suggest that it could be the first step of a Hitlerian escalation. As it turned out, no such escalation occurred anyway. So if Rand ever reflected on her wartime inconsistency, Martin Niemöller's famous warning might have come back to taunt her as: 'First they came for the Japs, and I said nothing. The End.'

Rand's melodramatic alarmism did have at least some roots in her subjective reality. In depression-era New York, there was appetite for social reform among liberal minded intelligentsia, who were opposed to European fascism and therefore naturally compared the faltering American economy with the Soviet experiment. Rand had experienced difficulty in finding a publisher for her first novel (*We, The Living*, a semi-autobiographical account of hardship in the USSR) because corporate readers simply didn't believe her descriptions. Journalist and sometime Soviet spy Whittaker Chambers later recalled how 'from 1930 on, a small intellectual army passed over to the Communist Party, with scarcely any effort on its part'.<sup>127</sup>

In the city's literary circles, the sentiment was especially strong. The US Communist Party was able to launch and sustain a front organisation, the League of American Writers, attracting prestigious members including Dashiell Hammett, Ernest Hemingway, Arthur Miller, and John Steinbeck. Executive Secretary Franklin Folsom even sent a letter to President Roosevelt, offering an honorary membership. As he later recalled: 'What do I do a few days later when Roosevelt accepts? It turns out that I do nothing. Roosevelt was a member of the League for two years, but this fact was never announced.'<sup>128</sup>

Meanwhile, Rand was telling her friends: 'You have no idea how radical and pro-Soviet New York is [ . . . ] Perhaps Mr Roosevelt has nothing to do with it, but it's a funny coincidence isn't it?' She declared, with characteristic lucidity, that: 'My feeling for the New Deal is growing colder and colder. In fact,

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<sup>126</sup> Burns (see note 87) p. 59.

<sup>127</sup> Burns p. 34.

<sup>128</sup> Franklin Folsom. 'The League of American Writers As I Found It', *CEA Critic* 56, no. 2, 1994, pp. 8–19. See <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/44377117>>. (Not archived.)

it's growing so cold that it's coming to the boiling point of hatred.<sup>129</sup> How Rand would have reacted if she had learned of Roosevelt's membership of the League of American Writers can only be imagined.

Meanwhile, Albert Jay Nock's ideas were converging with Ayn Rand's own quasi-Nietzschean opinions. Central to Nock's ideas was his concept of the 'superfluous man', meaning individuals who are independent-minded and refuse to go (or are temperamentally incapable of going) with the general flow of society. The term 'Superfluous Man' is sardonic, and almost certainly a subversion of the Nietzschean term 'Superman'.

Although Nock never cited Nietzsche's work directly, there were multiple routes along which their ideas about individualist exceptionalism converged. Nock was a confirmed admirer of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), whose transcendentalist writings Nietzsche privately cited as a crucial influence on his own work. Specifically, Nock and Nietzsche each considered *Self-Reliance and The Conduct of Life* among their favourite Emerson books. The epithet 'Superfluous Man' indicates the way in which Nock's invaluable 'outsider' figures are perceived as worthless by the society that has no use for them. In a 1936 essay for *The Atlantic Monthly*, entitled 'Isaiah's Job', Nock enjoined his readers to preserve and nurture this small nucleus of the unappreciated:

There is a Remnant there that you know nothing about. They are obscure, unorganized, inarticulate, each one rubbing along as best he can. They need to be encouraged and braced up because when everything has gone completely to the dogs, they are the ones who will come back and build up a new society; and meanwhile, your preaching will reassure them and keep them hanging on. Your job is to take care of the Remnant, so be off now and set about it.<sup>130</sup>

## To each, according to his greed

Nock died in 1945, but in 1957 Ayn Rand published a 1,168-page novel called *Atlas Shrugged*, which leaned heavily on Nock's ideas. Rand's title and thus her entire metaphor were based on her mistaken belief that the mythological Atlas supported the Earth upon his shoulders, rather than the sky. The novel has become a foundational text for modern American libertarianism. A reclusive genius called John Galt organises a labour strike by the world's leading creative figures in the arts, sciences, and business. His mysterious elusiveness is famously flagged up throughout the novel with the repeated question 'Who is

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<sup>129</sup> Burns (see note 87) p. 38.

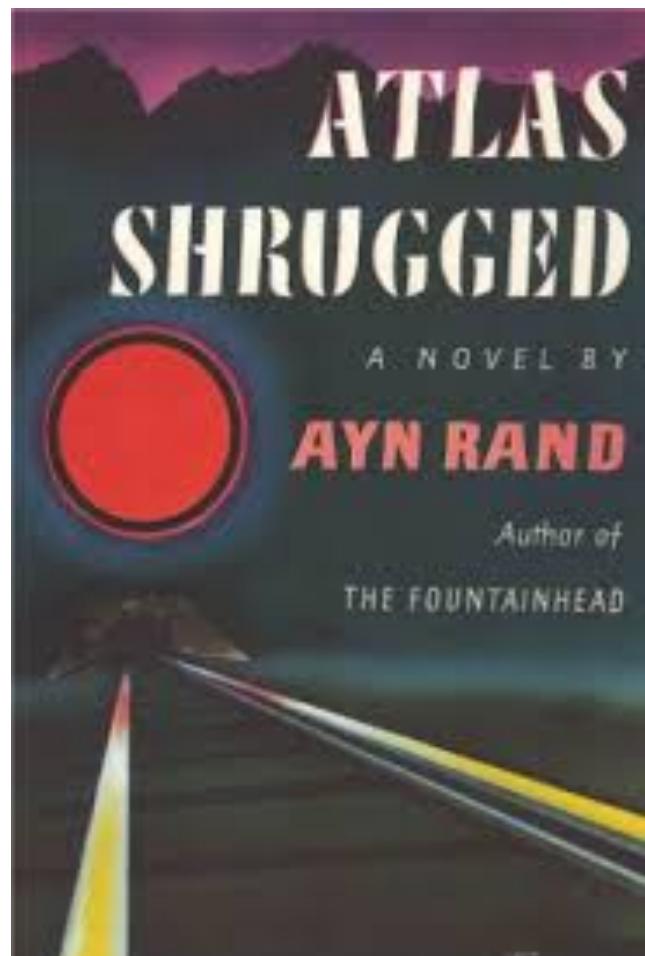
<sup>130</sup> Albert Jay Nock, 'Isaiah's Job', *The Atlantic Monthly*, June 1936.

See <<https://cdn.theatlantic.com/media/archives/1936/06/157-6/132443652.pdf>>.

John Galt?' Although a strike is by definition collective action, the purpose of Galt's strike is to bring about the downfall of a dystopian US government, which is predictably socialist and collectivist in nature (and thoroughly incompetent into the bargain). These 'men of the mind', as the novel describes them, hole up to ride out the collapse of civilisation (or at least, of the fictional socialist US) in a secret township in a secluded Colorado valley, informally known as Galt's Gulch. In other words, this is Nock's 'Remnant' gone rampant: the revenge of a self-preserving Homo Superfluous as imagined by Ayn Rand.

Whereas Nock had envisioned a semi-fatalistic means of preserving civilisation in the face of unforeseen disasters and catastrophes, Rand had decided that the designated survivors – whom she believed were effectively Nietzsche's Supermen – should perhaps precipitate crises in order to liberate themselves. In her notebooks, Rand recorded her certainty that 'humanity is petty [...] small [...] dumb, with the heavy, hopeless stupidity of a man born feeble-minded'.<sup>131</sup> Even when this conviction occasionally wavered, shereprimanded herself: 'I do give a great deal about human beings. No, not all of them. Only those worthy of the name'.<sup>132</sup> The author of the best-known Rand biography concluded frankly that 'Rand hated ordinary people with a vengeance'.<sup>133</sup>

John Galt's speech at the climax of *Atlas Shrugged* is as close as Rand ever got to spelling out her philosophy for the public. It is over 60,000 words long and occupies 56 consecutive pages of the first edition. In this monumental diatribe, Galt denounces altruism, which he believes has enslaved the productive to the unproductive, rewarding



<sup>131</sup> Burns (see note 87) p. 25.

<sup>132</sup> Burns p. 74.

<sup>133</sup> *TIME* magazine, 9 July 2015. See <<https://time.com/3951166/ayn-rand-ideal-fountainhead/>>.

mediocrity and punishing excellence. He proclaims rational self-interest to be the only moral value, demands an unregulated laissez-faire capitalist system, and urges his audience to reject any sense of guilt and pursue their own happiness, and to leave America's corrupt collectivist culture to its collapse and decay.<sup>134</sup>

Naturally, Galt has a utopia of his own to sell his audience, and he is of course just Rand's proxy for setting out her objectivist visions. In particular, Galt's rhetorical attacks on altruism were the advance guard of Rand's own coalescing opinions, which she eventually spelled out in 1961.

Altruism holds death as its ultimate goal and standard of value – and it is logical that renunciation, resignation, self-denial, and every other form of suffering, including self-destruction, are the virtues it advocates.<sup>135</sup>

By the late 1960s, *Atlas Shrugged* had become something of a catechism for an emerging body of young right-wing capitalists who were adopting the term 'libertarian' to describe themselves. Rand's novel had 'indelibly etched the idea of a stateless capitalist utopia on to the right-wing psyche'.<sup>136</sup>

Inevitably, the elitist (and virtuously selfish) Rand hated this success, because despite the royalty payments from her increased sales, she perceived vulgar devaluation of her carefully crafted objectivist philosophy. She denounced these new, mid-century libertarians as 'scum', 'intellectual cranks', and 'plagiarists', who were 'cashing in' on her work.<sup>137</sup>

Rand had met Albert Jay Nock toward the end of his life. Rand had written a 'Manifesto of Individualism' in 1940, but it only appeared briefly, as a pamphlet issued in 1941, and has never been republished. Throughout that year, Rand attempted to convene a body of cognoscenti to promote and preserve her ideas. Nock was among those who responded to her invitation. To her disappointment, Rand found Nock was worn down and pessimistic. Nock told fellow invitees that free societies were rare deviations from the historical norm, and that Rand's attempts to create an intellectual Remnant were doomed.<sup>138</sup> In this, Nock was largely, but not completely, correct.

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<sup>134</sup> Rand had unwittingly echoed an argument advanced by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon in 1840: 'Communism is the exploitation of the strong by the weak'.

<sup>135</sup> Ayn Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness: A New Concept of Egoism* (New York; Signet Books, 1964) pp. 37–38.

<sup>136</sup> Burns (see note 87) p. 253.

<sup>137</sup> Burns p. 238.

<sup>138</sup> Burns pp. 71–72.

## Part 3 New worlds for old

I promise this, that if I am supported by our most invincible sovereigns with a little of their help, as much gold can be supplied as they will need, indeed as much of spices, of cotton, of mastic gum (which is only found in Chios), also as much of aloes wood, and as many slaves for the navy, as their Majesties will wish to demand.<sup>139</sup>

### Going Galt

In 1966, inspired by reading Ayn Rand, millionaire property magnate Mike Oliver sat down to rewrite the US constitution. Oliver had been born in Lithuania and was 13 years old when the Third Reich invaded in 1941. A Jew, he was the only member of his family to survive the Holocaust, and after the war he emigrated to the United States.<sup>140</sup> In the mid-1960s, Oliver observed the civil strife that was sweeping America and concluded, somewhat counterintuitively, that he was watching the early stages of a putsch.

When I see that someone starts throwing bombs, shooting from roof tops, starting fires, and blocking streets, I see Storm Trooper tactics. If we permit this to continue, these elements who scream for "freedom" to do this violence will take over the United States and install a fascist regime.<sup>141</sup>

In 1964, in her *The Virtue of Selfishness*, Rand had promoted 'man's life as the standard of value – and his own life as the ethical purpose of every individual man.' Oliver now declared: 'Man's pursuance of his own rational self-interest is fully moral.'<sup>142</sup> Oliver's study of the US Constitution had led him to conclude

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<sup>139</sup> Christopher Columbus, letter dated 14 March 1493, announcing his 'discovery' of America by promising vast rewards in return for more funding. Addressed to Luis de Santangel, finance minister of King Ferdinand II. See [<https://english.hku.hk/staff/kjohnson/columbusletter.html>](https://english.hku.hk/staff/kjohnson/columbusletter.html).

<sup>140</sup> Michael Oliver (born Moses Stulfsfast) died in 2024. See obituary at [<https://www.recordcourier.com/obituaries/2024/dec/16/michael-oliver/>](https://www.recordcourier.com/obituaries/2024/dec/16/michael-oliver/).

<sup>141</sup> Interview in *Reason*, December 1972. See [<https://reason.com/1972/12/01/designing-a-free-country/>](https://reason.com/1972/12/01/designing-a-free-country/).

<sup>142</sup> Michael Oliver: *A New Constitution for a New Country* (Reno, Nevada; Fine Arts Press, 1968) p. 24. Available online at [<https://archive.org/details/newconstitutionf0000unse\\_l5m9/mode/2up>](https://archive.org/details/newconstitutionf0000unse_l5m9/mode/2up)

that the main problem with the document was its use of inadequately defined words and terms. '[S]uch omission of details', said Oliver, 'has left an array of clauses open to interpretation; thereby making wilful debasement of Constitutional intent easy to accomplish.'<sup>143</sup> Therefore, Oliver's new

constitution included a short glossary to prevent abuses of his meaning. Running to just 12 entries, it had nothing to say about the very general terms 'life', 'liberty', or 'the pursuit of happiness', since those had already been dealt with in the 1776 US Declaration of Independence. However, Oliver did include a new and startling definition of capitalism: 'A society so established that all personal rights are protected'.<sup>144</sup>

Oliver's booklet sold well, and attracted thousands of interested inquiries from would-be tax-avoiding pioneers, who wanted to live out the libertarian exit fantasy of 'Going Galt'.

The keystone of Oliver's new constitution was

a minarchist innovation: taxation was to become a premium, paid voluntarily to a government in return for basic services. Citizens not paying this 'premium' would not be able to use the minimal public services on offer.

Government, under this constitution, can be construed as a private corporation, which is to be hired by participants on a voluntary basis, for the specific purpose of protecting their personal rights. Regardless of majority vote, no person, entity, or governmental agency may take away these rights from others. (Emphases in original.)

Oliver's new constitution was explicitly intended as the ultimate revocation of the Roosevelt New Deal, which he claimed had used 'the 1929 depression [...] as justification to greatly expand government'.<sup>145</sup> For someone who had experienced at first hand the other forms of government that arose during the 1930s, the New Deal represented another intolerable and dangerous overreach. Oliver's envisioned corporate night-watchman would therefore have very limited duties to perform, restricted to maintaining national security

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<sup>143</sup> Oliver (see note 142) p. 43.

<sup>144</sup> Oliver p. 46. This bears a definite familial resemblance to the ideas proposed by Benjamin Tucker in 1888. (See page 27 above.)

<sup>145</sup> Oliver p. 19.

against foreign enemies, and administering courts (mainly in order to resolve property disputes). There would be police, but citizens who did not pay their voluntary premiums to the governing corporation would be ignored by them.

The new form of government would be prohibited from issuing currency, owning property, and from conducting business activities of any kind. Nor would it operate any kind of insurance or pension schemes. Most importantly, this new form of government would not 'engage in or support any charity, welfare, or medical program'.<sup>146</sup> Like Rand before him, Oliver foresaw disaster and tyranny descending upon the unsuspecting USA, and declaimed: 'Is not the history of socialism plain to see? Has not execution, imprisonment, and confiscation of property been the fate of millions of innocents who fell into the hands of socialist tyrants?'<sup>147</sup> While Oliver was, like Rand, a monarchist, his predictions of societal calamity and his hopes of preservation were classically, if unwittingly, Nockian.

### **Something rich and strange**

Since the USA was already fully occupied, Oliver's schemes needed new territory for his new country. On 19 January 1972, Oliver and a group of speculators declared the independence of the Republic of Minerva, a new country, on the tidally-submerged Minerva reefs south of Fiji. The previous year had been spent surreptitiously ferrying sand from a neighbouring atoll (and when that ran out, sand from Australia) to bulk up the surface of the reefs and provide stable 'land' above the high tide level. This meant that with a permanent dry surface, the reefs could be legitimately claimed under



The founding of the republic of Minerva, January 1972

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<sup>146</sup> Oliver (see note 142) p. 94.

<sup>147</sup> Oliver p. 19.

international law. The first, and as it turned out only, president of the Republic was Morris 'Bud' Davis, an electrical engineer from California.

The Minervan declaration of independence drew the attention of Tonga, 300 miles distant, which on 15 June annexed the fledgling republic by formalising ownership of the reefs it now referred to as 'the islands of Teleki Tokelau and Teleki Tonga'. Having only recently attained independence, Tonga (a British protectorate from 1900 to 1970) was not sanguine about the prospect of a colony of Americans establishing itself in the geographical vicinity. Along with 'all islands, rocks, reefs and foreshores and waters lying within a radius of twelve miles thereof', the reefs were officially proclaimed 'part of our Kingdom of Tonga'.<sup>148</sup> A delegation from Tonga then invaded the illegal Republic of Minerva to enforce Tongan sovereignty, by deposing president Morris, forcibly evicting the republic's 42 citizens, and destroying all the temporary structures they had built.

In most accounts of the lost Republic of Minerva,<sup>149</sup> Michael Oliver has been cast as the mastermind, who had lured investors into backing his South Pacific micronation scheme. However, the family and associates of one of Oliver's backers strongly reject this. According to them, the mastermind of the Minerva Project was Willard W. Garvey (1920–2002),<sup>150</sup> a grain tycoon from Wichita, Kansas, whose sprawling business empire and obsessive anti-communism had led him into some extraordinary contacts. He sat on a presidential task force<sup>151</sup> to set out plans for the US military to transition to voluntary recruitment,<sup>152</sup> and attended the Bohemian Grove club every year for

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<sup>148</sup> *Tonga Government Gazette*, extraordinary edition, 15 June 1971. See <<https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/ton5226.pdf>>.

<sup>149</sup> In e.g. Raymond B Craib, *Adventure Capitalism: A History of Libertarian Exit, from the Era of Decolonisation to the Digital Age* (Oakland, California: PM Press, 2022); Michael J. Lee and Jarrod Atchison, *We Are Not One People: Secession and Separatism in American Politics Since 1776* (Oxford University Press; 2022).

<sup>150</sup> Obituary at <<https://shorturl.at/rCBEo>> or <[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/62505f6e07f85444fa81f2e6/t/63ef7f01e27f6468ba3b4cca/1676640001751/Garvey\\_Willard+W.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/62505f6e07f85444fa81f2e6/t/63ef7f01e27f6468ba3b4cca/1676640001751/Garvey_Willard+W.pdf)>.

<sup>151</sup> Maura McEnaney, *Willard Garvey: An Epic Life* (Oakland, California: Liberty Tree Press, 2013) p. 21.

<sup>152</sup> US President Richard Nixon, 'Statement Announcing Appointment of the President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force', 27 March 1969. See <<https://shorturl.at/huoQg>> for <<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-announcing-appointment-the-presidents-commission-all-volunteer-armed-force>>.

decades, first as a guest and then as a signed-up club member.<sup>153</sup>

In 1958, Willard Garvey had written a letter to CIA director Allen Dulles, outlining his vision of 'making every man a capitalist' by starting low-cost housing projects in the developing world. '[W]hen you put a man in a home of his own', Willard wrote, 'you build an iron curtain between him and the collectivists of all shades'. USAF General Charles Cabell, acting director in Dulles's temporary absence, wrote back enthusiastically: 'I read with keen interest your ideas for fighting communist economic subversion.' Cabell called Garvey's proposals 'a bold and challenging concept that should be examined by those governmental and private groups concerned with the US response to the Communist economic subversion threat'. The exchange concluded with Cabell's promise to bring this plan to Dulles's attention when the director returned.<sup>154</sup>

The archival record is silent on further contacts with Dulles, but Garvey went on to set up low-cost housing projects around the world, exactly as he had proposed in his 1958 letter. On his return to the US from his various dealings around the globe, Garvey would be debriefed by CIA officers. Throughout the 1960s, Garvey somehow managed to get involved in a string of USAID-backed ventures<sup>155</sup> in countries that were of great interest to the CIA, so these debriefings must have been lengthy and detailed, as well as fairly frequent.<sup>156</sup>

Garvey and his business associates were keen admirers of Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* and Friedrich Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*. So they were also greatly impressed with Oliver's *New Constitution* booklet, and started casting around for unclaimed land for a new country. In 1970, Willard and his team decided on the Minerva Reefs, and started drawing up plans for 'docks, an airport, schools, hospitals, office space, retail areas, utilities and recreation areas', envisioning an eventual population of some 25,000 people. It was only at this stage – Garvey's biographer states – that Michael Oliver was brought in to provide the constitutional brains for the operation. Oliver also allegedly 'brought in new cohorts, including a mystery man believed to be a one-time international mercenary'.<sup>157</sup> This may or may not have had a significant

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<sup>153</sup> McEnaney (see note 151) pp. 181–185.

<sup>154</sup> See <<https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP80B01676R003800070016-9.pdf>>.

<sup>155</sup> McEnaney (see note 151) pp. 168–174.

<sup>156</sup> McEnaney pp. 174–178, cites Garvey's entanglements in Peru and Bolivia, both times when each country was undergoing a revolutionary coup, and an enduring involvement in Mexico, a country never far from the minds of Washington DC.

<sup>157</sup> McEnaney pp. 189–190.

influence on what happened next.

## The Plots of Abaco

In May 1974, Michael Oliver organised a private conference, over lunch at a prestigious restaurant in Washington DC. Duke Ziebert's, a favourite of the Washington elite, had been frequented by J. Edgar Hoover, Jimmy Hoffa, and Robert F. Kennedy, although rarely at the same time.<sup>158</sup> Among the attendees at Oliver's gathering were two former CIA officers: John Muldoon (1937–1992) and Walter Mackem (b. 1937),<sup>159</sup> both of whom were veterans of the CIA's Phoenix Program in Vietnam.<sup>160</sup> The meeting was convened to discuss plans to forcibly establish a libertarian state in the Bahamas. It was the latest iteration of Oliver's dreams of a new country.<sup>161</sup> Oliver told attendees:

The point is that the republic of Abaco will be, first of all, a moral experiment, a place where we'll try to keep individual freedom alive even if it doesn't survive in America.<sup>162</sup>

It was an unmistakably Nockian plan to preserve a 'Remnant'. At the time, the Bahamas were still subject to British rule, but Bahamian prime minister Lynden Pindling had announced his intention to declare independence. Although Pindling had won a mandate for his plans at a general election in September

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<sup>158</sup> WTOP News, 6 September 2018. See <<https://shorturl.at/CpXu4>> or <<https://wtop.com/dc/2018/09/duke-zeiberts-dominion-how-an-iconic-restaurant-brought-old-dc-together/>>.

A fascinating titbit here is that Henry Kissinger seems to have been in the habit of using the restaurant's phones to make sensitive cutout calls. *Washingtonian* 8 September 2013. See <<https://www.washingtonian.com/2013/11/08/taste-of-the-60s-chef-who/>>.

<sup>159</sup> Walter Mackem was still alive and living in Arlington, Virginia, as of the most recent available public record.

<sup>160</sup> A description of Muldoon's activities in Vietnam was published in *Counterpunch*, 15 May 2004. See <<https://shorturl.at/Gd2Ew>> or <<https://www.counterpunch.org/2004/05/15/abcs-of-american-interrogation-methods/>>.

<sup>161</sup> A third ex-CIA man at the meeting, Theodore 'Ted' Roussos (b. 1919), dropped out of the discussions the following day, which makes it seem as though he might have attended purely in order to gather information for some other undisclosed purpose.

<sup>162</sup> Craib (see note 149) p. 114.



1972, a majority of the votes cast by Abaco's approximately 6,500 citizens were in favour of parties opposing Bahamian secession. An anti-independence movement therefore formed, and petitioned Queen Elizabeth II to retain Abaco as a Crown Colony. With Britain allowing its imperial residue to fragment naturally, the Abaconian petition was predictably ignored. Michael Oliver's pipe dreams about a new libertarian state therefore seemed to represent a viable 'Plan B'. When a final date was set for Bahamian independence (10 July 1973), the anti-independence movement morphed into an active counter-secession. Oliver agreed to finance a new political group, the Abaconian Independence Movement. This was led by an islander called Chuck Hall, who agreed that he and his colleagues would work among the island's general population to popularise Oliver's constitution.<sup>163</sup>

The plan drawn up by the 1974 Washington restaurant meeting attendees was simple. Abaco's interior measures some 500,000 acres (2,009 km<sup>2</sup>). This land would be privatised if the libertarian state was successfully established.

Each Abaconian citizen would receive an acre plot of land to use however they liked. The vast area of remaining land would be used for development, creating an offshore tax-free commercial resort, with a heavy emphasis on casinos and other forms of gambling.

Co-chairing Oliver's informal meeting was a former Office of Strategic Services (OSS) man, Mitchell WerBell III, a semi-legendary character from the depths of the underground world of arms dealing, gun-running, and anti-communist mercenarism.



Mitch Werbell

WerBell, the son of a Tsarist military officer who had emigrated to the US after the 1917 Russian revolution, had been in the OSS during the Second World War, and then struck out on his own in peacetime. In the 1950s WerBell undertook covert work for the Cuban dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. By the 1960s, WerBell's client portfolio included Antonio Imbert Barrera, sometime president of the civil war-struck Dominican Republic. In 1966, WerBell led a bizarre and unsuccessful CBS-sponsored attempt to invade Haiti and overthrow Papa Doc Duvalier, in order to establish a base for

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<sup>163</sup> For a general history of the Abaconian counter-secession movement, see Rick Lowe, *Forgotten Dreams: A People's Desire to Chart Their Own Course on Abaco, Bahamas* (part 2); Nassau Institute, 2010. See <<https://shorturl.at/nUtXK>> or <<https://www.nassauinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/Forgotten-Dreams-July-2010.pdf>>.

attacking Cuba.<sup>164</sup> Whether the Haiti scheme was really funded and/or inspired by US intelligence is an open question. WerBell and his accomplices were indicted in the US, but the case against WerBell was dropped before it could get to trial, due to the apparent involvement of an unidentified intelligence agency.<sup>165</sup> Throughout the 1960s, WerBell was also flying back and forth and inserting himself into the US misadventure in Vietnam. In the brief interlude between the end of the Minerva Republic project and the start of the Bahamian plan, WerBell managed to become involved in an attempt to overthrow the Panamanian dictator Omar Torrijos.

WerBell was also rumoured to have had some minor role in the 1963 assassination of US president John F. Kennedy. The CIA man-cum-mercenary Gerry Patrick Hemming, whose career repeatedly strayed into the fringes of Kennedy assassination theories, stated publicly that any serious investigation into the murder would have sought WerBell for questioning.<sup>166</sup> In 1977, House Select Committee on Assassinations researcher Gaeton Fonzi looked into Florida's 1960s Cuban exile underworld, and arrived at a similar conclusion to Hemming's.<sup>167</sup>

WerBell was training the necessary troops to support the Abaconian coup, at his extensive farm compound in Powder Springs, Georgia. There, WerBell had established a training facility called SIONICS, which stood for Studies In Operational Negation Insurgency and Counter-Subversion. Mercenaries attended WerBell's annual courses to improve their existing skills and learn new ways of killing. A large proportion of WerBell's students were veterans from the Vietnam War, who had found themselves unable to return successfully to civilian life and decided to carry on as soldiers of fortune.<sup>168</sup> Since the SIONICS school was also a regular haunt of CIA officers, who kept up-to-date with WerBell's weaponry research, the training ground must have also served, at times, as a paramilitary recruitment nexus. Details of these connections are understandably obscure. WerBell's firearms research and development

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<sup>164</sup> *Washington Star*, 26 February 1970. See <<https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP72-00337R000200050008-4.pdf>>.

<sup>165</sup> Federal indictment, dated 23 February 1967. See <[https://cuban-exile.com/doc\\_101-125/doc0121.html](https://cuban-exile.com/doc_101-125/doc0121.html)>.

<sup>166</sup> *Lancer* conference, partial transcript, November 1996. See <[https://cuban-exile.com/doc\\_426-450/doc0439.html](https://cuban-exile.com/doc_426-450/doc0439.html)>.

<sup>167</sup> Gaeton Fonzi, *Miami Witnesses*. House Select Committee on Assassinations, 10 May 1977; reference 015107; p. 20. See <<https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/releases/docid-32262517.pdf>>.

<sup>168</sup> Craib (see note 149) pp. 108–109.

concentrated on advanced silencers, for everything from pistols to machine guns. His suppressors were regarded as the best in the world, and had earned him the dark nickname 'The Wizard of Whispering Death'. WerBell ran SIONICS with the financial backing of unidentified figures in the USA's southern former Confederate states, who evidently had their own reasons for training and recruiting off-the-books soldiers.<sup>169</sup>

It is not known how Michael Oliver and Mitchell WerBell had joined forces by 1974. In the absence of any other obvious candidates, it seems likely that WerBell was the mysterious 'international mercenary' peripherally involved in the Minerva Project (see page 42 above). Even if that were so, it just pushes the unanswered question of the Oliver-WerBell relationship further back in time. The more likely explanation is that Oliver and WerBell had originally been brought into contact by Kansan tycoon Willard Garvey, who (as discussed) already had CIA connections and extensive interests in Latin America. On this reading, WerBell would probably also have drawn in the semi-detached CIA attendees who were seated around Oliver at the Washington restaurant table.

Another clue that Willard W. Garvey was lurking in the shadows of the Abaco scheme is the fact that one of Garvey's co-investors to Oliver's failed Minerva project had been the American-born financier and philanthropist Sir John Templeton. Sir John had renounced his US citizenship in the 1960s and moved to the Bahamas, precisely to minimise his tax bills. While Garvey and Oliver were examining the Pacific Ocean for unclaimed land on which to found the libertarian Republic of Minerva, Sir John was naturally tasked with looking for sites to the East of the US.<sup>170</sup> The presence in the Bahamas of an extremely wealthy and tax-shy Garvey associate is therefore inherently unlikely to have been coincidental for the libertarian Abaco scheme.

## **Neo-colonial dreams**

Also present at the 1974 Washington restaurant conference was the British peer, Robert Hamilton, 14th Baron of Belhaven and Stenton (1927–2020).<sup>171</sup> Hamilton's presence is something of a mystery. His established interest in Abaco was the fact that in 1971, when the 6,500 people of Abaco realised they were about to be granted independence, they had petitioned the UK Government, seeking to retain their status as a British colony. The petition was

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<sup>169</sup> Craib (see note 149) p. 109.

<sup>170</sup> McEnaney (see note 151) pp. 188-189.

<sup>171</sup> Obituary, *Daily Telegraph*, 17 February 2021. See <<https://shorturl.at/ZxuKC>> or <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/obituaries/2021/02/17/13th-lord-belhaven-stenton-politician-farmer-champion-polish/>>.

ignored. Hamilton thought this disgraceful and denounced it in Parliament. He attempted to amend the Bahamas Independence Bill so that Abaco would become a Crown Dependency instead.<sup>172</sup>

It is not at all clear why Hamilton might have thought that a scheme for Abaco to secede from the Bahamas and become a self-governing libertarian enclave would have had any relevance to Britain. Nevertheless, there does seem to have been a lingering official British connection to Abaco after independence. In August 1974, three months after the Washington restaurant meeting, the CIA's Associate Deputy Director of Operations, David H. Blee, informed the FBI that the Bahamian government was receiving information about WerBell's schemes from 'the British MI-5 operative in Washington D.C'.<sup>173</sup>

WerBell had turned up in England in 1973, the year before the Washington meeting, evidently scouting for soldiers of fortune. He arrived in London accompanied by a somewhat shady lawyer called Edwin Marger<sup>174</sup> and met with at least two Members of Parliament. One of the MPs was Robert Maclennan (1936–2020), who recalled the duo expressing 'what one can only call sinister sentiments. One of them said that he had come "looking for special personnel for a special situation".' Maclennan added: '[O]ne must hope that these are threats that will not be carried out. But Her Majesty's Government are presumably well aware of these facts and are watching that situation with considerable attention.'

The other MP who met WerBell was Lieutenant-Colonel Colin Mitchell, who said 'There is no doubt that when people talk in rather wild terms one immediately takes a responsible attitude. I have counselled restraint . . .' In terms of WerBell's incendiary ideas, Mitchell used the House of Commons to announce that 'It would be unrealistic to think of anyone in this country interfering in that way between now and 10th July.' [1973, meaning Abaconian independence day.] However, whereas Maclennan had said WerBell was accompanied by Edwin Marger, Lt-Col Mitchell identified WerBell's companion

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<sup>172</sup> E.g. Hansard House of Lords Debate (7 June 1973), vol. 343, cols. 223 to 230. See <<https://shorturl.at/K4CHw>> or <<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/1973-06-07/debates/35d4b046-940e-42a1-897a-67381826dc81/BahamasIndependenceBill>>.

<sup>173</sup> David H. Blee: Memorandum, Central Intelligence Agency. undated. See <<https://documents3.theblackvault.com/documents/jfkfiles/jfk2025/104-10182-10072.pdf>> (p. 59).

<sup>174</sup> Born 1929, died 2017. Obituary at <<https://www.margerstuartlaw.com/law-firm/attorney-edwin-marger.html>>. From his listed activities on behalf of Papa Doc Duvalier, it is not hard to imagine how Marger came to know WerBell.

as 'Mr. Hall, an Abaconian, whose family has lived there for 200 years.'<sup>175</sup> This can only be Chuck Hall, the counter-secessionist behind the Abaconian Independence Movement (see page 43 above).

MacLennan had clearly been hoping to ensure that the Government was tipped off, and perhaps also to alert the British media to WerBell's machinations. It certainly seems that the UK Government was keeping a watch on WerBell. MI5 had already noticed WerBell's and Marger's presence in London, and had made a request (via the US Embassy in London) for FBI information on the two men.<sup>176</sup> By the end of August, the FBI had opened three separate case files on WerBell's Abaconian interests, titled: 'Edwin Marger; Mitchell WerBell IS – Great Britain'; 'UNSUBS Revolutionary groups on Abaco Island – IS Revolutionary activities'; and 'Mitchell Livingston Werbell III; Edwin Marger – Bahamas IS Neutrality matter'.<sup>177</sup>

Lt-Col Mitchell's attitude is less easy to make out. A month after his remarks in Parliament, he visited Abaco in person on a 'fact-finding mission' with WerBell. The only explanation offered to the curious local media was the time-honoured Cold War catch-all excuse about 'preventing a communist takeover'.<sup>178</sup>

Lt-Col Mitchell's name was raised again a year later, at another, more private conference of the Abaconian plotters. This was held at a branch of the Grammercy Inn hotel in Washington DC, on the night of 12 to 13 June 1974, so a month after the restaurant meeting. The core participants were again, Mitchell WerBell, John Muldoon, Michael Oliver, and Lord Belhaven (on this occasion, joined by Lady Belhaven). A pair of executives from a holiday resort chain joined the meeting after midnight, apparently invited along by WerBell to

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<sup>175</sup> *Hansard HC Deb.* (15 May 1973). vol. 856 cols. 1410 to 1415. See <<https://shorturl.at/c9Vwi>> or <<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1973-05-15/debates/5f8d986d-ea67-40af-8e74-eb9936b93f24/BahamasIndependenceBill>>.

<sup>176</sup> US Embassy teletype, dated 30 April 1973. See <<https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/releases/docid-32340528.pdf>>.

<sup>177</sup> FBI Teletype, Atlanta Office to Washington, 30 August 1973, page 7. See <<https://shorturl.at/D89ry>> or <<https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/releases/docid-32335531.pdf?ref=rockislandauction.com>>. 'UNSUBS' is the FBI abbreviation for 'Unidentified subject/s' (meaning individuals) and 'IS' is the abbreviation for 'Internal Security' (meaning US national security). The remaining pages of this document give a fair idea of what the FBI might have told MI5 about, in response to MI5's request in April (see footnote 174 above).

<sup>178</sup> *The Virgin Islands Daily News*, 23 June 1973. See <<https://shorturl.at/Rd9rt>> or <<https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=757&dat=19730623&id=ZDMwAAAAIBAJ&sjid=mkQDAAAIBAJ&pg=6375,5621052>>.

hear about the commercial opportunities his plan would create. WerBell was asked about rumours of weaponry being smuggled into Abaco, and denied it, saying 'everything was above board'. This time, Lt-Colonel Mitchell's name was mentioned as someone who was involved in organising a plebiscite on Abaco, to be held on 28 June.<sup>179</sup>

An FBI interviewer would later note:

In conclusion, Muldoon stated that WerBell III, Lord Bellehaven, [sic] Oliver, et al, were convinced, at least in their own minds, that if independence was gained by Abaco, they would actually run the country.<sup>180</sup>

## Open-ey'd conspiracy

The Abaconian plebiscite supposedly scheduled for 28 June 1974 never happened, and the plan for a Libertarian Abaco fell apart in unclear circumstances. As result of the late-night Grammercy Inn meeting, John Muldoon decided there was a gun-running operation afoot, got cold feet, and reported the Abaco plotters to the CIA the next day (14 June 1974). The



Lucien Conein

ripples from the break-up lapped at the door of the White House itself. A private investigator called Steve Van Cleave (from Georgia, WerBell's home state) had walked in on a corporate meeting at the headquarters of a security consultancy in Washington,<sup>181</sup> at which WerBell was discussing the Abaco counter-secession scheme. What Van Cleave heard is unknown, but he was so alarmed that he immediately phoned a contact to warn him off.

That contact was Lucien Conein, the legendary OSS/CIA officer who had been instrumental in arranging the South Vietnamese coup of November 1963. At the time, Conein (1919–1988) was the head of covert operations at the Drug Enforcement

<sup>179</sup> FBI memorandum, undated, reference number 62-108 665-NR, pages 5, 7, and 13. See <<https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/releases/docid-32340477.pdf>>.

<sup>180</sup> FBI memorandum, undated, of interview with John Muldoon conducted 16 and 17 October 1974, reference number 62-108 665-NR, page 12. See <<https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/releases/docid-32340477.pdf>>.

<sup>181</sup> From the narrative outlined in the FBI Atlanta Office teletype of 30 August 1973, it can be inferred that Van Cleave was a Bureau informant and probably keeping a watch on WerBell. (See note 177 above.)

Agency, having been appointed to that position by President Richard Nixon in 1972.<sup>182</sup> Steve Van Cleave warned Conein that if he was involved in WerBell's Abaconian project, he should get out immediately because 'there was going to be trouble'.

Conein, in turn, immediately passed the warning along to WerBell's fellow Abaco plotter, the ex-CIA officer John Muldoon.<sup>183</sup> Conein was a personal friend of Mitchell WerBell's, having worked as part of the same OSS team (Detachment 202) in China during the Second World War, along with later Nixon White House 'plumber' E. Howard Hunt. It was Conein who had originally introduced Muldoon to WerBell in 1973, in the early stages of the Abaconian skulduggery.

After Conein had passed along Van Cleave's warning, Muldoon drew the conclusion that WerBell's plotting was under investigation by the Justice Department, presumably meaning the FBI. Muldoon told the CIA he pulled out of the Abaco project on 18 June 1974. The cautious libertarian visionary Michael Oliver himself abandoned the Abaco scheme at about the same time, seemingly tipped off by Muldoon. The look of all this is that there was considerably more to the Abaco independence conspiracy than was ever made public. The initial involvement of Lucien Conein and the later seeming non-sequitur of Van Cleave's warning phone call to him (and then of Conein's subsequent tip-off to John Muldoon) very strongly suggests that there was a degree of arm's-length government involvement. A US-aligned quasi-libertarian state in the Bahamas, offering a supposedly neutral geostrategic staging post for Florida-launched operations against communist Cuba, would have been an enticing prospect for many in the Nixon White House.

## **Re-pioneering**

Michael Oliver's attempts to establish a new country continued on and off for two decades. In the Azores in the 1980s, he and his various accomplices backed guerrilla insurgents who wanted to break away from Portugal. In the New Hebrides, the plan was to implement the new country in the power vacuum left by the new independence of the island of Vanuatu, a project which eventually fizzled out in the 1990s. Minerva and Abaco were as close as Oliver and his scheming associates ever got to creating the new libertarian homeland of their dreams.

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<sup>182</sup> NB that the Drug Enforcement Agency is a sub-body of the Department of State, and not to be confused with the Drug Enforcement Administration, created in 1973.

<sup>183</sup> FBI memorandum, undated, of interview with John Muldoon conducted 16 and 17 October 1974, reference number 62-108 665-NR, pp. 8 and 9. See <<https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/releases/docid-32340477.pdf>>.

In 2001, American libertarians set out in a new direction. Since there was clearly a dearth of unclaimed territory elsewhere on the planet, they would colonise (or re-colonise) the state of New Hampshire. The state itself was a highly symbolic choice. New Hampshire (state motto: 'Live free, or die') was the first of the 13 colonies to reject British rule and declare statehood, which it did in February 1776, thus beating the Declaration of Independence by five months.<sup>184</sup> From a practical point of view, New Hampshire's sense of its own history makes it something of a bastion against centralised power. The state levies no income tax, no sales taxes, no capital gains taxes, and has stubbornly even refused to pass laws requiring motorists or passengers to use seatbelts in cars. In an exuberant expression of the country's gun culture, it is also the state with the highest per capita private ownership of machine guns.

The Free State Project aimed to tap into this truculent disposition, with

'a plan by which a critical mass of libertarian voters relocate to an underpopulated state and electorally take control of the state government. From there we not only eradicate authoritarian state laws, but slowly wean ourselves off of federal control, until we are satisfied or possibly secede. Our goal is to get 20,000 freedom minded men and women to join the movement'

The project's founder, Yale student Jason Sorens, wrote:

But didn't we fight a war over secession almost 150 years ago? Wouldn't the feds just send in the troops to crush our little experiment? The answer, in short, is no. In 'modern, democratic' countries the use of violence against legal secessionist movements is out of the question. [...] Indeed, the U.S. has militarily attacked countries for the way in which they treated separatist insurgencies. If the fedgov tried to go Milosevic on us free-staters, [sic] how would that look? The key is that we need to pursue secession within the political system, electorally.<sup>185</sup>

Within a decade, the 'Free Staters' were making their mark, and holding public pitchfork-throwing contests<sup>186</sup> and annual flag-burning protests against the

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<sup>184</sup> Constitution of New Hampshire, 5 January 1776. See <[https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/nh09.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/nh09.asp)>.

<sup>185</sup> Jason Sorens, 'Announcement: The Free State Project', *The Libertarian Enterprise*, Number 131, 23 July 2001. See <<https://mail.ncc-1776.org/tle2001/libe131-20010723-03.html>>.

<sup>186</sup> *RidleyReport*, YouTube.com, 1 July 2008. See <<https://youtu.be/lxyCB2ADu8E>>, archived at <<https://archive.org/details/ridley-report-grafton-nh-pitchfork-throwing-contest>>.

insidious force of the United Nations.<sup>187</sup> There was talk of taking New Hampshire out of the USA<sup>188</sup> and inviting the presidents of independent former Soviet states as dignitaries to lend prestige to this secession campaign.<sup>189</sup> The Free Staters began to describe themselves as 'a society within a society', and boasted about replacing New Hampshire's traditional government with their own innovations, such as a substitute emergency services line by which citizens could call upon the public for help instead of the police or firefighters,<sup>190</sup> although there was also talk of abolishing the state's prisons.<sup>191</sup>

Insofar as it was hated by left-wing and right-wing politicians, and most of the general public, the Free State Project was a unifying force. One of the state's Republican Party elected representatives told the Free Staters that cutting, defunding, and shrinking the government had practical limits, and that libertarian aims would be unsuccessful in the long run.<sup>192</sup> One of the state's Democratic Party senators told the influx of New Hampshire libertarians: 'You're really not escaping. You're invading. And your goal is to, because you know best, to take over New Hampshire.'<sup>193</sup>

Within New Hampshire itself, the experiment was focused upon the town of Grafton, which was to serve as a Petri dish for growing a libertarian culture to spread across the state: 'A New Hampshire within New Hampshire.' The Free

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<sup>187</sup> YouTube.com, 21 December 2009. See <<https://youtu.be/6yMJ2Mju29U>>, archived at <<https://archive.org/details/ridley-report-new-hampshirites-torch-un-flag>>.

<sup>188</sup> *RidleyReport*, YouTube.com 25 December 2012. See <<https://youtu.be/sncbOUNCIL>>, archived at <<https://archive.org/details/ridley-report-nh-secession-bill-is-within-your-power-to-instigate>>.

<sup>189</sup> *RidleyReport*, YouTube.com, 14 May 2013. See <<https://youtu.be/UT7hLjrsLV8>>, archived at <<https://shorturl.at/OVrZ2>> or <<https://archive.org/details/ridley-report-free-staters-should-host-president-of-seceded-country>>.

<sup>190</sup> *RidleyReport*, YouTube.com, 2 September 2015, See <<https://youtu.be/KHhsbD65tpo>>, archived at <<https://shorturl.at/iS24Q>> or <<https://archive.org/details/ridley-report-are-free-staters-becoming-a-nation-within-a-nation>>.

<sup>191</sup> *RidleyReport*, YouTube.com, 29 March 2012. See <<https://youtu.be/mAefpwxHTsc>>, archived at <<https://archive.org/details/ridley-report-free-stater-questions-jailing-killers>>.

<sup>192</sup> *RidleyReport*, YouTube.com, 16 October 2014. See <<https://youtu.be/FxPpShCEteM>>, archived at <<https://archive.org/details/ridley-report-free-staters-will-fail-says-bedford-republican>>.

<sup>193</sup> *RidleyReport*, YouTube.com, 9 March 2013. See <<https://youtu.be/EU4wKVYK7iI>>, commencing at 1 minute, 37 seconds. Archived at <<https://archive.org/details/ridley-report-politician-free-staters-are-invading-new-hampshire>>

Town Project used social media to issue general invitations for 'immigrants'<sup>194</sup> and talked of setting up an independent embassy to welcome curious visitors from the unfree outside world.<sup>195</sup>

Where the Free State Project was large and vague, the Free Town Project was compact and simple. It was also rooted in a romantic conception of American frontier history. The town of Grafton's jurisdiction covered 46 square miles and, with a population of just 1,229, it had 'far more land than people, [so] plenty of plots were available for would-be homesteaders'.<sup>196</sup> Founded and settled soon after the American Revolution, Grafton also had a venerable history of tax resistance. Grafton had voted against funding a militia in the late 1700s (in defiance of the founding fathers' explicit constitutional warning about the need for such forces), and in the 1800s declared a tax-free year for residents whenever town revenues showed a surplus. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the town had decided against funding the construction of both a fire station and a police station, with predictably dire and sometimes fatal consequences.<sup>197</sup>

In February 2004, a van carrying a small 'landing party' of libertarian colonists arrived in Grafton. They were there to meet John Babiarcz, a Libertarian Party member who had twice stood unsuccessfully for election as state governor, and who was by now advising the state's elected governor on how to make efficiency savings.<sup>198</sup> Babiarcz's four visitors were a businessman, a lawyer, a software engineer, and a former Florida health department worker who had been convicted for possessing child pornography.<sup>199</sup> They had no formal manifesto, but a clear mission statement:

The Free Town Project intends to liberate either a New Hampshire Town, or a Western County, by moving in enough Libertarians to control the

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<sup>194</sup> *RidleyReport*, YouTube.com, 9 September 2012. See <<https://youtu.be/ng0ZqQI9L8s>>, archived at <<https://archive.org/details/ridley-report-graftonites-continue-recruiting-immigrants>>.

<sup>195</sup> *RidleyReport*, YouTube.com, 4 September 2012. See <<https://youtu.be/bpBkYbjBcIc>>, archived at <<https://archive.org/details/ridley-report-grafton-embassy-gives-nh-visitors-base>>

<sup>196</sup> Matthew Hongoltz-Hetling, *A Libertarian Walks Into a Bear* (New York: Hachette Books, 2020), p. 33.

<sup>197</sup> Hongoltz-Hetling pp. 84–85

<sup>198</sup> Biographical details from Babiarcz campaign website, 2005. See <<https://www.johnbabiarz.com/john-babiarz-about>>.

<sup>199</sup> His convictions had been struck out because a malicious prosecutor during his trial had written the word 'pervert' on a piece of evidence that was shown to the jury.

local Government and remove oppressive Regulations (such as Planning & Zoning, and Building Code requirements) and stop enforcement of Laws prohibiting Victimless Acts among Consenting Adults, such as Dueling, Gambling, Incest, Price-Gouging, Cannibalism, [. . .] Drug Trafficking, Prostitution, Obscenity, Organ Trafficking, BumFights, and other Victimless 'Crimes'.<sup>200</sup>

The Grafton libertarians set about infiltrating the town's governance, by packing town meetings with stooges and proposing popular votes on pet subjects. One such vote cut 30 per cent from the town's annual budget. Another denied funding to the local senior citizens' council. A vote to abolish the town planning board failed,<sup>201</sup> so the libertarians managed to get their friends elected to the board and stymie it from within, progressively cutting its budget from \$2,000 to \$500 and ultimately to just \$50. The libertarians managed to persuade Grafton residents to block the purchase of \$40,000-worth of road resurfacing material, and the town ended up with potholes full of flourishing vegetation and both town bridges being declared dangerous.<sup>202</sup> A methamphetamine laboratory was discovered and closed down; registered sex offenders gravitated to the town until they constituted one in every 60 town residents; and Grafton experienced its first murder in generations when a libertarian shot two housemates who had accused him of 'freeloading'.<sup>203</sup> Meanwhile, the American frontier started closing in to overgrow the unravelling town, bringing with it a plague of black bears, who were attracted by the uncollected garbage and by residents who unwisely claimed their natural right to enjoy feeding the local wildlife.

The town's annual deliberative session in February 2015, which lasted almost 11 hours due to disruption by local libertarians, provides a snapshot of the Free Town Project's attitude and tactics. The session's moderator ruled at the outset that the town budget would have to be voted on at the start of the session. The usual arrangement of holding the vote at the end of the meeting had inspired libertarians to obstruct and prolong the previous year's session so much that the voting would be done when the regular townsfolk had all gone home so that only attendees from the Free Town Project would be left to vote on all the decisions. So the first thing the libertarians did at 2015's meeting

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<sup>200</sup> Free Town Project website, 2002. See <<http://freetownproject.com/>> (Page deleted, archive only. See capture dated 23 June 2004.)

<sup>201</sup> Hongoltz-Hetling (see note 196) p. 70.

<sup>202</sup> Hongoltz-Hetling p. 80.

<sup>203</sup> Hongoltz-Hetling p. 84.

was try to depose the moderator, by demanding a temporary replacement. The motion's proposer chided the moderator: 'Last year, you were unable to control the proceedings.' Someone else, who obviously remembered the chaos the libertarians had caused, shouted out: 'I wonder why she wasn't able to control it?'<sup>204</sup> With the moderator unmoved and unbowed, the libertarians then insisted on scrutinising the town budget line by line. When that failed, they insisted on scrutinising expenditure department by department. A town clerk interjected to tell the moderator that further interruptions of this kind should result in the speaker being ejected from the meeting for disorderly conduct. By this stage, the meeting had been in progress for over two hours and nothing whatsoever had been accomplished.<sup>205</sup> When a town clerk informed the libertarians that the session was to approve or reject the budget, not scrutinise it,<sup>206</sup> the libertarians tried to vote it down. When that didn't work, they put forward a motion to cut the budget by 20 per cent. When that failed, they tried to propose another motion to cut it by ten per cent. The moderator almost broke down in tears, as she explained that she had taken up her role in the hope she could bring the town together and improve people's lives.<sup>207</sup> After three and a half hours, one libertarian (named Brian Fellers) tried to take control of the microphone and was told to leave. He did so immediately, probably because he had recently been convicted for disorderly conduct at the previous year's meeting, and was still trying to appeal his sentence.<sup>208</sup> The last six hours of the meeting were taken up with laboriously going through all the proposals the libertarians had submitted before the meeting in the hope of making the meeting itself overrun.

One of the Grafton libertarians, Bob 'Weeda Claus' Constantine, later fulminated that he attended the meeting in an 'attempt to reduce the theft and rattle my chains, well aware of my forced subservient position within the

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<sup>204</sup> Grafton Deliberative Session, 7 February 2015 (part 1). See <<https://youtu.be/wd0mplHj-54>>, commencing at 5 minutes, 40 seconds. Archived at <<https://archive.org/details/grafton-deliberative-session-2015-1-of-7>>.

<sup>205</sup> Grafton Deliberative Session, 7 February 2015 (part 2). See <[https://youtu.be/6Qg0\\_Us0lnw](https://youtu.be/6Qg0_Us0lnw)>, commencing at 38 minutes and 25 seconds. Archived at <<https://archive.org/details/grafton-deliberative-session-2015-2-of-7>>.

<sup>206</sup> Grafton Deliberative Session (part 2). See note 207 above, commencing at 43 minutes and 20 seconds.

<sup>207</sup> Grafton Deliberative Session (part 2). See Note 207 above, commencing at 1 hour, 7 minutes, 30 seconds.

<sup>208</sup> Grafton Deliberative Session (part 3). See <<https://youtu.be/iUDkUhRGuOs>>, commencing at 25 minutes. Archived at <<https://archive.org/details/grafton-deliberative-session-2015-3-of-7>>.

coercive government food chain', adding: 'Plus I know they'll steal my home if I don't pay their ransom.'<sup>209</sup> Constantine mocked the meeting as 'powerless to affect or implement the sentiments expressed, caught as they are in a top down coercive system and also being obedient, sychophantic [sic] minions of their overlords'.<sup>210</sup>

The Grafton Deliberative Session was not any kind of council or government meeting, simply a 'direct democracy' event for townspeople to have their say on the town's finances. All this budgetary sabotage by the Free Town Project libertarians was intended solely to prevent their neighbours from indirectly approving a funding increase for local services that would have caused local property taxes to rise by 0.024 per cent.

In 2016, the New Hampshire Free State Project announced that it had met its target of 20,000 would-be participants.<sup>211</sup> The Free Town Project was quietly abandoned in a cloud of recriminations, as libertarian supporters of the Free State Project slowly began to move into New Hampshire's other towns to settle the state. At the time of publication, an estimated 7,000 New State Project 'settlers' have arrived, and more than 20 elected Free State Project participants sit in the state legislature. Although they are far from exercising control, Free State Project votes are valuable for the Republican Party bloc and so the latter proposes measures that are somewhat tailored to the former. In a classic instance of libertarian hyperbole, the Free State Project takes direct credit for a series of state government decisions, including 'Constitutional Carry' (the right to carry firearms without a permit, whether concealed or openly), expanded rights for parents who homeschool their children, and, inevitably, slashing the overall state budget by 11 per cent, with consequent savings for taxpayers.

## **Meta-homesteading**

While the Free Town Project in New Hampshire was still in progress, other

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<sup>209</sup> The nickname is from his habit of dressing up as a sort of psychedelic Santa and holding provocative one-man pro-marijuana protests, which is not unrelated to his arrest in 2009 for cultivating marijuana at his Grafton home. *The Boston Phoenix*, 15 December 2010. See <<https://thephoenix.com/boston/life/112911-here-comes-weeda-claus/>>.

<sup>210</sup> *Free Keene*, 19 February 2015. See <<https://freekeene.com/2015/02/19/weeda-claus-reports-from-grafton-deliberative-session/>>. *Free Keene* is a blog run by libertarians who were at the time attempting to take over another town in New Hampshire.

<sup>211</sup> Free State Project, 3 February 2016. See <<https://shorturl.at/qK12o>> or <<https://freestateproject.org/blogs/free-state-project-officially-announces-20000-signers-100-reached>>.

libertarian enclaves and colonies were being concocted and attempted. The Texan town of Von Ormy (population approximately 1,000) decided to incorporate as a 'Liberty City' in 2006, even though that label just meant municipal incorporation to prevent Von Ormy from being engulfed by the expanding nearby city of San Antonio. The townspeople of Von Ormy had been sold a dream of low tax and minimal government, by a right-wing law graduate called Art Martinez de Vara, who became the newly-incorporated town's first mayor in 2008. Property taxes were cut by ten per cent each year, but the plan to increase the town's prosperity by inviting major businesses to the area failed, because Von Ormy had no waste water system and still relied on septic tanks. After just two years of tax cuts, Von Ormy's roads were crumbling and disintegrating in the Texan heat, its volunteer fire service had been disbanded due to lack of donations, and its struggling police force had its accreditation revoked, reducing its officers to semi-official vigilante status.<sup>212</sup>

These and similar fin de siècle Libertarian projects were an inevitable expression of a feature of American life that was already becoming increasingly dominant. The urban fortress mentality was a relic of the earliest pioneering days, when colonists such as those at Roanoke (1585), Jamestown (1607), and Plymouth (1620) built walls around themselves to keep out natural predators and angry indigenous Indians. There were also gated communities throughout the antebellum and postbellum USA, although mainly for mutual aid and protection against criminals and bandits. It was not until the 1980s, when Reaganite neoliberal economics began to widen the gulf between the wealthiest and poorest, that gated communities started to proliferate.<sup>213</sup> Faced with increasing inequality and the concomitant fear of crime, the well-off began retreating into private worlds.

During the 1980s, these private worlds were mostly luxury compounds and condominiums, for rich retirees. Throughout the 1990s, as the concept went mainstream, similar but less-unaffordable projects began to proliferate, and the popular association with retirement homes was gradually forgotten. In 1995, an estimated four million Americans lived in gated communities. By 1997, it was eight million. By 1998 it had doubled again, to 16 million. By the time the American Housing Survey stopped measuring the gated community phenomenon, in 2015, an estimated 30 million Americans lived in these semi-secluded microcosms. In some senses, this post Cold War transformation

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<sup>212</sup> *The Texas Observer*, 31 July 2017. See <<https://www.texasobserver.org/the-rise-and-fall-of-the-freest-little-city-in-texas/>>.

<sup>213</sup> Setha Low, *Behind the Gates: Life, Security, and the Pursuit of Happiness in Fortress America* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

vindicated Willard Garvey's vision of making 'every man a capitalist' by means of home ownership.

These voluntary evacuees pay management companies for the upkeep of their chosen refuges, and enter into contracts with private service providers to replace the public services (such as waste collection) that have deliberately been shut out. These internal exiles then protest against what they see as the double taxation that pays for the public services in the world beyond their walls. The sheer number of people living in such enclaves, coupled with their general fiscal dissatisfaction, provides further electoral incentives for politicians offering service-cutting and pro-privatisation policies. As municipal services deteriorate, gated communities begin to look like an attractive option for those living outside them, gradually drawing in more and more of those who can afford the figurative entry fee.<sup>214</sup> In other words, residents in gated communities are discovering libertarian precepts for themselves – if they were not actively seeking them out in the first place. As a former president of the libertarian think tank, the Mises Institute, put it:

Building a libertarian secession movement need not involve mass political organising<sup>215</sup> [...] we should think of secession as something that really begins at home, and it begins more at the individual and local level<sup>216</sup> [...] Our focus should be on hyperlocalised resistance to the federal government, in the form of a bottom-up revolution<sup>217</sup> [...] Politics is a trailing indicator, right? Culture leads; politics follows.<sup>218</sup>

Just as the Russian revolution of 1917 had drawn inspiration from European prototype communal living experiments of the 19<sup>th</sup> and late 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries, the libertarian colonisation of the US in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century had started long before anyone noticed.

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<sup>214</sup> Low (see note 213) p. 17.

<sup>215</sup> Jeff Deinst, 'Breaking Away: The Case for Secession'. Address delivered at the Mises Institute, 24 January 2015. See <<https://mises.org/podcasts/human-action-podcast/jeff-deinst-secession-begins-home>> commencing at six minutes, 10 seconds, archived at <<https://archive.org/details/deinst-secession-begins-at-home>>.

<sup>216</sup> Deinst, commencing at six minutes, 57 seconds.

<sup>217</sup> Deinst commencing at six minutes, 26 seconds.

<sup>218</sup> Deinst, commencing at seven minutes, 59 seconds.

## Part 4 It happens first in Kansas

For decades Americans have experienced a populist uprising that only benefits the people it is supposed to be targeting. In Kansas, we merely see an extreme version of this mysterious situation. The workers, mighty in their numbers, are marching irresistibly against the arrogant [and] bellowing out their terrifying demands. "We are here," they scream, "to cut your taxes."<sup>219</sup>

### Extremism in defence of liberty

Charles Koch (born 1935) is a billionaire businessman and anarchist. The combination of an overbearing father and an inherited fortune left him with a burning desire 'to smash the one thing left in the world that could discipline him: the government'.<sup>220</sup> Koch's preferred vision of society is that of Friedrich Hayek (1899–1992), the Austrian economist who regarded free market economies as more valuable and benevolent than democracy.<sup>221</sup> While a Republican Party supporter by upbringing, Koch was 'incensed' in the early 1970s by President Richard Nixon's unwillingness to undo the agenda of Roosevelt's New Deal, which had expanded under the two successive Democratic Party presidencies of the 1960s. When Nixon had the temerity to interfere in the workings of the free market economy (by e.g. capping oil prices) Koch's rage turned into direct action. With the financial power extracted from his industrial empire, 'Charles Koch set out to dismantle the system for himself.'<sup>222</sup> To this end, Koch – believing strongly in 'the necessity of political subterfuge'<sup>223</sup> – has spent decades building a network of front organisations and well-concealed



Charles Koch

<sup>219</sup> Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004) p. 109.

<sup>220</sup> Jane Mayer, *Dark Money: How a Secretive Group of Billionaires is Trying to Buy Political Control in the US* (London: Scribe Publications, 2016) p. 54.

<sup>221</sup> Christopher Leonard, *Kochland: The Secret History of Koch Industries and Corporate Power in America* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2019) pp. 42-43.

<sup>222</sup> Leonard p. 94.

<sup>223</sup> Mayer (see note 220) p. 54.

funding routes, in order to circumvent democratic scrutiny. All his projects are ultimately designed to push American politics in the direction he wants, which is to not only 'tear the government out at the root'<sup>224</sup> but 'destroy the prevalent statist paradigm'.<sup>225</sup>

Casting around for a means of accomplishing his free market coup, Charles Koch lighted on the tiny US Libertarian Party, which in the early 1970s was 'relatively new and profoundly unpopular'. The attraction for Koch was that the Libertarians 'made the Republicans look like liberals'.<sup>226</sup> He began donating money to the Libertarian Party, declaring that only they could defeat what he called 'rapidly increasing government control over all aspects of our lives'. By this, Koch really meant mostly the environmental legislation introduced by President Nixon, which had imposed extra costs and restrictions on Koch's petrochemical interests. Koch also claimed that he had abandoned the Republican Party for this reason, although much later he would tack back toward the Republicans when he found them useful in pursuing his own agenda. In the early 1970s, issues like Vietnam and Watergate were causing political upheavals, and (in Koch's eyes) the Libertarian Party offered a real political channel for voters to express their opposition to the state. Or rather, a way to channel voters into supporting the demolition of the federal government.

The Libertarian Party had been launched in 1971, and, since it was dominated by those who attained libertarian consciousness in the 1960s, it was permeated with the theories of Ayn Rand. Party founder David Nolan was a devotee of Rand's work, and recalled the early membership as full of people who were 'fans, admirers, students of Ayn Rand'.<sup>227</sup> Rand herself detested the Libertarian Party all the more because of their slavish adulation. 'It's a bad start for a pro-capitalist party to start by stealing ideas', she announced sternly to the audience at one of her public lectures. Libertarian Party members were a 'monstrous, disgusting bunch of people' and the party itself 'a cheap attempt at publicity'.<sup>228</sup> Ostensibly, the philosophical basis of Rand's wrath was the Libertarian Party's decisive anarcho-capitalist stance, which contradicted her own preference for monarchism. It is hard to resist the inference that Rand also resented the party's living political success, which had outshone and now

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<sup>224</sup> Mayer (see note 220) p. 53.

<sup>225</sup> Mayer p. 54.

<sup>226</sup> Leonard (see note 221) p. 113.

<sup>227</sup> Burns (see note 87) pp. 266–267.

<sup>228</sup> Burns p. 268.

attempted to supersede her precious but little-praised objectivism.

The public's mounting disquiet about the Vietnam War proved a fertile recruiting ground for the libertarian cause, since there was considerable overlap between the views of the hippies and the libertarians on the subject. As the dropout slogan had it: 'What if they gave a war and nobody came?'<sup>229</sup> The libertarian magazine *Protos* editorialised in 1970:

The atrocities and evils of the Vietnam war are not the result of Laissez-Faire Capitalism, but of Mixed Economy Fascism [ . . . ] Laissez-Faire explicitly rejects the initiation of force by the government or by any other agent.

Warming to its theme, *Protos* denounced both the US military draft ('that most outrageous means of government coercion') and the Military-Industrial Complex ('a pro-war lobby can exist only in a society where the government's access to lives and funds is absolute'). The editorial concluded in terms that would have made any hippy's heart beat faster:

An analysis of this hideous conflict at last turns one's attention not only to the morality of the war, but finally to the moral standing of the government itself.<sup>230</sup>

So heady was the atmosphere of the early 1970s, the new Libertarian Party even sent a delegate to the would-be libertarian secessionist Bahamian island of Abaco (see part three, above). Dr John Hospers, of the University of California, had been the Libertarian Party's first presidential candidate in the US general election of 1972, and in February 1974 he arrived on Abaco to address the first convention of the Abaconian independence movement. Whatever Hospers told the Abaconians was clearly well-received, as he was invited back for a second conference in May that year. However, the Bahamian authorities banned Hospers from re-entering the territory.<sup>231</sup> Evidently, Lynden Pindling's government in Nassau took a stronger diplomatic stance on interference from a US political party than it had on Mitchell WerBell and his menagerie of CIA men, British neocolonialists, and would-be revolutionaries.

However, Charles Koch's attempt to use the Libertarian Party as a

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<sup>229</sup> A line by the poet Carl Sandburg, the later transformation and adoption of which makes for interesting reading. See *Quote/Counterquote*, 12 January 2020 at <<https://shorturl.at/Xx2pd>> or <<http://www.quotecounterquote.com/2011/12/suppose-they-gave-war-and-nobody-came.html>>.

<sup>230</sup> Don Franzen, 'The Show Must Go On', in *Protos* (magazine), special issue, 'USA: Can it, will it, should it survive?', Libertarian Press Association, Los Angeles, n.d., 1970, pp. 4 and 5.

<sup>231</sup> Rick Lowe (see note 163) p. 3.

battering ram went nowhere, and nor did eventually putting Charles's brother, David, forward as the party's vice presidential candidate in 1980. It was then that Charles Koch began building his resistance network, with 'think tanks, university research institutes, industry trade association, and a parade of philanthropic institutions to support it financially'.<sup>232</sup> These all worked together to steer US history in Koch's desired direction, by surrounding politicians and the media with an army of 'independent' experts who all agreed with each other.

### **A spectre is haunting America**

Koch modelled his obfuscatory schemes on the organisational principles of the John Birch Society (JBS), a clandestine anti-communist 'resistance' movement co-founded by his father in 1958. Fred Koch, an oilman, had visited the Soviet Union for industrial purposes during the 1920s, in the early phase of Stalin's dictatorship, and what he saw there filled him with an abiding terror that the same thing might happen in his homeland.<sup>233</sup>



Robert Welch

The mastermind of the JBS, confectionery magnate Robert H.W. Welch (1899–1985), had created a country-wide system of local anti-communist chapters, all sworn to secrecy. This, Welch and Koch Sr believed, reflected the way in which the communist conspiracy in the United States was organised. Since the communist conspiracy somehow managed to evade detection, so too would Welch's counter-conspiracy. The first few JBS meetings were held in the basement of the Koch family home, in Wichita, Kansas. Among those impressed by Koch Sr's first-hand accounts of Stalinism was Willard W. Garvey, later eminence

grise of Michael Oliver's libertarian micronation schemes. As fellow Wichitans and businessmen, Garvey and Koch Sr knew each other socially and professionally,<sup>234</sup> and Garvey became one of the earliest signed-up JBS members.<sup>235</sup> The young Charles Koch obligingly joined the JBS too, mainly as a way of pleasing his overbearing father, but his attention soon drifted away from

<sup>232</sup> Leonard (see note 221) p. 395.

<sup>233</sup> Mayer (see note 220) pp. 38–39.

<sup>234</sup> McEnaney (see note 151) p. 109.

<sup>235</sup> McEnaney p. 166.

its anticommunist obsessions.<sup>236</sup> He eventually resigned in 1968, over the Society's support for the Vietnam War.

JBS chapter members were enjoined to exert their influence in whatever fields they could, such as local councils, police forces, or parent-teacher associations. While the ground-level tactics varied from chapter to chapter, the direction of progress was always toward the envisioned defeat of 'collectivism'. Welch had applied this term to everything from mild trade unionism to doctrinal communism, and thus encompassed almost anything that Welch saw as standing against his own romanticised 19<sup>th</sup> century concepts of American individualism. Charles Koch just went one step further, and applied Welch's strategies against the US federal state itself.<sup>237</sup>

Welch found a kindred spirit in the rabidly anti-communist Ayn Rand, whom he first met in 1961. Rand saw the John Birch Society as misguided, due to their Christian beliefs. Welch saw Rand as misguided, due to her atheism. However, they got along well because Rand was obviously convinced that any opposition to the JBS was axiomatically anti-capitalist, which gelled nicely with Welch's own perceptions of an omnipresent communist threat.<sup>238</sup> Later, the JBS would formulate a standard reply letter to curious Rand devotees, explaining the Society's own religious precepts but urging recipients to continue supporting the JBS's distinctly libertarian principles of 'less government, more individual responsibility, and a better world' in their own chosen ways.

Although Welch's own concepts of liberty were somewhat aligned with Rand's, his overall vision drew upon a very different libertarian thinker. When setting up his anti-communist underground, Welch was also thinking of the John Birch Society in terms of a potential stay-behind resistance network. 'Having read Albert Jay Nock's work, [Welch] knew that a conservative movement was always more successful when it was part of a Remnant.'<sup>239</sup>

## Collective individualists

Through his early experiences in the JBS, Charles Koch also became interested

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<sup>236</sup> Mayer (see note 220) p. 41.

<sup>237</sup> Koch's fellow-Bircher, Willard Garvey, did something very similar, setting up a series of public lobbying groups in Kansas, such as the Center for Privatization, and the Home Owners Trust. One of Garvey's front organisations, the Kansas Taxpayers Network, later merged with Koch's think tank, Americans for Prosperity. McEnany (see note 151) pp. 213–218.

<sup>238</sup> Burns (see note 87) pp. 206–207.

<sup>239</sup> Edward H. Miller, *A Conspiratorial Life: Robert Welch, the John Birch Society, and the Revolution of American Conservatism* (University of Chicago Press, 2021) p. 177. For Remnant, see p. 35 above.

in an institution called the Freedom School, with which several key Birchers were involved. The Freedom School had been founded in 1956, by Robert LeFevre (1911–1986), and promoted free market liberal economics. Within a few years, LeFevre had attracted the involvement of the Austrian economist Friedrich von Hayek, and of Hayek's pupil, Ludwig von Mises, both of whom sat on the editorial board of the Freedom School's newsletter. Although LeFevre's school officially promoted free market economics, that was the appetiser for a libertarian curriculum of individualist-anarchism. LeFevre preferred to call this ideology 'autarchy' (literally: self-government) in case the public associated the word 'anarchist' with terrorism.

During the 1930s, LeFevre had been a member of an individualist cult called 'I AM', which based itself on the theories of the Victorian occultist Helena Blavatsky. The founder of I AM, Guy Ballard (1878–1939), also claimed direct inspiration from the Comte de Saint-Germain, a 2,000-year-old aristocrat who had generously appeared to Ballard during a mountain hiking expedition, in order to introduce him to the Immortal Ascended Masters. These masters were once human beings, who had transcended the curse of reincarnation, and now lived in an ethereal realm from which they proposed to transmit messages of great importance to the Earthbound human race. It was via insights such as these that Guy Ballard discovered he was the reincarnation of George Washington.

Rather like Ayn Rand's secular bastardised idea of an America filled with pseudo-Neitzschean 'Supermen', adherents of I AM believed they could fulfil the mission of the divinely-inspired United States and transform the country into an Earthly paradise. The 'I AM' was therefore both an affirmation and the acronym for the Immortal Ascended Mastery to which disciples aspired. It was abundantly clear to the I AM cultists (just as it was clear to Ayn Rand, and would become clear to Michael Oliver) that President Roosevelt's New Deal was a regressive step into collectivisation and slavery. The I AM fanatics were indoctrinated to reflexively chant 'Annihilate them!' whenever the names of the president and his wife Eleanor were mentioned.<sup>240</sup>

As a devotee of 'I AM', Robert LeFevre became immersed in this ideology of transformative individualism. He claimed he could drive his car while asleep, and had met Jesus Christ during an out-of-body experience. What was revealed to LeFevre during that meeting remains unknown, but after the Second World War, LeFevre moved to California, joined the Republican Party, and became an anti-communist activist. His views were wide-ranging,

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<sup>240</sup> A historical summary of the I AM movement can be read at <https://www.theosophy.world/encyclopedia/i-am-religious-activity>.

including demands for the USA's withdrawal from the United Nations, and denunciations of subversive socialist propaganda he had detected hidden in the Girl Scouts Handbook. In order to counter the pernicious consequences of Roosevelt's policies, LeFevre continued his anti-New Deal campaign at the Freedom School. This fixation with unpicking the liberalist consensus was now absorbed by Charles Koch, who was so enamoured with LeFevre's teachings that he became a substantial donor and trustee. This was no passing whim. As late as the 1990s, Koch was still crediting LeFevre's Freedom School as the source of his 'passionate commitment to liberty as the form of social organisation most in harmony with reality and man's nature'.<sup>241</sup>

## **Tea for Trump**

Koch had gradually become hostile to the 2000-2008 presidency of George W. Bush, which he saw as insufficiently deregulatory at home and unacceptably interventionist abroad. However, the election of Barack Obama in 2008 filled Koch with fury and alarm. Shortly before Obama's inauguration in January 2009, Koch convened a secret meeting at a Californian resort, attended by billionaires, media moguls, elected right-wing politicians, and PR professionals. The subject of the meeting was how to derail the political programme the country had voted for.<sup>242</sup> Later that year, Koch began using one of his pressure groups, Americans for Prosperity, to pump money into a grassroots movement that had caught his eye and aligned with his principles. It was called the Tea Party, with 'Tea' standing backronymically<sup>243</sup> for 'taxed enough already', alluding to the 1773 anti-tax insurrection known as the Boston Tea Party. Koch began organising, funding, and orchestrating the Tea Party protests, and helped create a national wave of disorderly anti-Obama protests. Meanwhile, he used his front organisations to inundate the corporate media, creating echo chambers that amplified the Tea Party's complaints.<sup>244</sup>

Despite Koch's efforts to destabilise his presidency, Obama pressed ahead with his mildly reformist agenda. The president introduced modest measures to curtail the extravagances and excesses of the financial sector, expanded the state-funded Medicaid health insurance programme, and – most offensively of all, in Koch's eyes – began attempting to tackle the environmental threat of industrial carbon dioxide emissions. By the time the 2012 presidential election

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<sup>241</sup> Mayer (see note 220) pp. 43-46.

<sup>242</sup> Mayer pp. 1-4.

<sup>243</sup> <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Backronym>>

<sup>244</sup> Leonard (see note 221) p. 445.

drew nigh, Koch's hostility toward Obama was approaching pathological levels. He poured millions of dollars into anti-Obama propaganda and activism. Privately, Koch compared Obama to an anti-American dictator, telling another of his billionaire conclaves: 'We have Saddam Hussein, this is the Mother of All Wars we've got in the next 18 months. For the life or death of this country.'<sup>245</sup> But Obama was handsomely re-elected anyway.

Despite being a long-standing donor to the Republican Party, Koch declined to support Donald Trump's 2016 campaign for the presidency, likening the choice on offer to the electorate – either Trump, or Hillary Clinton – to a choice between cancer and a heart attack.<sup>246</sup> But at the same time, Koch did not support the Republican Party's internal opposition to Trump's candidacy. When Trump ultimately became the party's candidate, his choice of vice-presidential running mate was Indiana state governor Mike Pence, a significant Koch ally. Pence had first attended one of Koch's private 'summit' conferences in 2009, after catching Koch's attention with public expressions of scepticism about global warming.<sup>247</sup> Trump's decision to pick Pence was guided by his campaign manager, Kellyanne Conway, a professional pollster who had previously worked for the Koch brothers, and for then Governor Pence.<sup>248</sup>

Once in office, Trump installed more than 40 Koch associates to government positions. One of them was Mike Pompeo, a former Representative for Koch's home state, Kansas, whose congressional career had been

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<sup>245</sup> ABC News, 6 September 2011. See <<https://shorturl.at/eIeci>> or <<https://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2011/09/billionaire-conservative-activist-charles-koch-on-2012-election-we-have-saddam-hussein-this-is-the-mother-of-all-wars>>

<sup>246</sup> ABC News, 24 April 2016. See <<https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/charles-koch-stop-donald-trump/story?id=38619453>>.

<sup>247</sup> New Yorker, 23 October 2017, *passim*. See <<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/10/23/the-danger-of-president-pence>>.

<sup>248</sup> When Conway took up a position in the Trump administration in January 2017, she had to file an OGE Form 278e (Public Financial Disclosure). Section 4 of this disclosure lists previous paid roles with two Koch front organisations: Freedom Partners; and Americans for Prosperity. See <<https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/3534131-Conway-Kellyanne>>. Conway also sat on the board of another Koch front organisation, The Independent Women's Forum. *The Nation*, 18 August 2016. See <<https://shorturl.at/mCnPB>> or <<https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/meet-the-feminists-doing-the-koch-brothers-dirty-work>>.

Conway's filing also lists a paid role with Mike Pence's abortive 2016 campaign for the presidency. In addition to these interests, Conway had an indirect family tie to Pence, whose nephew was married to one of her cousins. *Christian Science Monitor*, 4 November 2022. See <<https://shorturl.at/Ndsgj>> or <[https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Politics/monitor\\_breakfast/2022/1103/Kellyanne-Conway-An-insider-s-look-at-the-Republican-Party](https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Politics/monitor_breakfast/2022/1103/Kellyanne-Conway-An-insider-s-look-at-the-Republican-Party)>.

underpinned by Koch money.<sup>249</sup> Trump made Pompeo the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency<sup>250</sup> and then Secretary of State.<sup>251</sup>

## The Kansas experimenters

While it wasn't the takeover Koch must have hoped for, his effective penetration of the 2016-2020 Trump administration was a significant



Sam Brownback

achievement in his overriding plan of smashing the system. In 2008, Koch had funded a presidential run by Kansas politician Sam Brownback, a Republican Party senator. The relationship between the two men had begun in 1994, when Brownback first ran for elected office as congressional Representative for Kansas's second district. Koch had pumped an undisclosed amount of money into Brownback's campaign, and help unseat the incumbent Bob Dole. One Kansas politician said at the time 'If Sam becomes governor, I think essentially Koch Industries will have the key to the governor's office.'<sup>252</sup>

Brownback's 2008 bid for the presidency came to nothing, and Koch was subjected to the tyranny of Barack Hussein Obama instead. The precise amount of money Koch gave to Brownback's political career is not known, due to Koch's maze of front organisations and a general lack of campaign transparency, but the presidential run alone attracted around \$1 million identified as coming from donors within Kansas.<sup>253</sup> In 2010, with Obama safely back in the White House, Koch and Brownback turned inward and tried to turn the state of Kansas into a libertarian microcosm instead. Pitched to an electorate struggling with the after-effects of the 2008-2009 economic crisis, the so-called Kansas Experiment was the

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<sup>249</sup> *Politico*, 7 July 2014. See <<https://shorturl.at/tyi1w>> or <<https://www.politico.com/story/2014/07/koch-industries-mike-pompeo-todd-tiahrt-kansas-108624>>.

<sup>250</sup> *Wall Street Journal*, 18 November 2016. See <<https://shorturl.at/6445d>> or <[https://www.wsj.com/articles/donald-trump-tabs-kansas-rep-mike-pompeo-as-cia-director-1479477208](https://www.wsj.com/articles/donald-trump-tabs-kansas-rep-mike-pompeo-as-cia-director-donald-trump-tabs-kansas-rep-mike-pompeo-as-cia-director-1479477208)>.

<sup>251</sup> *BBC News*, 26 April 2018. See <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-43910164>>.

<sup>252</sup> *The Kansas City Star*, 18 September 2010. See <<https://shorturl.at/QaJdL>> or <<https://www.kansascity.com/2010/09/18/2233422/democrats-fear-koch-industries.html>>. (Page deleted, archive only.)

<sup>253</sup> *Open Secrets*, 22 October 2007. See <<https://www.opensecrets.org/news/2007/10/brownback-backs-out/>>.

umpteenth attempt to prove that low-tax, small government policies offered a transformative alternative economic model.

Koch's home state was an ideal laboratory for his ideological project. Kansas is almost definitively 'middle America' and has a long history of small-town orneriness, bucking national trends in order to further the state's interests instead. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, pressure from farmers and labourers frustrated with economic inequality, railroad monopolies, and banking practices drove the 1890 creation of Kansas's populist People's Party. Kansas journalist William Allen White, crusading editor of the progressive *Emporia Gazette* during that period, famously stated that: 'When anything is going to happen in this country, it happens first in Kansas.'<sup>254</sup>

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup>, Kansas demonstrated its undiminished and uncanny ability to set the pace. In the 1990s, the state was the flashpoint for a national debate over abortion laws. It started with religiously-inspired 'Summer of Mercy' protests in 1991, denouncing a late-term abortion clinic in Wichita, run by a Dr George Tiller, and escalated until Tiller was murdered by an anti-abortion terrorist in 2009. Along the way, the Kansas furore got the misleading term 'Partial birth abortion' into national parlance, and the controversy prompted the George W Bush government to pass the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act of 2003.

In the early 2000s, Kansas was again in the vanguard of modern reactionary thought when the state board of education attempted to meddle with the science curriculum to promote, first, creationism, and then (when that failed), the thinly-disguised version of creationism known as 'intelligent design'.<sup>255</sup> After the Great Recession of 2008 to 2009, which affected everyday life for far longer than official indicators suggested, Kansas voters were more than ready to back a Koch-sponsored attack on the prevailing economic consensus, too.

## **Bleeding Kansas**

First, Brownback and Koch created an artificial groundswell of popular support for Brownback's gubernatorial campaign. Brownback staged appearances at

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<sup>254</sup> White went on to use his newspaper to expose and condemn Kansan chapters of the Ku Klux Klan so convincingly that the State Supreme Court delivered the first American proscription against the Klan.

For a potted history of White's campaign, see the *Kansas Reflector*, 31 October 2020 at <<https://tinyurl.com/4rb3hbnj>> or <<https://kansasreflector.com/2020/10/31/when-real-american-william-allen-white-ran-for-office-to-save-kansas-from-the-kkk/>>

<sup>255</sup> Abortion rights and federally-mandated education would become key policy issues for Trump in his second presidential term, discussed below.

the Tea Party's Koch-funded rallies and events, giving the impression that he had support among the wider public. This helped initiate a media bandwagon effect that powered Brownback to electoral success in November 2010.

When Sam Brownback was safely in office as Kansas state governor, having defeated his Democrat opponent at the ballot box by a margin of almost 2:1, Charles Koch used another of his front organisations, the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), to write the tax-cutting and government-shrinking state laws that Brownback ultimately enacted. This was helped by the fact that approximately 50 members of the state government were also members of ALEC, and helped pass the laws their sponsor had produced.<sup>256</sup> Steve Anderson, from the Koch think-tank Americans for Prosperity, was brought in as Brownback's Budget Director.<sup>257</sup>

Brownback also hired economist Arthur Laffer (another ALEC alumnus) to work on tax policies. Laffer (born 1940) was something of a folk hero among libertarians, having devised and promoted the Laffer Curve concept, purportedly showing that it is possible to stimulate economic growth purely by cutting taxes. Laffer had previously advised US President Ronald Reagan on supply-side economics, and now called Brownback's ALEC-engineered policies 'amazing' and 'truly revolutionary'.<sup>258</sup> Brownback described his vision in much the same terms, although using slightly less dramatic language.

While President Obama continues to implement his big-government vision for the nation, Kansas and its neighbors in Missouri and Oklahoma are charting a course based on a vision of lower taxes and leaner governments leading to a more prosperous citizenry.<sup>259</sup>

One of Brownback's principal media cheerleaders was libertarian activist Grover Norquist, founder of the pressure group Americans for Tax Reform,

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<sup>256</sup> *Lawrence Journal-World*, 17 December 2013. See <<https://tinyurl.com/44mn99rk>> or <<https://www2.ljworld.com/weblogs/capitol-report/2013/dec/17/brownback-says-perception-of-alec-influe/>>.

<sup>257</sup> *Topeka Capital-Journal*, 7 September 2013. See <<https://tinyurl.com/4vxss8ej>> or <<https://www.cjonline.com/news-legislature-state/2013-09-07/former-kansas-budget-director-work-kansas-policy-institute>>.

<sup>258</sup> *Washington Post*, 21 December 2011. See <<https://tinyurl.com/44aed9cf>> or <[http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/in-kansas-gov-sam-brownback-puts-tea-party-tenets-into-action-with-sharp-cuts/2011/11/02/gIQAkbnOAP\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/in-kansas-gov-sam-brownback-puts-tea-party-tenets-into-action-with-sharp-cuts/2011/11/02/gIQAkbnOAP_story.html)>

<sup>259</sup> NB Brownback was already running for his second term as Kansas governor at the time he made these remarks. *Wall Street Journal*, 28 May 2014. See <<https://tinyurl.com/2ncd2c7x>> or <<https://www.wsj.com/articles/sam-brownback-a-midwest-renaissance-rooted-in-the-reagan-formula-1401317548>>.

which he had created in 1986 to promote President Ronald Reagan's tax-cutting agenda.

Norquist saw the Kansas Experiment as the prototype for a new style of governance.

In our 50 states, nine don't have an income tax. I think in the next 15 years it'll be 25 [states] that don't have income taxes. You're seeing a number of states looking to follow Kansas's model of ratcheting the income tax personal income tax down [ . . . ] Kansas is the future. Kansas is the model.<sup>260</sup>



Grover Norquist

Norquist had always described his anti-tax agenda as revolutionary. While the diametric opposite of a communist, he admired Vladimir Lenin's dictum: 'Probe with bayonets, looking for weakness.' Norquist kept a portrait of Lenin on his living room wall, and studied the works of Italian communist would-be revolutionary Antonio Gramsci.<sup>261</sup> While Norquist's focus was on winning over voters who disliked taxation, he knew that his campaign would be more effective by mobilising voters with intersectionally fundamental beliefs, Norquist had always recognised that there was a natural but small overlap between three groups of American voters: tax-

haters; gun-lovers; and Christians. Norquist expressed his firm belief that:

With that [intersecting] group you can take over the country, if you start with the airports and the radio stations. But with all [three groups] that's 60 per cent of the population, and you can win politically. And if you add more things, like property rights and home-schooling, you can do even better.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> *Reason TV*, YouTube.com, 22 April 2015. See <<https://youtu.be/r3tFqzeXI0g>> commencing at 2 minutes 49 seconds. Archived at <<https://archive.org/details/reason-tv-grover-norquist-follow-kansas>>.

<sup>261</sup> David Brock, *Blinded by the Right: The Conscience of an Ex-Conservative* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2002) pp. 66-67.

<sup>262</sup> *The New Yorker*, 24 July 2005. See <<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2005/08/01/the-ringleader>>.

Before long, Sam Brownback had abolished four of Kansas's state agencies, and cut 2,000 government jobs, moves supposedly intended to help eliminate governmental inefficiency. Brownback also established an Office of the Repealer, to abolish laws that supposedly placed obstacles in the way of businesses,<sup>263</sup> and removed all taxes on profits generated by the 100,000 businesses in the state. Budgets for highways and schools were slashed, which did not lead to a renaissance of private enterprise but did directly and adversely affect almost every voter in Kansas.

Brownback also cut welfare expenditure by stealth, by tightening the qualifying requirements. The justification for all these restrictions was the standard 'less dependence, more self-reliance' mantra, in which the first clause is an order and the second a vicarious ambition. By restricting access to funds supplied by just one welfare programme – the federal government's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) – Brownback culled the number of claimants by 67 per cent. However, Brownback's state government kept the federal funds for the whole TANF programme, thus banking some \$60 million each year.<sup>264</sup>

Roughly half of Kansas's state government revenue had come from income tax, and Brownback's policies pulled the rug out from under his own administration. In Brownback's first year as governor, the state government's income plummeted by \$688 million, a decrease of almost 10 per cent. Across the four years of Brownback's first term, his government had to introduce nine successive rounds of austerity cuts, the state's credit rating was deprecated three times, and Kansas defaulted on multiple federal loans. Instead of proving that Kansas could take off without the weight of the federal government holding it down, the Koch-Brownback experiment had thrown Kansas off a fiscal cliff, only to find out that private enterprise wasn't going to turn up to catch it after all.

### **If at first you don't secede**

Surveying the wreckage of the Kansas Experiment, self-styled anti-tax revolutionary Grover Norquist decided that Brownback's agenda had not failed because of economic realities but because the testing ground was unsuitable for some unspecified reason. Having earlier declared that 'Kansas is the future.

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<sup>263</sup> *Topeka Capital-Journal*, 21 January 2011. See <<https://tinyurl.com/3a8jpe4u>> or <<https://www.cjonline.com/story/news/politics/state/2011/01/21/governor-creates-repealer-office/16477931007/>>.

<sup>264</sup> *Kansas City Kansan*, 4 November 2014. See <<http://www.kckansan.com/2014/11/brownback-policies-cutting-welfare.html>>.

Kansas is the model', Norquist now dismissed it with the words 'Kansas is an outlier [ . . . ] If you're a Republican looking for [an economic] model [state], Kansas is not the model.'<sup>265</sup>

Norquist's longed-for vindication had evaporated. But for him, as for Koch, and for other libertarians, the Kansas Experiment had failed without invalidating the theory it was supposed to prove. As with Mao Zedong in 1927, Fidel Castro in 1958, or Ayatollah Khomeini in 1963, final revolutionary triumph had only been postponed. Even Vladimir Lenin (perpetually frowning down from Norquist's living-room wall) had acknowledged the value of his own first and unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the Russian state, writing in 1920 that:

As for teaching the fundamentals of political science to masses and leaders, to classes and parties alike, each month of this period was equivalent to an entire year of 'peaceful' and 'constitutional' development. Without the 'dress rehearsal' of 1905, the victory of the October Revolution in 1917 would have been impossible.<sup>266</sup>

By 2017, even Brownback's own party had had enough, and introduced state legislation to reset most of the disastrous financial changes the governor had made. When the bill was voted through, Brownback refused to enact it, three times, until finally both chambers of the state legislature voted to veto Brownback's veto and brought the Kansas Experiment to an ignominious halt. Brownback himself 'failed upward'. Within weeks, the White House announced that Brownback would be appointed US Ambassador-At-Large for International Religious Freedom, becoming yet another Koch acolyte embedded within the Trump administration.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> *The Atlantic*, 7 April 2017. See <<https://tinyurl.com/yc23pz7a>> or <<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/06/kansass-conservative-tax-experiment-is-dead/529551/>>.

<sup>266</sup> Vladimir Lenin, 'Left-Wing' Communism: an Infantile Disorder, chapter 3 ('The Principal Stages in the History of Bolshevism'). See <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/lwc/ch03.htm>>.

<sup>267</sup> *New York Times*, 26 July 2017. See <<https://tinyurl.com/5dwdv3we>> or <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/26/us/politics/sam-brownback-kansas-ambassador-international-religious-freedom.html>>.

## Part 5    **Storming Heaven**

In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes.<sup>268</sup>

### **A greater leap for mankind**

US billionaire and space travel fanatic Elon Musk (b. 1971) has long dreamed of establishing his own nation and declaring independence from the USA, by colonising the planet Mars. This notion was implanted from an early age by his father. Errol Musk says he chose the name 'Elon' because it was the title of the ruler of Mars, in a 1952 science-fiction novel by the Nazi rocket scientist Wernher von Braun, who worked on the post-war US space programme.<sup>269</sup> Musk Sr ascribes the title 'Elon' to the leader of the red planet's human colonists. But this is not correct. Von Braun's novel clearly states that the 'Elon' is in fact the leader of the native Martians.<sup>270</sup>

As a 43-year-old, Musk revealed the extent of his fully-developed ambition:

Not everyone loves humanity. Either explicitly or implicitly, some people seem to think that humans are a blight on the Earth's surface [...] But I'm not in that school [...] I think we have a duty to maintain the light of consciousness, to make sure it continues into the future.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> US President Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Farewell Address*; 17 January 1961. Transcript at <<https://shorturl.at/fAOnc>> or <<https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/president-dwight-d-eisenhowers-farewell-address>>.

<sup>269</sup> 'Errol Musk – Dad of a Genius' (YouTube channel), 1 August 2022. See <<https://youtu.be/6zL9yNDs9M4>> commencing at two minutes, 22 seconds. Archived at <<https://archive.org/details/errol-musk-on-the-names-he-chose-for-his-children>>.

<sup>270</sup> Wernher Von Braun, *Project Mars*, p. 177. Archived at <<https://archive.org/details/ProjectMars/page/n179/mode/2up>>.

<sup>271</sup> *Aeon*, 30 September 2014. See <<https://aeon.co/essays/elon-musk-puts-his-case-for-a-multi-planet-civilisation>>.

Musk's dream is a classically Nockian Remnant, but on a hitherto unimaginable scale.

Although Musk's world-famous rocketry experimentation has yet to reach any level above Earth orbit, the terms and conditions of his satellite-based telecommunications company Starlink<sup>272</sup> demonstrate his determination and conviction:

For Services provided on Mars, or in transit to Mars via Starship or other spacecraft, the parties recognize Mars as a free planet and that no Earth-based government has authority or sovereignty over Martian activities. Accordingly, Disputes will be settled through self-governing principles, established in good faith, at the time of Martian settlement.<sup>273</sup>

The exploitation of extraterrestrial natural resources is governed by the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, to which the US is a signatory. A Mars mission launched from the jurisdiction of the USA would remain bound by US federal law at all times.<sup>274</sup> Musk's ambition to establish a politically-independent Martian civilisation is therefore revolutionary in both the metaphorical and literal senses of that word. For the time being, he is confined to planet Earth and has become involved in a smaller revolution, namely Donald Trump's libertarian reconfiguration of the USA.

The political relationship between the two men began during Trump's first term in office, and was fractious from the start. Musk had originally endorsed Trump's electoral rival Hillary Clinton. But after winning the presidency Trump appointed him to sit on the advisory council overseeing the White House transition.<sup>275</sup> Musk's initial support for Clinton had been based partly on environmental concerns, and he reiterated his desire to influence the Trump administration on those matters. But Musk was also still focussed on his Martian objective, stating: 'My goals are to accelerate the world's transition to sustainable energy [usage] and to help make humanity a multi-planet

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<sup>272</sup> A wholly-owned subsidiary of Musk's corporate space programme, SpaceX.

<sup>273</sup> Starlink terms and conditions, 8 June 2022. See <<https://www.starlink.com/legal/documents/DOC-1020-91087-64>>.

<sup>274</sup> UN Resolution 2222 (XXI) of 1967: *Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies*; Article VIII. See <<https://shorturl.at/p0rQC>> or <<https://www.unoosa.org/oosa/en/ourwork/spacelaw/treaties/introouterspacetreaty.html>>.

<sup>275</sup> *Reuters*, 14 December 2016. See <<https://shorturl.at/iFEow>> or <<https://www.businessinsider.com/elon-musk-donald-trump-feud-relationship-timeline-2022-7>>.

civilization.<sup>276</sup>

While Musk's appointment to the advisory council was a surprise to many, it was not a wild card played by the Trump administration. For about a decade, by gradually undercutting the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), Musk had gradually worked his way into a position where he could influence the government. While his SpaceX corporation has undeniably excelled at providing high quality rocketry innovations (such as reusable vehicles) at very competitive prices, the federal government's increasing reliance on Musk's products has inadvertently allowed him to acquire political weight. This has been aided and abetted by Trump, whose 2016-2020 administration awarded what turned out to be a series of gargantuan contracts to SpaceX, many of which extend into the near future.

The figurative touchpaper was lit when Trump created the US Space Force, a new branch of the military, in December 2019.<sup>277</sup> In October 2020, as Trump's first term in office began to build to its insurrectionary conclusion, SpaceX was awarded a \$149 million contract to produce four satellites for the US Space Force.<sup>278</sup> The planned machines would be equipped to perform wide-field visual detection capable of identifying the paths of hypersonic missiles.<sup>279</sup> In 2021, SpaceX was awarded a secret contract worth \$1.8 billion, to design and build a network of hundreds of low-altitude satellites for the Department of Defense's National Reconnaissance Office, capable of capturing high-resolution imagery of the Earth's surface.<sup>280</sup> By 2022, SpaceX's connections with the US military and intelligence had become so extensive that it was necessary to compartmentalise them. SpaceX formed a new corporate branch called StarShield, to 'leverage existing relationships with the Defense Department

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<sup>276</sup> Elon Musk, Twitter.com, 3 February 2017. See <<https://x.com/elonmusk/status/827330589191704576>>.

<sup>277</sup> Department of Defense announcement, 20 December 2019. See <<https://shorturl.at/JuTvv>> or <<https://www.war.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/2045981/department-of-defense-establishes-us-space-force/>>.

<sup>278</sup> C4ISRNET, 6 October 2020. See <<https://shorturl.at/t5HVr>> or <<https://www.c4isrnet.com/battlefield-tech/space/2020/10/05/space-development-agency-orders-8-hypersonic-weapon-tracking-satellites/>>.

<sup>279</sup> C4ISRNET, 15 May 2020. See <<https://shorturl.at/6SV3M>> or <<https://www.c4isrnet.com/battlefield-tech/space/2020/05/15/these-eight-satellites-will-track-hypersonic-weapons/>>.

<sup>280</sup> Reuters, 16 March 2024. See <<https://www.reuters.com/technology/space/musks-spacex-is-building-spy-satellite-network-us-intelligence-agency-sources-2024-03-16/>> or <<https://www.reuters.com/technology/space/musks-spacex-is-building-spy-satellite-network-us-intelligence-agency-sources-2024-03-16/>>.

and the intelligence community'.<sup>281</sup>

Trump has also encouraged support for Musk's plans, telling the public that NASA has to return to the Moon, not for its own sake, but because the Moon will be the first base for a longer-range Mars mission.<sup>282</sup> Constructing the larger-scale spacecraft needed for the months-long journey to Mars would be much easier on the Moon, where the lower gravity also means far less fuel would be needed to launch them.

## **Tomorrow is yesterday**

Musk has stated that his favourite novel is *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*, by Robert Heinlein, published in 1966. In this acclaimed work of science fiction, the people of the Earth have turned the Moon into a penal colony. However, lunar prisoners soon become permanently physically weakened due to the Moon's lower gravity, which makes returning to Earth dangerous for them. A large and growing lunar settlement of freed former prisoners therefore exists alongside the imprisoned convicts. A small nucleus of freed individuals begins a covert war to establish the political independence of the Moon, a revolt which is ultimately successful.

Musk's vision of a unilateral declaration of Martian independence – unlike Heinlein's fictional lunar rebellion – would pose little threat to the Earth. But one underlying similarity is stark. The vulnerability to gravity that afflicts Heinlein's characters is a real phenomenon. Astronauts returning to Earth have to laboriously reacclimatise themselves to Earth's gravity, due to the rapid muscle wastage and bone density loss that occurs during even brief spells in space. Every safe landing is a medical emergency, as re-arrived space crew frequently cannot even stand upright on their own.<sup>283</sup> Musk's envisioned Mars colonists would face up to a year in space, en route to their destination, and then live on a planet where the gravity is 60 per cent weaker than Earth's.<sup>284</sup>

There would, therefore, be very little prospect of Musk's interplanetary

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<sup>281</sup> C4ISRNET, 12 May 2022. See <<https://tinyurl.com/yhyuux3s>> or <<https://www.c4isrnet.com/battlefield-tech/space/2022/12/05/spacex-forms-starshield-business-unit-to-focus-on-national-security/>>.

<sup>282</sup> This was Trump's real meaning when he famously said 'The Moon is part of Mars' in 2019. *Newsweek*, 7 June 2019. See <<https://www.newsweek.com/donald-trump-moon-mars-fox-1442874>>.

<sup>283</sup> A lucid and accessible outline of these dangers can be found in *SciTech Daily*, 13 August 2022. See <<https://tinyurl.com/mwxk9sst>> or <<https://scitechdaily.com/floating-in-space-might-seem-exciting-but-it-has-serious-consequences/>>.

<sup>284</sup> Harvard University, Medical School, 19 July 2019. See <<https://hms.harvard.edu/news/martian-gravity>>.

migrants ever returning to terrestrial life, and biological reproduction among permanent Mars dwellers would imperceptibly begin to follow a new evolutionary path toward a separate species of Martian humans.<sup>285</sup> That these physical risks and consequent evolutionary divergence would arise in new planetary environments is not esoteric theory, but inescapable biological fact. As a space research fanatic, Elon Musk will be well aware of these complications, although perhaps understandably, he chooses not to talk about them in public. As he is also aware of the origin of his own forename, maybe the thought of establishing a native Martian branch of the human race even appeals to him. The natural conclusion of Musk's project, even more so than the goals of Ayn Rand and Robert LeFevre before him, would be to transcend humanity itself.

A key underlying philosophical point of Heinlein's *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* is that free people should not oppress other free people, which is clearly a libertarian axiom. Heinlein himself is embraced as a fellow-thinker by modern libertarians, and with good reason. As well as consistently exploring themes of oppression and individual freedom in his work, Heinlein explicitly described his own political position as libertarian, writing in one letter that:

As for libertarian, I've been one all my life, a radical one. You might use the term 'philosophical anarchist' or 'autarchist'<sup>286</sup> about me, but 'libertarian' is easier to define and fits well enough [ . . . ] my solution to almost everything is 'Let's repeal that law'; or, possibly, 'Let's not do anything – let's wait.'<sup>287</sup>



Robert Heinlein

Heinlein was writing in the 1960s, and located himself within the well-defined historical libertarian philosophies. He was also an admirer of Ayn Rand. *The*

<sup>285</sup> Some informed ideas about what this inherently unpredictable biological process could produce is available in e.g. *Astronomy.com*, 8 October 2021. See <<https://tinyurl.com/52u8f6f7>> or <<https://www.astronomy.com/science/colonizing-mars-could-speed-up-human-evolution/>>.

<sup>286</sup> 'Autarchy' was the borderline occult philosophical version of libertarianism taught at Robert LeFevre's 'Freedom School' (see page 64 above).

<sup>287</sup> The Heinlein Society, FAQs: 'There has been much talk about Heinlein being a Libertarian. Was he?' See <<https://tinyurl.com/yc842tr3>> or <<https://www.heinleinsociety.org/faq-frequently-asked-questions-about-robert-a-heinlein-the-person-2/>>.

*Moon is a Harsh Mistress* subversively steers the reader in the direction of Rand's work, in a snatch of dialogue that praises someone called John Galt, the mastermind in Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*. Thus, Heinlein implants in his reader's mind the question that drives Rand's own narrative: 'Who is John Galt?' <sup>288</sup>

## The Way to Eden

Elon Musk's libertarianism is something more amorphous and distinctly modern, that also has its roots in the 1960s, but which did not achieve prominence until the information technology boom of the 1990s. Although it has now spread worldwide and become almost mainstream, it is informally known as the Californian Ideology, because that is the US state where it evolved.<sup>289</sup> In the words of the theorists who identified it, the mindset 'promiscuously combines the free-wheeling spirit of the hippies and the entrepreneurial zeal of the yuppies'.<sup>290</sup>

What the 'hippies' and the 'yuppies'<sup>291</sup> had in common in the 1960s – albeit for very different reasons – were resistance to and even rejection of conformity, and a temperamental hostility to the overweening power of the state. This was another enantiodromic fusion of opposites. The decisive practical difference was that the 'yuppies' had power but hippies had proverbially dropped out – an imbalance between the former's strong political idealisation of commodities and the latter's vaguely ecumenical notions of community.

The inherent political struggle was lived out in thousands of personal experiences throughout that decade, perhaps best encapsulated by the co-founder of an anarchist farm, who recalled that members pooled their sporadic

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<sup>288</sup> Robert Heinlein, *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*, UK edition (London: Hodder and Staughton; 1969), p. 98.

<sup>289</sup> Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron, 'The Californian Ideology' in *Science as Culture*, Volume 6, issue 1, 1996, pp 44–72. Available as PDF download at <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249004663\\_The\\_Californian\\_Ideology](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249004663_The_Californian_Ideology)>.

<sup>290</sup> Barbrook and Cameron p. 2. Richard Barbrook later acknowledged that the title was an allusion to *The German Ideology* by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, published in 1846, in which the communist authors had launched a materialist and witheringly sarcastic critique of the philosophical individualism that underpinned contemporaneous German capitalism. Recounted in Nathan Schneider's 'Polemic Becomes Canon: An Interview with Richard Barbrook on the Californian Ideology', in *International Journal of Communications*, vol 17 (2023). See <<https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/21355/4235>>.

<sup>291</sup> 'Yuppie' is a neologism from the 1980s. The nearest real-life equivalent from the 1960s would be 'bread heads', meaning people obsessed with gaining material wealth. Presumably Barbrook and Cameron chose 'yuppies' for its convenient similarity to 'hippies'.

earnings and shared resources freely, without encountering any problems until they decided they would like to raise chickens.

[T]he chicken crisis involved all sorts of things. Did we need eggs? Who would build the chicken coop? This was the first time I remember hearing anyone say "Well, I won't give money for chickens" – using money as a weapon, a personal source of power. And it wasn't long before money again became a personal possession.<sup>292</sup>

While the 'hippies' were failing to convert the 'yuppies' in their midst, the political libertarian right was also (and much to the fury of Ayn Rand) cynically steering the exhausted counterculture of the 1960s into adopting anarcho-capitalist views. Disillusioned and angry university and college students were prime targets for co-option. Don Franzen, editor of libertarian student newspaper *Protos*, openly stated:

It is not exaggeration to say that in selling libertarianism to leftists, many libertarians are slightly embarrassed or hesitant to openly advocate capitalism. 'Freedom' is the bill of goods we try to sell to the flower-children and the leftists.<sup>293</sup>

The consequent gradual 'drift towards the right by the Californian ideologues is helped by their unquestioning acceptance of the liberal ideal of the self-sufficient individual'. They see themselves as pioneers, in the spirit of 'American folklore [in which] the nation was built out of a wilderness by free-booting individuals – the trappers, cowboys, preachers, and settlers of the frontier.'<sup>294</sup>

The fusion of these two unlikely worlds in the 1960s – the radical anarchic left and radical anarchic right – gave the emerging Californian Ideology the distinctive paradoxical character recognisable today. At one extreme, individuals like Perry Barlow (a lyricist for the Grateful Dead, and former disciple of LSD guru Timothy Leary) saw anarchic and utopian possibilities in technology that in 1996 inspired him to publish A



Perry Barlow

<sup>292</sup> Prof. Ronald E. Rees, *The New Communes: Coming Together in America* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc, 1970), p. 10.

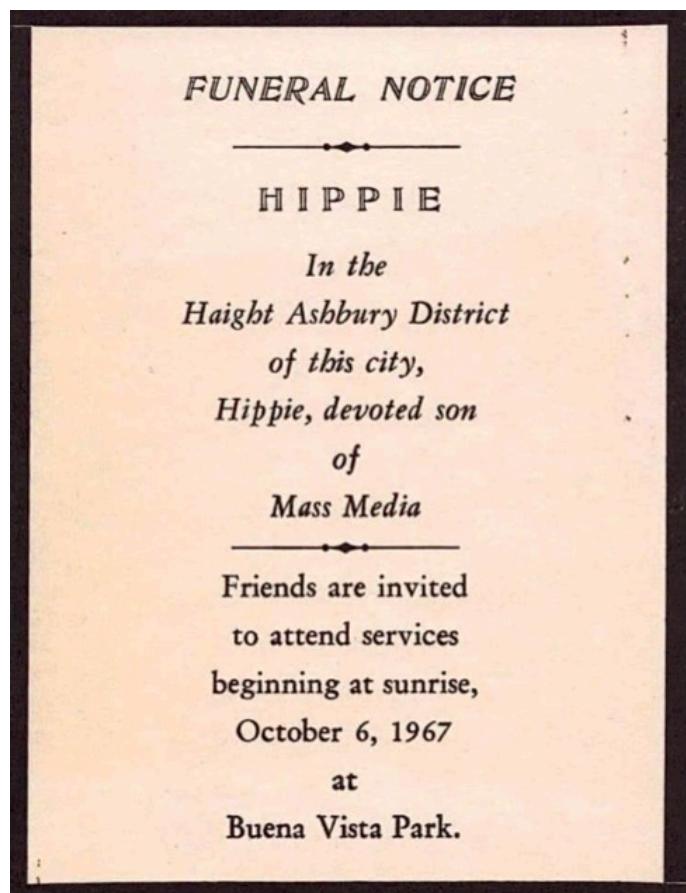
<sup>293</sup> Jennifer Burns (see note 87) p. 260.

<sup>294</sup> Barbrook and Cameron (see note 290) p. 8.

## Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace.<sup>295</sup>

Barlow's document reflected the rugged and defiant strains of American experience, the 'outward, then upward' that had been described by Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893. Pioneers keep advancing through the wilderness. Some settle and build new stable communities, becoming reshaped by their environment in the process. Hierarchies become flattened and replaced by new economic realities, in which individual character is the main determining factor in social status. Finally, big business and government interference reach into the new communities, and the settlers either move on further westward, or remain to fight their corner.

In the 1960s, the defeat of the hippy counterculture was proclaimed on 6 October 1967, when the dropout inhabitants of San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district staged a 'happening' in the form of mock funeral procession, proclaimed as 'The Death of Hippie'. The coffin they carried bore the epitaph 'Summer of Love', and the rite was an act of surrender, publicised nationwide by news media. The Man had won, and was commodifying the would-be revolutionary subculture as a marketable trend instead. San Francisco was heaving with a huge influx of excitable drifters and curious teenagers, eager for free love, unhindered drug use, and memorabilia, but without imbibing the anti-establishment political ethos. The hippies' new frontier had been out-pioneered from under them. The ceremonial burning of the Summer of Love coffin in Golden Gate Park was accompanied by Hare Krishna chants and impromptu singing of 'God Bless America' from spectators, with the mourners shouting 'Hippies are dead! Now the Free Man will come through!'<sup>296</sup> The organiser of the 'happening', San Francisco 'Digger'



<sup>295</sup> Full text at <<https://www.eff.org/cyberspace-independence>>.

<sup>296</sup> *Time*, 13 October 1967. See <<https://time.com/archive/6631218/hippies-where-have-all-the-flowers-gone/>>.

Mary Kasper, explained: 'We wanted to signal that this was the end of it, to stay where you are, bring the revolution to where you live and don't come here because it's over and done with.'<sup>297</sup>

In 1996, Perry Barlow was still trying to bring the revolution to where he lived, and to automatically also bring it to where everyone else lived too. His frontier was the notional horizon of virtual exploration, which veterans of the 1960s counterculture were exploring and settling, forming abstract cyberdelic colonies in which to express their utopian visions. His Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace was a line drawn in the constantly shifting digital sand, against corporate and state repioneering of the newly-colonised virtual world.<sup>298</sup>

Meanwhile, modern California's contrast of vast wealth and widespread poverty meant the state – once full of communal living experiments – was fast becoming a successful libertarian-aligned landscape of private micro-colonies. By the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, one third of all new developments in southern California were designated gated communities, where the well-off could retreat into pockets of tranquillity and order, and escape the disintegrating urban environment outside.<sup>299</sup>

In 1968, hippy music festival organiser Stewart Brand (another LSD illuminatus, and a crony of Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters) had started publishing something called The Whole Earth Catalog. This was a directory of companies and products to support a lifestyle that would now be loosely called 'off-grid'. Although it was definitely a manifestation of the decade's counterculture, it was imbued with the primal American philosophy of frontier life. As Brand subtitled it, *The Whole Earth Catalog* was about 'access to tools'. It was contemporaneously described as 'a kind of source book for the new

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<sup>297</sup> *People's World*, 6 July 2017. See <<https://www.peoplesworld.org/article/this-week-in-history-the-summer-of-love/>>. The Haight-Ashbury 'Diggers' were an activist group named after the 17<sup>th</sup> Century English proto-socialists, and operated on broadly comparable communalist ideas, including the administration of 'free stores' in San Francisco where payment was optional and not encouraged.

<sup>298</sup> The frontier analogy has an inherent conceptual weakness, because *access to* the internet is reliant on the expansion and improvement of telecommunications infrastructure, and thus is more akin to the 19th-Century spreading of telegraph networks and railways. Nevertheless, the obvious relevance of Turner's frontier thesis to the spread of online utopianism is explored at length in Rod Carveth and J Michel Metz's 'Frederick Jackson Turner and the democratization of the electronic frontier', in *American Sociologist*; 27, 72–90 (1996). See <<https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02691999>>.

<sup>299</sup> Low (see note 214) p. 15.

communal self-sufficiency'.<sup>300</sup> Brand was also a fan of the work of Ayn Rand, whose *Atlas Shrugged* he re-read during the intoxicating Summer of 1968, enhancing the experience with heroic amounts of nitrous oxide.<sup>301</sup> Approaching his eightieth birthday in 2020, Stewart Brand recalled:

Whole Earth Catalog was very libertarian, but that's because it was about people in their twenties, and everybody then was reading Robert Heinlein and asserting themselves and all that stuff.<sup>302</sup>

The Merry Pranksters also cast a folkloric shadow so long that it reaches Elon Musk's 'artificial intelligence' program, Grok. 'Grok' is a word in the fictional Martian language created by Musk's favourite sci-fi author, Robert Heinlein, in his 1961 novel *Stranger in a Strange Land*. 'Grok' was first recorded in the countercultural vocabulary in 1968, when author Thomas Wolfe reproduced it in his freestyle reportage of the adventures of the Merry Pranksters, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. At a literal level, 'grok' means 'to drink'. By extension, grok means 'to comprehend' and 'to love'. Ultimately – and perhaps alarmingly, for critics of 'artificial intelligence' – the word 'grok' can encompass 'To understand thoroughly, through having empathy with' and even 'To become one with'.<sup>303</sup>

Stewart Brand's visionary off-grid *Whole Earth Catalog* was later emulated, rather darkly, by another ambitious libertarian. Ross Ulbricht (born 1984) subscribed to an obscure branch of libertarian philosophy called Agorism, which held that citizens should engage in counter-economics (i.e. black-market buying and selling) to undercut the state, most obviously by evading taxation. In 2011, Ulbricht founded Silk Road, a dark web market place for the sale of illegal drugs, which users could buy using the decentralised and hard-to-trace cryptocurrency Bitcoin. But in 2013, the FBI finally caught up with Ulbricht, and in 2015 he was sentenced to serve two life sentences with no parole, plus 40 years. The weight of this sentence turned Ulbricht into a 'martyr' figure for libertarians who regarded the international hard drugs trade as an inalienable component of the free market. They turned

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<sup>300</sup> Rees (see note 293) p. 14.

<sup>301</sup> Burns (see note 87) p. 263.

<sup>302</sup> *The New Yorker*, 18 November 2016. See <<https://shorturl.at/4ZONP>> or <<https://www.newyorker.com/news/letter-from-silicon-valley/the-complicated-legacy-of-stewart-brands-whole-earth-catalog>>.

<sup>303</sup> Surya Joy, 'Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*: A Postmodern Study', *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences* Vol 6, Issue 4; July – August 2021. See <<https://ijels.com/detail/robert-heinlein-s-stranger-in-a-strange-land-a-postmodern-study/>>.

a blind eye to the fact that Ulbrecht had also used the dark web to approach a professional assassin, intending to arrange the murder of a personal rival. In January 2025, less than 48 hours into his second term in office, President Donald Trump granted Ulbrecht a full and unconditional pardon, and he was released from prison.<sup>304</sup>

## Kiss the sky

After the 1967 'Death of the Hippie' ceremony, San Francisco 'Digger' Mary Kasper had reflected on the Summer of Love:

We really thought that drugs were going to change the world. We thought if you turned on, if you took acid, you would really change, because we had [become] changed from those experiences of cosmic oneness.

In February 1966, during an acid trip in San Francisco, Stewart Brand gazed into the sky and became convinced that the collective consciousness of humankind would be inspired by a photograph of its home planet, seen from space.



Mary Kasper

Brand embarked upon a quixotic crusade to pressure NASA into releasing such photographs, the existence of which was only rumoured at the time. Deciding he had to get the public talking in order to achieve his objective, Brand needed a slogan.

In an instinctively libertarian flourish, he decided to exploit public distrust of 'Big Government': '[I]t had to be made a question. Use the great American resource of paranoia. "Why haven't we seen a photograph of the whole Earth yet?" Ah. That was it.' Brand's scheme was successful, and the first published photo of planet Earth appeared on the cover of the Fall 1968 edition of *The Whole Earth Catalog*.<sup>305</sup> Brand later rhapsodised:

For the first time humanity saw itself from outside. The visible features from space were living blue ocean, living green-brown continents, dazzling polar ice and a busy atmosphere, all set like a delicate jewel in vast immensities of hard-vacuum space. Humanity's habitat looked tiny, fragile and rare. Suddenly humans had a planet to tend to. The

<sup>304</sup> BBC News, 22 January 2025. See <<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cz7e0jve875o>>.

<sup>305</sup> The complete issue is reproduced at <<https://shorturl.at/Uz23b>> or <[https://monoskop.org/images/0/09/Brand\\_Stewart\\_Whole\\_Earth\\_Catalog\\_Fall\\_1968.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/0/09/Brand_Stewart_Whole_Earth_Catalog_Fall_1968.pdf)>.

photograph of the whole earth from space helped to generate a lot of behavior – the ecology movement, the sense of global politics, the rise of the global economy, and so on.<sup>306</sup>

In one of those pleasing self-contained synchronicities that danced through the counterculture of the 1960s, there had indeed been a cover-up of sorts going on. Brand had been unaware, as he lay staring up into the Californian heavens in February 1966, that secret photographs of Earth from space really did exist. On the second day of that month, the Central Intelligence Agency had launched a satellite capable of taking high-resolution photographs, to spy on the Soviet Union's nuclear missile capabilities. Orbiting at an altitude of 115 miles, the KH-4A (Keyhole-4A) series satellites could produce imagery of objects on Earth as small as 2.7 metres across. Part of the CIA's CORONA surveillance operation, the KH-4s were carried into space aboard rockets launched from Vandenberg Air Force base in southern California, a few hours drive from Brand's home in San Francisco. However, the photograph eventually released in response to Brand's campaign was taken much later, on 10 November 1967, by a harmless and non-classified meteorological satellite operated by NASA. The CIA's CORONA programme, which had commenced in 1959, remained an official secret until its existence was declassified in 2011.

Far away from the marginalised and dreaming dropouts, wealthy adherents of the Californian Ideology began to reinvent themselves as the inheritors and standard-bearers of utopian hippie ideals. In 1994, Princeton graduate and hedge fund manager Jeff Bezos (b. 1964) deliberately rented a house with a garage, purely for PR purposes, so that he could use the garage as an office and warehouse, and thereby give his new company Amazon.com a counterculture-friendly 'humble origins' backstory.<sup>307</sup> Naming his new corporate behemoth after the South American river and its surrounding rainforest was in itself arguably a countercultural 'greenwashing' PR move. As Amazon.com gradually expanded (from 'one garage to another garage', as Bezos quipped), further layers of countercultural fakery were applied to the corporation's veneer. The young company's director of customer services contacted temp agencies for prospective employees, telling them 'Send us your freaks.' The firm's first tranche of warehouse workers consisted of 'a bunch of funky rock musicians and starving artists trying to make ends meet'.<sup>308</sup>

As of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Jeff Bezos has also leveraged

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<sup>306</sup> Smithsonian Photography Initiative, May 2008. See <<http://click.si.edu/Story.aspx?story=31>>. (Page deleted, archive only.)

<sup>307</sup> Robert Spector, *Amazon.com: Get Big Fast* (London: HarperCollins, 2000) p. 37.

<sup>308</sup> Spector p. 113.

his now incomprehensible wealth into private rocketry and grand ambitions for humankind's future in outer space. On graduating from high school in 1983, he spoke of his vision of establishing space colonies that would 'get all people off the Earth and see it turned into a huge national park'. Since people living off-Earth would have no way of visiting their home planet unassisted, this would commodify space traffic routes there and back. Effectively then, there would be a planetary entry price, in the manner of a ticket to a paradisical theme park – or perhaps, like the fare paid by hippies to board the magic bus to the dreaming land of Afghanistan. Years later, a friend recalled Bezos's private motivations as pioneering and expansionist in the American tradition:

[Bezos] was not so focused on the ecology side – but more about taking a long-term view of the Earth as a finite place to live. His was the classic Star Trek approach of the final frontier. We had the ability to explore space, so all we needed to do was pour money into it and then it would be explored. (Second emphasis added.)<sup>309</sup>

Bezos's idea of the Earth as a rewilded nature reserve implicitly acknowledges that the planet would be better off without humankind occupying it, which may seem like a respectable utopian proposition. That proposition contains an indirect proposition of its own, namely that spacefaring humankind will be able to extract the natural resources it requires by ransacking uninhabited natural objects in space instead. These objects need not necessarily be on the planetary scale. The asteroid Psyche-16, for example, is believed to contain metallic elements that would have a terrestrial monetary value of some \$100,000 Quadrillion, roughly 9.5 thousand times greater than the combined GDP of every nation on Earth. Psyche-16, which lies in the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter, is also believed to contain significant amounts of water, a molecule without which any human attempt to live anywhere in the Universe would obviously be impossible.<sup>310</sup>

As of 2025 an unmanned NASA mission to investigate Psyche-16 is under way. Launched in 2023, the landing probe is scheduled to reach its destination in 2029. Perhaps significantly, the contractor that built the rocketry for this Mars adjacent mission is the SpaceX corporation, owned by would-be Martian revolutionary Elon Musk.<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> Spector (see note 307) pp. 6 and 7.

<sup>310</sup> *Forbes*, 22 August 2024. See <<https://shorturl.at/UCf4A>> or <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jamiecartereurope/2024/08/22/there-may-be-water-on-psyche-the-asteroid-worth-10000-quadrillion/>>.

<sup>311</sup> Jet Propulsion Laboratory, California Institute of Technology, 28 October 2022. See <<https://www.jpl.nasa.gov/news/nasa-continues-psyche-asteroid-mission/>>.

## Space seed

The 'final frontier' of science fiction in the 1960s was a 'new frontier' of political fact, and became an integral founding dream among the Californian Ideologues.<sup>312</sup> In his 1960 acceptance speech, US presidential candidate John F. Kennedy had told the public and his party of his dreams of fulfilling far-reaching social reform and ambitious scientific projects. He explicitly invoked the mythos of exploration and expansion, declaring: 'I'm asking each of you to be pioneers towards that New Frontier.' In Spring the following year, Kennedy announced his goal of 'landing a man on the Moon and returning him safely to the Earth'. The language of the frontier mythos was already embedded in the US space program before Kennedy took office: a series of unmanned US probes had been sent into space between 1958 and 1960, officially called the Pioneer program.<sup>313</sup>

Similarly, the 'frontiering' aspect of the Californian Ideology is reflected in Elon Musk's concept of the establishment phase of his Martian colonies.

My rough guess is that for a half-million dollars, there are enough people that could afford to go [to Mars] and would want to go. But it's not going to be a vacation jaunt. It's going to be saving up all your money and selling all your stuff, like when people moved to the early American colonies.<sup>314</sup>

In terms of Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, the conquest of space is therefore simultaneously both an 'outward' and an 'upward'. Examining his frontier thesis in 1893, Turner had wistfully concluded:

Each frontier did indeed furnish a new field of opportunity, a gate of escape from the bondage of the past [ . . . Now] the frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history.

He had reckoned without Elon Musk.

Musk's rocketry company, SpaceX, was founded in a California warehouse in 2002, initially employing around 30 people. Like Bezos's theatrical founding of Amazon.com Inc in a small rented garage, Musk's founding of SpaceX was a deceptively small-scale start. Musk's personal investment in his new firm was \$100 million, an ostentatious display of self-confidence that inevitably (and

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<sup>312</sup> The first series of *Star Trek* was broadcast in 1966.

<sup>313</sup> The second Pioneer program ran from 1965 to 1992. As of 2025, the Pioneer probes 10 and 11 (launched in 1972 and 1973 respectively) are still heading into interstellar space, although radio communications with Earth have been lost.

<sup>314</sup> *AEON*, 30 September 2014. See note 272.

intentionally) encouraged would-be customers. By 2003, the Pentagon's research and development wing, DARPA, was sniffing at Musk's door, paying SpaceX for unspecified 'conceptual work'.

In 2006, NASA arrived and paid for the inaugural and unsuccessful launch of the first SpaceX rocket, Falcon 1. Soon after that, NASA handed SpaceX a contract worth \$279 million, to develop rocket delivery systems for delivering supplies to the crew of the International Space Station. When SpaceX eventually achieved its first successful rocket flight, in 2008, NASA was so enthused that it paid the company a further \$1.5 billion to see the supply project to fruition. It is hard to estimate the extent to which SpaceX has been federally funded, partly due to the fact that so much SpaceX work is on classified government projects. However, Musk's various business ventures have together received almost \$40 billion in government subsidies during the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.<sup>315</sup>

Hardcore anarcho-capitalist libertarians have denounced Musk's various off-Earth schemes, due to Musk's corporate reliance on government subsidies and tax breaks. The charge levelled against Musk is that this supposedly makes him an enemy of free market purism, and instead 'constitute[s] the very opposite: economic fascism; government interventionism, crony capitalism'.<sup>316</sup>

Similar accusations had been made against Ayn Rand in 1969, when she watched the launch of Apollo 11 and wrote that she had felt something 'that was not triumph: but more: the feeling that that white object's unobstructed streak of motion was the only thing that mattered in the universe'. Libertarian author Jerome Tuccille reacted by calling NASA 'bandits operating with billions of dollars stolen from the taxpayer', and thundering 'has Ayn Rand been co-opted into the system?'<sup>317</sup> Tuccille's barb was typical libertarian hyperbole, and he was not the only commentator making such accusations.

Libertarian economist David D. Friedman criticised the Apollo programme on the predictable basis that it was an enormous example of the government misusing the public's money. Adopting a more constructive line of criticism, Friedman estimated that a privately-funded Apollo 11 would have cost \$5

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<sup>315</sup> Extensive details of US federal funding for Musk's various ventures were published in the *Washington Post*, 26 February 2025. See <<https://shorturl.at/U1A9R>> or <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/interactive/2025/elon-musk-business-government-contracts-funding/>>.

<sup>316</sup> Walter E. Block and Peter L. Nelson, *Space Capitalism; How Humans Will Colonize Planets, Moons, and Asteroids* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) pp. 188-191.

<sup>317</sup> Quoted in Jennifer Burns (see note 87) p. 261.

billion, instead of NASA's \$24 billion. It could have been paid for by auctioning off samples of Moon rock, by selling commemorative stamps cancelled by the astronauts while on the lunar surface itself, and by selling sponsorship of the mission to private corporations at advertising rates. Friedman also took the TV audience figures for the coverage of NASA's Moon landing, and calculated that the cost of the mission could have been recouped by turning the entire project into a television spectacular, comprising a 'series of shows leading up to, including, and following the landing', although he ruefully observed that this would only have been cost-effective if pay-per-view TV broadcasting had been legal.<sup>318</sup>

Perhaps pre-empting these inevitable broadsides, Ayn Rand had been at pains to establish her ideological position, asking her readers: 'Is it proper for the government to engage in space exploration?' and immediately answering herself: 'No, it is not.' She added, quite deliberately, that

It is said that without the 'unlimited resources' of the government, such a enormous project would not have been undertaken. No, it would not have been – at this time. But it would have been, when the economy was ready for it.<sup>319</sup>

To some extent, then, it would be true to say that Rand was imagining the eventual career of someone very much like Elon Musk.

As for what ideological form the political independence of his Martian colonies might take, Musk has always tried to evade the subject of partisan preferences. He has however described his general outlook in a very recognisably libertarian way.

In general, I believe government should rarely impose its will upon the people, and, when doing so, should aspire to maximize their cumulative happiness.<sup>320</sup>

Musk has also mused about Martian society practising 'direct democracy', in which every decision is made by plebiscite, a concept dear to the heart of some Libertarians – although the more devout see it as a danger, since it allows minority choices to be oppressed by majorities. Nevertheless, this is a libertarian vision, since decentralising power and devolving it to the citizenry

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<sup>318</sup> *Protos* special issue, 1970 (see note 230), p. 22.

<sup>319</sup> Ayn Rand, *The Objectivist* (magazine), September 1969. Essay available online at <<https://courses.aynrand.org/works/apollo-11/?nab=1>>.

<sup>320</sup> Elon Musk, Twitter.com, 2 September 2021. See <<https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1433474893316722691>> Archived at <<https://archive.ph/qB0Kz>>.

inherently tends toward minarchism. How this would square with Musk's idea of himself as the colonial Martian proprietor is hard to imagine, but it is a stance squarely aligned with that of Ayn Rand, whose work Musk has read and admires.

## **A piece of the action**

Musk's schemes took a major setback when Trump lost the 2020 presidential election. While SpaceX continued to land lucrative government contracts throughout the 2021-2025 presidency of Joe Biden, it wasn't enough. In order to maximise his chances of securing a future government-funded Mars colonisation programme, Musk set out to facilitate Trump's return to office.

First, he bought the social media platform Twitter,<sup>321</sup> which Trump had used to reach voters directly, before and throughout his first term in office. The platform's management had silenced Trump by locking his personal account during the 6 January 2021 insurrection, citing his obvious encouragement of the disorder in Washington DC. After returning Trump's account to him on 7 January, with the danger seemingly passed, Trump began posting remarks about how he would boycott the forthcoming inauguration of his successor, Joe Biden. At that point, Twitter decided enough was enough, and closed his account down permanently, dubiously accusing Trump of ongoing breaches of the website's 'Glorification of Violence Policy'.<sup>322</sup>

Trump had always been a keen Twitter user. In 2017, he told followers: 'Twitter is a wonderful thing for me, because I get the word out [...] I might not be here talking to you right now as president if I didn't have an honest way of getting the word out.' For Trump, the site represented a form of communication analogous to, but incalculably more potent than, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's 'Fireside Chat' radio broadcasts. FDR's innovation allowed him to bypass the hostile corporate newspaper industry and to personally deliver his unmediated message into people's living rooms and parlours. Trump, who constantly railed against the 'Fake News media', just used the same strategy in a digital era. Twitter's 2021 ban was a major political blow for Trump, and many commentators even questioned its constitutional legitimacy.

Musk's own use of Twitter during the crisis period of January 2021 raises the question of whether he was deliberately trying to cause a simultaneous economic crisis, to destabilise the Biden presidency at its outset, with the

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<sup>321</sup> Musk later changed the website's domain name from Twitter.com to X.com. For the sake of clarity, the platform is consistently referred to as Twitter throughout the present work.

<sup>322</sup> Twitter Inc, corporate blog, 8 January 2021. See <[https://blog.x.com/en\\_us/topics/company/2020/suspension](https://blog.x.com/en_us/topics/company/2020/suspension)>.

longer-term purpose of bolstering public support for Trump. Six days after Biden's inauguration, Musk exacerbated a potential banking disaster by using Twitter to drive hysteria related to a short squeeze on shares in the struggling video game retailer GameStop.<sup>323</sup>

The economics of this are labyrinthine,<sup>324</sup> and so are the origins of the short squeeze itself. But in a nutshell, it began as a semi-malicious online prank, executed by traders who noticed an opportunity to punish hedge funds for their predatory practices, by forcing them to incur huge unexpected losses.<sup>325</sup> But the company's spiralling share prices – at one point, nearly \$500 per share, making the company worth more than oil giant ExxonMobil – threatened a chain of liquidity crises among brokers, and a corresponding cascade of defaults. The Security and Exchange Commission reported in October 2021 that the GameStop debacle 'tested the capacity and resiliency of our securities markets in a way that few could have anticipated'.<sup>326</sup>

In January 2022, Musk began buying up shares in Twitter, until he owned almost 10 per cent of the total stock. He then began negotiating to buy the platform, submitting his offer in April 2022. He denied that Trump had encouraged him to buy Twitter, even though that claim had been made directly by a Trump aide.<sup>327</sup> Then Musk said that if he did buy Twitter, he would rescind the ban that stopped Trump from using it.<sup>328</sup> Since Musk eventually paid \$44 billion to gain control of the platform, it would be reasonable to infer that he was speculating with confidence. Trump's account was finally reactivated on 20 November 2022, but he did not resume using it until the 2024 election

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<sup>323</sup> Reuters, 26 January 2021. See <<https://shorturl.at/Ek9My>> or <<https://www.reuters.com/article/technology/gamestop-extends-reddit-driven-hyper-rally-after-musk-tweet-idUSKBN29V214/>>.

<sup>324</sup> A decent explanation was published by the *Financial Times*, 29 January 2021. See <<https://www.ft.com/content/47e3eaad-e087-4250-97fd-e428bac4b5e9>>.

<sup>325</sup> *Rolling Stone*, 29 January 2021. See <<https://shorturl.at/MDdGE>> or <<https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/gamestop-reddit-robinhood-hedge-fund-populism-1120713/>>.

<sup>326</sup> SEC: 'Staff Report on Equity and Options Market Structure Conditions in Early 2021' published 14 October 2021. See <<https://shorturl.at/GaJWs>> or <<https://www.sec.gov/files/staff-report-equity-options-market-structure-conditions-early-2021.pdf>>.

<sup>327</sup> *Forbes*, 6 May 2022 <<https://shorturl.at/g7QTU>> or <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/annakaplan/2022/05/06/musk-denies-claim-trump-encouraged-him-to-buy-twitter/>>.

<sup>328</sup> *Financial Times*, 8 May 2022. See <<https://www.ft.com/content/2bf4e8db-e35c-40fd-9fdc-bfff6745e90f>>.

campaign had begun.<sup>329</sup>

Approximately one week after reactivating Trump's account, Musk falsely declared that he would support the Republican governor of Florida, Ron DeSantis, at the 2024 presidential election.<sup>330</sup> However, during the 2024 election campaign, a reporting exposé showed that Musk was secretly donating large sums to a campaign 'front' organisation, to support Trump's bid for the presidency.<sup>331</sup> When a would-be assassin's bullet nicked Trump's ear 24 hours after that revelation, Musk didn't let the crisis go to waste. He immediately proclaimed 'I fully endorse President Trump and wish for his full recovery.'<sup>332</sup> By the time the media had recovered their senses after the shooting, Musk's political volte-face was old news.

### **It takes two to tango**

As the 2024 campaign progressed, the libertarian nature of the Trump-Musk team became explicit. For instance, in November 2024, with days left until voting, Musk tweeted a satirical manipulated photograph of himself, seated alongside Libertarian Party grandee Ron Paul, to promote Trump's proposed 'Department of Government Efficiency', a cuts-making task force which Musk would eventually head. This allusion to a former libertarian presidential candidate was beyond a dog-whistle, and might more accurately be described as horse-whispering. The clear but unstated message was: 'Vote Trump, get libertarianism'.<sup>333</sup>

In parallel to his often covert campaign teamwork with Musk, Trump was drawing succour from a libertarian experiment that had sprung up in Latin America. Javier Milei, a self-professed libertarian, was elected president of Argentina in November 2023 and immediately set about a series of radical

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<sup>329</sup> Elon Musk, Twitter.com, 19 November 2022. See <<https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1594131768298315777>>.

<sup>330</sup> *Fortune*, 26 November 2022. See <<https://shorturl.at/f60AF>> or <<https://fortune.com/2022/11/26/elon-musk-backs-ron-desantis-for-president-fellow-fighter-woke-agenda/>>.

<sup>331</sup> *Bloomberg*, 12 July 2024. See <<https://shorturl.at/N5ScP>> or <<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-07-12/elon-musk-donates-to-trump-tapping-vast-fortune-to-swing-2024-race>>.

<sup>332</sup> Elon Musk, Twitter, 13 July 2024. See <<https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1812256998588662068>>.

<sup>333</sup> Elon Musk, Twitter, 2 November 2024. See <<https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1852546748956225833>>. Archived at <<https://archive.is/QhDa6>>.

economic reforms that he described as 'Shock Treatment'.<sup>334</sup> He had been able to sell this plan to the electorate thanks to Argentina's dire economic situation, which had seen annual inflation averaging 190 per cent since 1944. In its worst year, 1990, Argentina's inflation reached a peak of 20,262 per cent.

To quell this chronic inflationary problem, Milei prescribed the traditional combination of privatisation and austerity. Into this package of economic nostrums, Milei had smuggled a bundle of social reforms such as restricting abortion rights and liberalising gun laws. In office, Milei abolished nine of the government's 18 ministerial departments, eviscerated government subsidies to Argentine industries, and devalued the country's currency. Within a year of Milei's election, the poverty rate in Argentina reached 53 per cent<sup>335</sup> and Argentina's inflation (which had been 140 per cent when he took office) hit 250 per cent despite Milei's fixation on reducing it. Meanwhile, wage stagnation and Milei's devaluation of the peso meant that Argentines found they were getting steadily poorer by default.

Argentines seem generally resigned and philosophical about suffering the short-term consequences of Milei's plans, with one struggling worker telling the BBC: 'If it is the last thing we have to go through, let's go through it.' Whether Milei himself feels this way is open to question. A pensioner who found herself having to busk in Buenos Aires to supplement her vanishing state income, lamented that 'It's the common people who are suffering.' When her statement was put to Milei, he rejected it as 'false' and then sweepingly dismissed all such hardships by saying 'You can't make a macroeconomic evaluation based on the situation of an individual.'<sup>336</sup>

Not unlike Trump, Milei regards his country's news media as his enemies, denouncing them as 'rotten' and 'serial liars'. He also sees himself as an



Javier Milei

<sup>334</sup> BBC News, 11 December 2023. See <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-67678276>>.

<sup>335</sup> Reuters, 10 October 2024. See <<https://shorturl.at/UIDF7>> or <<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/argentinas-triple-digit-inflation-slows-cash-strapped-workers-struggle-pay-bills-2024-10-10/>>.

<sup>336</sup> BBC News, 06 May 2024. See <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-68935255>>.

outsider struggling against an entrenched political establishment, which he calls *la casta*, or 'the caste'.<sup>337</sup> Also not unlike Trump, Milei bases many of his arguments on what could be generously called alternative facts. For example, Milei regards the entirety of human history as a story of free market economic expansion, and promotes his hypercapitalism by stating that 'between the year zero and the year 1800 approximately, world per capita GDP practically remained constant throughout the whole reference period'.<sup>338</sup>

### **Lo barato sale caro**<sup>339</sup>

Milei has an accomplice in the form of Federico Sturzenegger (born 1966), a former governor of the National Bank of Argentina, whom Milei calls 'the best economist on the planet'. His extensive CV includes a lengthy series of consultancies at the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the United Nations Development Program. Sturzenegger's career received a kick start in 1987, when he graduated as a Bachelor of Economics, from the National University of La Plata, Argentina. He was immediately awarded a Ford Foundation scholarship, which enabled him to study in the US. Sturzenegger then enrolled with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which awarded him his PhD in economics in 1991. In the years that followed, he would return to US academia, first as assistant professor of economics at the University of California, Los Angeles (1991-1994), then as visiting professor of public affairs at Harvard (2005-2007).<sup>340</sup>

In July 2024, Javier Milei appointed Sturzenegger his Minister for Deregulation and State Transformation. According to Milei's presidential decree of 5 July 2024, Sturzenegger's remit is the 'deregulation, reform, and modernisation of the state with a view to resizing and reducing public spending, increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of agencies'.<sup>341</sup>

Sturzenegger has direct hands-on experience of overseeing transitions between economic paradigms. In 1993 (so, during his aforementioned visiting

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<sup>337</sup> BBC News, 16 February 2024. See <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-68287245>>.

<sup>338</sup> Javier Milei, 'Address to the World Economic Forum', delivered 17 January 2024. See <<https://shorturl.at/aa9mh>> or <<https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/01/special-address-by-javier-milei-president-of-argentina/>>.

<sup>339</sup> 'Cheap things are expensive' (Argentine proverb).

<sup>340</sup> Sturzenegger's impressive CV can be inspected at <[https://fsturzenegger.com.ar/CV-Federico-Sturzenegger-2019\\_en.pdf](https://fsturzenegger.com.ar/CV-Federico-Sturzenegger-2019_en.pdf)>.

<sup>341</sup> Buenos Aires Times, 5 July 2024. See <<https://shorturl.at/bW28d>> or <<https://www.batimes.com.ar/news/argentina/sturzenegger-officially-joins-government-minister-of-de-regulation-and-state-transformation.phtml>>.

professorship with the University of California), Sturzenegger was a consultant to the National Bank of Ukraine. Ukraine had become independent from the collapsing Soviet Union in 1991, and rushed to adopt free market principles. Within three years, Ukraine's GDP fell by 50 per cent and hyperinflation set in. Sturzenegger arrived just in time to study the Ukrainian government implement so-called 'shock therapy'. A year later, in 1994, Sturzenegger had become a visiting scholar at the Moscow-based Institute for the Economy in Transition (EIT),<sup>342</sup> headed by former Soviet apparatchik Yegor Gaidar (1956–2009).<sup>343</sup>

EIT had formed from the discussions of a small cluster of Soviet economists, Gaidar among them, tacitly encouraged by Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev. Their ideological good standing allowed them to privately analyse the USSR's economic problems without attracting the suspicion of officialdom. The seed of doubt had been planted in Gaidar's mind during his childhood, when he visited communist Cuba with his parents in 1963. The seven-year-old Gaidar saw the poor and limited choice of fruit on sale in Havana's markets, but later saw vast quantities of unsold fruit at farms in the surrounding countryside. There was, as he put it 'a supply and demand problem'.<sup>344</sup> In his twenties, Gaidar's outlook was further influenced by reading a subversive science fiction novel called *The Inhabited Island*.<sup>345</sup> The scantily-disguised metaphorical plot sees a naïve cosmonaut accidentally overthrow an alien dystopia, thus foiling the schemes of a self-appointed benevolent despot who believed the hardships endured by the people were only a temporary prelude to a glorious future.



Yegor Gaidar

<sup>342</sup> Founded in 1990 as the Institute for Economic Policy, an organ of the Academy of National Economy, which itself trained managers and civil servants for their careers in the Soviet Union's centrally-planned economy.

<sup>343</sup> The EIT has since been renamed in Gaidar's honour. See the Institute's own explanation: <<https://shorturl.at/TfhjU>> or <<https://www.iep.ru/en/brief-introduction-to-the-ye-t-gaidar-institute-for-economic-policy.html>>. For clarity's sake, the organisation is referred to as EIT throughout the present work.

<sup>344</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 16 December 2009. See <<https://shorturl.at/2exTv>> or <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/finance-obituaries/6827912/Yegor-Gaidar.html>>.

<sup>345</sup> Co-authored by brothers Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, and initially circulated in mimeographed form, before being published in partially censored book form in 1971.

EIT was one of the think tanks pushing for the abolition of the USSR's command economy, and when Gorbachev eventually resigned, Gaidar joined the new government of Boris Yeltsin, as Minister of Finance. In January 1992, Gaidar inflicted shock therapy on Russia, including the abolition of price controls, the easing of foreign trade barriers, and the privatisation of state assets. By the end of 1992, inflation had averaged 301.5 per cent,<sup>346</sup> a third of the population was living below the official level of poverty, and unemployment had increased by a factor of 10 to some 35 million people.

On the day of Javier Milei's election as Argentine president in November 2023, photographs of Milei displaying a libertarian flag were circulated on social media platform Twitter. The flag was the famous black and gold 'Gadsden Flag', depicting a coiled viper ready to strike, with the legend 'Don't Tread on Me' below. The Gadsden Flag, designed and flown during the American Revolution, has since become an emblem of US state rights in general, and has been adopted by libertarians the world over.

Responding publicly to one of those photographs, Elon Musk commented simply 'Prosperity is ahead for Argentina'.<sup>347</sup> A few weeks later, there was a seemingly unnecessary public exchange between the two, via the same social media platform. Musk posted a video of an interview with Milei, in which he said: 'There is nothing more unfair than social justice [. . .] When you go along with social justice, which is the redistribution of wealth, what you are really doing is using the state's repressive machinery to take from the successful and distribute whimsically according to the wishes of whoever sits in power.' Milei himself immediately responded to Musk: 'Elon, we need to talk.'<sup>348</sup> After this elaborately contrived public connection, Musk went on to promote Milei's government and its policies throughout the US election campaign.<sup>349</sup> In the minds of Trump and Musk, Milei's Argentina became what Pinochet's Chile had represented to Reagan and Thatcher in the 1970s: living proof of a successful new economic paradigm.

The week before the US presidential election, Elon Musk told viewers of a

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<sup>346</sup> This was a spike, but six years later, Russia's average yearly inflation was still 21.5 per cent.

<sup>347</sup> Elon Musk, X.com, 19 November 2023. See <<https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1726377537259925795>> Archived at <<https://archive.is/a7VjT>>.

<sup>348</sup> *Buenos Aires Herald*, 5 December 2023. See <<https://shorturl.at/nhrWS>> or <<https://buenosairesherald.com/politics/elon-musk-shares-video-of-milei-attacking-social-justice>>.

<sup>349</sup> For example, on Twitter on 7 May 2024. See <<https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1787654457339342932>>.

broadcast on Twitter that '[W]e have to reduce spending to live within our means. And that necessarily involves some temporary hardship, but it will ensure long-term prosperity'. One viewer commented that 'initial severe overreaction in the economy' means the 'market will tumble', but anticipated 'There will be a rapid recovery to a healthier, sustainable economy.' To which Musk replied simply: 'Sounds about right.'<sup>350</sup>

Speaking after Trump's election, Javier Milei told a Buenos Aires conference:



I understand that it is through lower taxes and not through spurious devaluations that impoverish the population that competitiveness is achieved. In the United States they have already realised this and are copying our model. In fact, Musk is in talks with Federico Sturzenegger to see how to deregulate the US economy.<sup>351</sup>

Throughout his eccentric and erratic 2023 campaign, Javier Milei had frequently wielded a chainsaw, to symbolise his plans to eviscerate the overblown state, reduce

wasteful government spending, and (most importantly) cut taxes. The chainsaw was inscribed with the motto 'Viva la libertad, carajo' which could be parsed into vernacular English as 'Fuck it all, long live freedom.' Soon after Donald Trump's inauguration as US President in 2025, Musk appeared on a conference stage in Washington DC, accompanied by guest Javier Milei. The Argentine president handed Musk the original campaign chainsaw, and Musk held it aloft, shouting 'This is the chainsaw for bureaucracy!' <sup>352</sup> Trump and his small band of libertarian accomplices were finally free, to smash the system from within.

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<sup>350</sup> *New York Times*, 29 October 2024. See <<https://shorturl.at/fD0kA>> or <<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/10/29/us/politics/elon-musk-trump-economy-hardship.html>>.

<sup>351</sup> *Buenos Aires Times*, 12 November 2024. See <<https://shorturl.at/w6a2J>> or <<https://www.batimes.com.ar/news/argentina/milei-talks-with-trump-says-us-is-copying-argentinas-model.phtml>>.

<sup>352</sup> Reported in politer form by *Reuters*, 21 February 2025. See: <<https://shorturl.at/pE736>> or <<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/elon-musk-wields-chainsaw-conservative-gathering-gift-argentinas-milei-2025-02-21/>>.

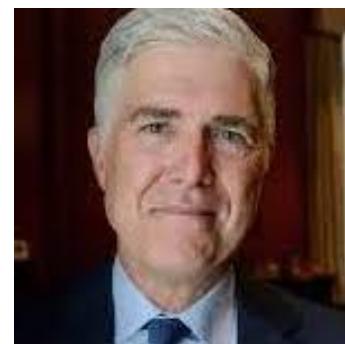
## Part 6 The Deconstruction Era

We do have a kind of empirical methodology for trying to assess levels of stability throughout the world, and there are probably two thirds of the countries in the world that exhibit one or more characteristics – in varying degrees, obviously – of instability. And I guess if you applied that same measure against us, well, we're starting to exhibit some of them too.<sup>353</sup>

### 'A baneful precedent'

When the US Supreme Court overturned the landmark case of *Roe v Wade*, in 2022, the national uproar was considerable and long lasting. The then President Joe Biden called it 'the culmination of a deliberate effort over decades to upset the balance of our law', and said it was 'a realization of an extreme ideology and a tragic error by the Supreme Court, in my view'. Much of the public outrage was naturally directed at Donald Trump who, during his first presidential term, had appointed three new justices to the Supreme Court. This gave the Supreme Court a conservative majority, and indeed all three of Trump's picks had voted to overturn the 1973 *Roe* decision. These justices were Neil Gorsuch (appointed in 2017); Brett Kavanaugh (appointed in 2018); and Amy Coney Barrett (appointed in 2020).

The appointment of Gorsuch, in particular, was widely condemned. When Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia died in February 2016, Trump's presidential predecessor Barack Obama had nominated Merrick Garland to replace him.<sup>354</sup> (Garland had already been chief judge of the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, for decades.) In what a *New York Times* editorial<sup>355</sup> denounced as 'a stupendous show of political malfeasance', Republicans in Congress blocked the confirmation process to



Neil Gorsuch

<sup>353</sup> James Clapper, Director of National Intelligence, speaking at the Aspen Security Forum, 28 July 2016. See <<https://youtu.be/XpG9MXVoeQA>> (commencing at 28 minutes and 35 seconds.) Archived at <<https://archive.org/details/aspen-security-forum-28-july-2016>>.

<sup>354</sup> Sitting presidents have the power to appoint judges, under Article II of the US Constitution.

<sup>355</sup> *New York Times*, 17 March 2017. See <<https://shorturl.at/gaHwe>> or <<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/17/opinion/merrick-garland-for-the-supreme-court.html>>.

prevent Obama's nomination from going ahead. Merrick's candidacy expired with the end of Obama's presidency. When Trump took office he filled the vacancy left by Scalia with Gorsuch instead, thus beginning the process of tilting the Supreme Court decisively to the right.<sup>356</sup> As the *Times* remarked, the sole object of blocking Garland's appointment 'was to hold on to the court's conservative majority. The outrageousness of the ploy was matched only by the unlikelihood that it would succeed — until, to virtually everyone's shock, it did. . . .'<sup>357</sup> It wasn't quite as drastic as Franklin D. Roosevelt's 1937 'court-packing' scheme,<sup>358</sup> but the principle was the same.

All three of President Trump's appointments to the Supreme Court (Gorsuch, Kavanaugh, and Barrett) were affiliates<sup>359</sup> of a Washington D.C. Policy thinktank called the Federalist Society.<sup>360</sup>

The Federalist Society was founded by Yale University students in 1982, as a way of uniting and galvanising legal professionals opposed to what they believed was the liberal-left caucus dominating the judiciary. The Society took aim at what it called 'judicial activism', the perceived tendency for judges to usurp the powers of legislators by constant re-interpretation of the US Constitution. The Federalist Society's own 'counter-activism' was therefore implicitly presented as not activism at all, and perhaps even its opposite: inactivism.

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<sup>356</sup> When Brett Kavanaugh was subsequently appointed, it was to replace the retiring Justice Anthony Kennedy; Amy Coney Barrett replaced the recently-deceased Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

<sup>357</sup> *New York Times*, 31 January 2017.

'While Judge Gorsuch's views on abortion are not known, he has written extensively about assisted suicide and euthanasia. In his book on the topic, he wrote that "human life is fundamentally and inherently valuable, and that the intentional taking of human life by private persons is always wrong." By himself, Judge Gorsuch would not upset the court's balance on abortion rights or affirmative action, but if one of the more liberal justices or Justice Anthony Kennedy step down during Mr. Trump's presidency, a solidly right-wing majority could quickly overturn those precedents.'

See <<https://shorturl.at/pfwTc>> or  
<<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/31/opinion/neil-gorsuch-the-nominee-for-a-stolen-seat.html>>

<sup>358</sup> For a summary, see the Federal Judicial Center's brief description at <<https://www.fjc.gov/history/timeline/fdrs-court-packing-plan>>.

<sup>359</sup> This is a neutral descriptor that verges on generosity. A cynic might call such valuable affiliates 'deniable members'.

<sup>360</sup> Whether the Federalist Society is a think tank ultimately depends on one's definition. The society is registered in the District of Columbia as a non-profit and tax-exempt organisation: The Federalist Society For Law & Public Policy Studies. (Emphasis supplied) See <<https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/organizations/363235550>>.

The appellation 'Federalist' is itself deceptively ambiguous. The Federalist Society argues that it is concerned with the separation of federal powers, a modern reading that is plausible at face value. However, the word 'federalist' has a forgotten historic meaning: it originally meant supporters of the US Articles of Confederation, which came into effect in 1781, who were adamantly opposed to the US Constitution. When the Articles were superseded by the Constitution in 1789, supporters of the US Constitution appropriated the term 'federalist' to mean their support for stronger centralised governance instead. As discussed further below, the Federalist Society's attitude toward the US Constitution invites doubts about which meaning applies.

A Federalist Society member and former justice department official summarised the Society's approach by saying: 'Policy is people'.<sup>361</sup> By appointing judges and justices, American governments can install people who are likely to take a politically favourable stance on legal issues. Changing the interpretation of the US Constitution, which is the objective of the Federalist Society, takes historical amounts of time and widespread coordinated effort. One pithy twist on an old proverb is so repeated so often within the Federalist Society that it could be regarded as a corporate motto: 'Rome wasn't burned in a day'.<sup>362</sup>

By the time Trump left office in 2021, the Federalist Society boasted some 40,000 members, of whom a quarter were law undergraduates, constituting a 'future generation' of protégés. The remaining 30,000 constituted the society's Lawyers Division, and were distributed across 75 chapters, each in a major US city, with members switching in and out of 15 national 'practice groups'. The Lawyers Division also operates a Speakers' Bureau, arranging Federalist Society communicators for public engagements.<sup>363</sup> The Federalist Society has been called a 'vast right wing conspiracy' but (according to Professor Lawrence Baum, of the Ohio State University) serves as a formalised version of the private and personal milieus that have always existed in American legal communities, and thus might be more accountable than those networks. Somewhat disingenuously, Baum contrasts the Federal Society with the social connections of Supreme Court Justices during Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency, which have never been called 'a vast left wing conspiracy':

There were strong links between some of Franklin Roosevelt's Supreme

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<sup>361</sup> Amanda Hollis-Brusky, *Ideas with Consequences: The Federalist Society and the Conservative Counterrevolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015) pp. 152 to 153.

<sup>362</sup> Hollis-Brusky, p. 20.

<sup>363</sup> Hollis-Brusky p. 12

Court appointees and other liberals in the New Deal era. Liberal justices on the Court and the federal court of appeals for the District of Columbia interacted with each other and with like-minded people who [later] held other positions in the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, the dining room of a liquor warehouse in Washington served as something of a 'salon' for liberals in and out of the judiciary during that [i.e. Roosevelt's] era.<sup>364</sup>

Central to the Federalist Society's projects is a legalist school of thought known as originalism: rather than interpreting the US Constitution and allowing it to evolve in pace with society, readings should be objectively confined to what the Founding Fathers had in mind when they wrote it. Or rather, what the Founding Fathers must have meant, which is a somewhat subjective version of constitutional truth. In effect, a living and active document would become a document held in permanent suspended animation. As Justice Antonin Scalia angrily declared in 2013: 'It's not a living document. It's dead, dead, dead.'<sup>365</sup>

That this is a somewhat faux-purist approach can be inferred from the fact that adherents of originalism reject calls for any kind of gun control, even though the only firearms available in the 18<sup>th</sup> century were flintlock pistols and muskets.<sup>366</sup> For opponents of originalism, this kind of contradiction shows how proponents

'fail to appreciate the holistic character of meaning – that individual utterances earn their meaning based on how they fit into a linguistic whole – and, accordingly, target the wrong object of interpretation, focusing on individual words and statements when they must first grasp the broader idioms from which those component parts issued.'<sup>367</sup>

As with many other forms of fundamentalism, the implications are far-reaching, since a newly-imposed prior restraint on constitutional interpretation

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<sup>364</sup> Lawrence Baum, *Judges and Their Audiences* (2006), cited in Hollis-Brusky (see note 362), p. 165.

<sup>365</sup> Hollis-Brusky (see note 362) p. 172.

<sup>366</sup> It is taken as a given that the US Constitution is not and never was a perfect document, as is evinced by the existence of 27 post-enactment amendments. Perhaps the most infamous is the Eighteenth, which imposed the prohibition era in 1919, and (when that proved a disaster) was repealed in 1933 by the Twenty-First. In passing, it's worthwhile to note that an originalist approach to the Constitution does not inherently rule out future amendments.

<sup>367</sup> Jonathan Gienapp, 'Historicism and Holism: Failures of Originalist Translation', *Fordham Law Review*, 2015; vol. 4, issue 3; p. 935. See <<https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/flr/vol84/iss3/3>>.

allows for aspects of modern US society to be drastically altered without engaging the constitution at all.<sup>368</sup> Federalist Society co-founder Steven Calabresi stated:

[M]any of our members are right of center, and because they tend to be interested in public policy and politics, a lot of them go on to do jobs in government and [ . . . ] become directly involved in policy-making. So I think it's fair to say Federalist Society alumni who go into government have tended to push public policy in a libertarian-conservative direction.<sup>369</sup>

When Trump was defeated in the presidential election of 2020, The Federalist Society was also implicated in the attempted January 6<sup>th</sup> putsch, in the form of senior Society member John Eastman. An experienced constitutional lawyer, Eastman was the creator of a fraudulent pseudo-legal scheme that aimed to allow Trump to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election while somehow adhering to the US Constitution. The core of Eastman's argument, which he proposed in the last week of December 2020, was that the constitution's Twelfth Amendment allowed for the Vice President to disqualify the electoral college votes of some states, and reach a decision by finding a majority of electoral college votes among the remainder. Thus, in Eastman's scenario, the 538 electoral college votes would be reduced to 454 by excluding seven pro-Biden states, allowing Trump to 'win' with only 232 electoral college votes.<sup>370</sup>

## A Cold Civil War

Despite the understandable furore, and despite popular confusion, the 2022 overturning of Roe v Wade was not a national ban on abortion. Supreme Court justice Samuel Alito, who wrote the majority opinion, stated: 'It is time to heed the Constitution and return the issue of abortion to the people's elected

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<sup>368</sup> It is taken as a given that the US Constitution is not and never was a perfect document, as is evinced by the existence of 27 post-enactment amendments. Perhaps the most infamous is the Eighteenth, which imposed the prohibition era in 1919, and (when that proved a disaster) was repealed in 1933 by the Twenty-First. In passing, it's worthwhile to remark that an originalist approach to the Constitution does not inherently rule out future amendments.

<sup>369</sup> Hollis-Brusky (see note 362) p. 10.

<sup>370</sup> John Eastman, undated memo. See <<https://shorturl.at/mDAWx>> or <[https://policymemos.hks.harvard.edu/files/policymemos/files/9\\_22\\_21\\_memo\\_trump\\_lawyer\\_to\\_vp\\_pence\\_overturn\\_election.pdf?m=1632510751](https://policymemos.hks.harvard.edu/files/policymemos/files/9_22_21_memo_trump_lawyer_to_vp_pence_overturn_election.pdf?m=1632510751)>.

representatives.<sup>371</sup>

The issue at hand was the constitutionality of state abortion laws, and *Roe v Wade* had been negated in favour of the state laws of Mississippi. One of the consequences of *Roe* had been the imposition<sup>372</sup> of a national 24-week upper limit on abortion. Mississippi wanted to impose a tighter, 15-week limit instead, and the 2022 decision ceded the federal rule in favour of the state rule. Mississippi had passed its own state legislation (the Gestational Age Act) in March 2018, intended to govern access to abortion healthcare. This was done in the full knowledge that the state's 2018 Bill<sup>373</sup> clashed with the 1973 Supreme Court ruling, and thus served as an active and ultimately successful state-level challenge to the federal government's power.

What passed almost unremarked-upon was the fact that the Solicitor-General of Mississippi was Scott G. Stewart,<sup>374</sup> a lawyer who had served in the Department of Justice during the Trump presidency of 2017-2021. Stewart had led the federal government's case in a 2017 hearing that sought to force a pregnant immigrant to either carry the pregnancy to term or leave the country. Stewart had presented the hair-raisingly sophistical argument that the government wasn't interfering with the woman's right to choose an abortion, only her right to gain access to clinicians willing to perform the operation. Therefore, said Stewart, she was free to seek an abortion on the condition that she did so outside the USA. The judge hearing the case said she was 'astounded' by this proposal, and rejected the government's position.<sup>375</sup>

The year before overturning *Roe v Wade*, the Supreme Court had fired another shot across the bows of the federal government. Again, the shot was a southern state-level abortion law, the so-called Texas Heartbeat Act. And again, the issue was the validity of *Roe v Wade*. As the main plank of its argument, Texas asserted that the state level laws that existed before the 1973 *Roe* ruling had never been repealed. The federal government (under Democratic Party president Joe Biden) tried to bring Texas to heel in 2021, and

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<sup>371</sup> *New York Times*, 24 June 2022. See <<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/24/us/roe-wade-overturned-supreme-court.html>>.

<sup>372</sup> Via a 'descendant' Supreme Court ruling, *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992).

<sup>373</sup> As eventually enacted, MS Code § 41-41-191 (2023). See <<https://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/documents/2018/pdf/HB/1500-1599/HB1510SG.pdf>>.

<sup>374</sup> Undated biography, published by the Office of the Attorney General of Mississippi. See <<https://attorneygenerallynnfitch.com/divisions/solicitor-general/>>.

<sup>375</sup> *Mother Jones*, 18 October 2017. See <<https://shorturl.at/ghDSu>> or <<https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2017/10/trumps-doj-lawyers-just-made-a-shocking-argument-about-the-right-to-abortion/>>.

the Supreme Court dismissed the government's application. When Roe was overturned in 2022, both the Texas Heartbeat Act and Mississippi's Gestational Age Act therefore became active law by default. These were 'trigger laws' laid down in advance of a change of circumstances, and Texas and Mississippi were only two of 13 states to have prepared the same way for the Supreme Court's decision to rule Roe unconstitutional: Arkansas; Idaho; Kentucky; Louisiana; Mississippi; Missouri; North Dakota; Oklahoma; South Dakota; Tennessee; Texas; Utah; Wyoming.

All 13 of those states were Republican-controlled at the state level; eight of them are traditionally considered part of US south; and five of those southern states were members of the Confederacy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Apart from Texas and Mississippi, the other three 'Rebel' states with trigger laws were Louisiana and Tennessee, which both passed their abortion laws in 2018, and Arkansas, which passed its anti-abortion law in 2019. Somehow, these hard-red states had all caught which way the wind was blowing, and had prepared accordingly in the space of a few years. If Trump had not been defeated in 2020, all these preparations would have come to fruition during his second term in office. It is hard to resist the inference that Trump's court-packing scheme was intended to deliver this exact outcome all along.

Like the wave of trigger laws laid down by states in seeming preparation for the 2022 overturning of Roe v Wade, other synchronised waves of state laws suggest forthcoming battles that the federal government will only fight on a superficial level, if at all. The most striking of these waves – and the one that most deserves the label 'trigger law' – concerns that fundamentally American of rights: The Second Amendment right to bear arms.

From 2021 to 2022, more than a dozen US states introduced legislation declaring themselves 'Second Amendment Sanctuary States', and exempt from federal gun laws. The states were: Alabama (which passed its law on 13 April 2022); Arkansas (29 April 2021); Arizona (6 April 2021); Kentucky (26 April 2021); Missouri (12 June 2021); Montana (23 April 2021); Nebraska (14 April 2021); New Hampshire (24 June 2022); North Dakota (26 April 2021); Oklahoma (27 April 2021); South Carolina (17 May 2021); Tennessee (2 June 2021); Texas (17 June 2021); West Virginia (26 March 2021); and Wyoming (22 March 2022).

As with the wave of trigger laws laid down in advance of the overturning of Roe v Wade, the correlation with former Confederate states now under Republican governance is abundantly clear. (The participation of libertarian redoubt New Hampshire should by now come as no surprise.) All these 'Second Amendment Sanctuary' laws are likewise unconstitutional and unenforceable, for the time being. The seeming coordination suggests that a future Supreme

Court ruling related to the Second Amendment is anticipated among Republican cognoscenti.

This is another area in which the libertarian-aligned Federalist Society (see page 98 above) is keenly interested. Its originalist reading of the US Constitution's Second Amendment has it that the desirability of well-regulated militias is a justification for, but not a condition of, private firearms ownership. Thus, the individual rights of US citizens are the final argument, because the originalists have (not entirely unreasonably) used basic grammar to pare extraneous interpretations from the constitution's meaning.<sup>376</sup> There are at present four key federal laws that impose restrictions and conditions on private gun ownership,<sup>377</sup> and so it seems likely that a state-level challenge to at least one of those laws will triumph at the Supreme Court in the foreseeable future.

A tell-tale clue as to what lies ahead may be the case of Missouri's 2021 'Second Amendment Preservation Act'. The Biden administration's Department of Justice sued Missouri under Article VI of the Constitution. This is the so-called Supremacy Clause that grants the federal government the power to outweigh state-level laws. When a federal injunction was granted against the new law, Missouri appealed, and lost. The state then applied to the Supreme Court for a stay (a 'relief' period) to prepare a further appeal. The Supreme Court dismissed the stay application, which was constitutional in that it adhered to Article VI. But crucially, the Supreme Court did not order Missouri to annul or repeal its new gun law, which is thus still valid but currently suppressed.

From the day it was handed down in 1973, *Roe v Wade* had been bitterly contested on multiple grounds, but most consistently and overwhelmingly on a constitutional point of principle. Namely, that instead of interpreting the law, the Supreme Court had invented a new civil right in 1973, by stretching the terms of the Constitution and declaring restrictions on access to abortion to be 'violative of the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment'. This, for many, was a vast federal usurpation of the rights of individual US states, and the twist of the knife lay in the fact that the Supreme Court's decision was an

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<sup>376</sup> 'The right of the people to keep and bear Arms' is the subject; 'shall not be infringed' is the verb; and 'The right of the people to keep and bear arms' is therefore also the indirect object. The introduction to that sentence is a prefatory scene-setter (an absolute): 'A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State [ . . . ].'

<sup>377</sup> The National Firearms Act (1934); the Gun Control Act (1968); the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act (1993); and the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (2022).

explicit rebuke to Texas, whose local law was the principal issue in *Roe*.<sup>378</sup> In 2008, US Senator Barack Obama campaigned for the presidency with a promise to permanently enshrine the *Roe* ruling by turning it into a federal law.<sup>379</sup> After winning the presidency he failed to keep that promise despite winning two consecutive terms. In 2020, US President Joe Biden (previously Obama's vice-president) campaigned on exactly the same promise, and he also failed to honour it.<sup>380</sup> So in 2022, with *Roe v Wade* still not codified, American states' rights proponents took their long-awaited revenge. In doing so, they also curtailed interpretation of the Fourteenth Amendment, one of the 19<sup>th</sup> century's post-Civil War 'Reconstruction' amendments.

The Reconstruction Amendments were: Thirteen, abolishing slavery (ratified in 1865); Fourteen, establishing equality of protection under the law (1868); and Fifteen, outlawing racial discrimination against voters (1870). Broadly, the three amendments were intended to produce uniform principles of racial egalitarianism across the whole USA, which would eventually erase the grievances of the Civil War. This was no utopian scheme: the 11 former rebel states were still under military occupation by the victorious Union throughout the ratification of the Reconstruction amendments. The southern states soon got the chance to wreck Reconstruction, at the inconclusive presidential election of 1877. The infamous 'Corrupt Bargain' of that election put Republican candidate Rutherford B. Hayes in the White House, with southern state support, in return for the withdrawal of federal troops from the former Confederacy. This was the point at which Reconstruction was quietly abandoned, and the former slave states, freed from the jackboot rule of 'Northern Aggression', quickly enacted apartheid policies while the federal government looked away in feigned helplessness.

After the Second World War, the federal government began to reassert itself, gradually but inexorably de-segregating the southern apartheid states. By the 1970s, the job was done – on paper, at least. Hearts and minds were another matter entirely. When America finally elected its first biracial president in 2008, the process of Reconstruction seemed to be, if not complete, then decisively over. This was underlined throughout Obama's presidency by the enormous controversy that developed when progressive campaigners in the

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<sup>378</sup> The eponymous defendant in the Supreme Court was Henry Wade, then District Attorney of Dallas County.

<sup>379</sup> *New York Times*, 28 April 2019.  
See <<https://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/29/us/politics/29text-obama.html>>.

<sup>380</sup> Biden campaign, official website, 2020. See <<https://joebiden.com/healthcare/>> (Page deleted, archive only).

former Confederate states demanded the removal of public statues of Confederate military leaders. The governments of several of those states reasserted themselves, by passing their own laws prohibiting the removal of such monuments.

It was all an illusion, a hyperreal spectacle projected by the media, and as a thesis the symbolic consolidation of Reconstruction soon generated its antithesis – a surge in extremist ideology, a wave of far-right activism, and an increase in racial tensions. These were the public forces that Trump later harnessed and cynically exploited to help him win the presidency in 2016. He quietly abandoned them later, when they were no longer useful, but there is no guarantee he will not entice them again in his second term.

### **'What is to be done.'**

Much of Trump's government-shredding second term agenda was set out by Project 2025, a conservative 'manifesto' published in 2023 by a hard-right think tank called the Heritage Foundation. Trump had tried to distance himself from Project 2025 during the 2024 election campaign, saying that some of its proposals were 'absolutely ridiculous and abysmal'. But he also claimed to have no idea who was behind Project 2025, which was demonstrably an outright lie. Project 2025's staff included more than 200 people who had been directly involved, professionally or politically, with Trump's first term<sup>381</sup> and Trump implemented almost two-thirds of their proposals before he had even completed the first week of his second term.<sup>382</sup>

The reason that Trump had hurried to distance himself from Project 2025 during the campaign period was that, a few days earlier, the chairman of the Heritage Foundation, Kevin Roberts, had said the country was 'in the process of the second American Revolution, which will remain bloodless if the left allows it to be'.<sup>383</sup>

Libertarian billionaire Charles Koch funnelled millions of dollars into Project 2025, in his usual convoluted hard-to-trace way. Principally, Koch disbursed money to various right-wing lobbying groups, which have then routed that

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<sup>381</sup> CNN, 11 July 2024. See <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/07/11/politics/trump-allies-project-2025/index.html>.

<sup>382</sup> Time Magazine, 24 January 2025. See <https://time.com/7209901/donald-trump-executive-actions-project-2025/>.

<sup>383</sup> Politico, 4 July 2024. See <https://shorturl.at/myQA7> or <https://www.politico.com/news/2024/07/04/leader-of-the-pro-trump-project-2025-suggests-there-will-be-a-new-american-revolution-00166583>.

money into bodies that participated in Project 2025.<sup>384</sup> To cite one example, the Texas Public Policy Foundation (a pro-fossil fuel pressure group) was an advisory body to Project 2025,<sup>385</sup> and simultaneously received money from Koch's personal interests (the Charles Koch Institute and the Charles Koch Foundation)<sup>386</sup> and his front organisation The Stand Together Trust.<sup>387</sup> A key member of the Federalist Society has become involved in Koch's compulsive chicanery, the two men shuffling huge sums of money through a jungle of cut-out public interest organisations, all designed to evade campaign finance regulations and exempt donors from the scrutiny of the Internal Revenue Service.

Leonard Leo (born 1965) was vice-president of the Federalist Society until shortly before Trump's first term ended, and now sits on the Society's board. He advised Trump on judicial appointments throughout the president's first term in office, and launched public relations campaigns that were crucially influential in securing the positions of Supreme Court nominees Gorsuch, Kavanaugh, and Barnett. Leo worked with the Republican Party to funnel money into campaigns that threatened to unseat any Democratic Party lawmakers who had the temerity to oppose Trump's picks.<sup>388</sup> Leo operates a network of political donor 'cut-out' organisations,<sup>389</sup> the principal bodies of which (the Concord Fund, and 85 Fund) gave millions of dollars to both Project 2025 and lobby groups that also supported Project 2025. Some of the bodies Leo supplied with money were also Koch front organisations, such as the American Legislative Exchange Council (which had provided the draft

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<sup>384</sup> NBC, 21 March 2024. See <<https://shorturl.at/eFvGj>> or <<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2024-election/leonard-leo-koch-networks-pour-millions-prep-potential-second-trump-ad-rcna144360>>.

<sup>385</sup> TPPF statement, 18 January 2023. See <<https://www.texaspolicy.com/press/tppf-joins-project-2025>>.

<sup>386</sup> PR Watch (Center for Media and Democracy), 10 January 2020. See <<https://shorturl.at/1PRvX>> or <<https://www.prwatch.org/news/2020/01/13524/koch-funds-groups-supporting-lawsuit-against-donor-transparency>>.

<sup>387</sup> SFOF Exposed (Center for Media and Democracy, undated. See <<https://sfofexposed.org/texas-public-policy-foundation>>.

<sup>388</sup> Judicial Crisis Network, 9 January 2017. See <<https://shorturl.at/M5bHx>> or <<https://judicialnetwork.com/judicial-crisis-network-launches-10-million-campaign-preserve-justice-scalias-legacy-support-president-elect-trump-nominee>>. (Page deleted, archive only.)

<sup>389</sup> Washington Post, 21 May 2019. See <<https://shorturl.at/L4k65>> or <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/investigations/leonard-leo-federalists-society-courts>>.

legislation for the 2009-2017 Kansas Experiment).<sup>390</sup>

### **'Bombard The Headquarters'**<sup>391</sup>

The southern states' reactions to the 2022 *Roe v Wade* annulment (and the explicit contraction of the scope of the Fourteenth Amendment) can be considered as micro-secessions, planned in advance and executed swiftly. This is a tendency that Trump has repeatedly courted and encouraged, chiefly by allowing the federal government to quietly abrogate its duties. His determination to abolish the Department of Education and return schooling policy decisions to state level is a notable example. When returned to office as US President in 2025, one of his first acts was to appoint a new education secretary, Linda McMahon. Trump told media: 'I want her to put herself out of a job.'<sup>392</sup>



Linda McMahon

Although Trump cannot abolish the Department of Education by fiat (such a move would require Congressional approval) he has signed an executive order that will cut the department to a few utterly basic core functions. Section Three of Trump's order explicitly states that the plan is to ultimately 'return authority over education to the States and local communities'.<sup>393</sup> The prospect is therefore a situation in which the Department of Education is eventually reduced to a rump status by the federal government, and then eroded away by conflict with state governments seeking to enforce their own schooling policies.

Again, this move gives micro-secessionary succour to states in the US South, specifically those with the country's highest homeschooling rates (the national average is 3.5 per cent). These southern states also happen to be those with the highest percentage populations of protestant evangelists. In Tennessee, for example, 52 per cent of census respondents classify themselves as evangelicals, and the state has a 10.8 per cent homeschooling rate. Kentucky has a population that is 49 per cent evangelical, and a homeschooling rate of 8.5 per cent. Arkansas has a 46 per cent evangelical

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<sup>390</sup> *NBC*, 21 March 2024. See note 385 above.

<sup>391</sup> Mao Zedong; 5 August 1966. See <<https://shorturl.at/Ltgsn>> or <[https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-9/mswv9\\_63.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-9/mswv9_63.htm)>.

<sup>392</sup> *Reuters*, 5 February 2025. See <<https://shorturl.at/Akkd4>> or <<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-says-he-would-like-close-dept-education-with-executive-action-2025-02-04/>>.

<sup>393</sup> Executive Order, 20 March 2025. See <<https://shorturl.at/UrMEL>> or <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/improving-education-outcomes-by-empowering-parents-states-and-communities/>>.

population, and 6.2 per cent homeschooling rate. Nationally, homeschooling parents cite their desire to instruct their offspring about morality (75 per cent), the importance of family life (72 per cent), and religious principles (53 per cent).<sup>394</sup>

Healthcare, another source of fierce hostility toward the federal government, is being quietly undone by Trump's appointee Robert F. Kennedy Jr. An outspoken critic of the US healthcare and pharmaceutical industries, Kennedy had briefly stood for nomination as the Libertarian Party's presidential candidate in 2024, and was defeated by voting at the party's convention just 24 hours before Trump himself addressed the same audience (see page 18 above).<sup>395</sup> Kennedy was brought into the Trump administration within days of the 2024 presidential election.<sup>396</sup> As Health Secretary, Kennedy has dismissed approximately 20 per cent of departmental staff, and sacked the panel that supplied the Center for Disease Control with advice on vaccinations.<sup>397</sup> Federal funding for mental health and addiction projects, totalling \$11.4 billion, has been rescinded, with hundreds of consequent job losses.<sup>398</sup> Funding for university research institutions has also been cut to near-minimal levels, which the editor of the journal *Science* called 'betrayal of a partnership that has enabled American innovation and progress'.<sup>399</sup> The Medicaid programme is also under attack, facing abolition by atrophy as one trillion dollars is slowly withdrawn, which the Congressional Budget Office estimates will leave nearly 12 million Americans without healthcare support by the middle of the 2030s.<sup>400</sup> These, and similar federal cuts will have both dramatic and pernicious effects in individual states, but they are in keeping with the underlying minarchist principle of the withdrawal of centralised power.

Kennedy has also ordered that vaccination programmes comply with

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<sup>394</sup> Pew Research Center, 20 February 2025. See <<https://shorturl.at/C95W0>> or <<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/02/20/a-look-at-homeschooling-in-the-us/>>.

<sup>395</sup> CNN, 27 May 2024. See <<https://edition.cnn.com/2024/05/26/politics/rfk-jr-nominated-libertarian-party>>.

<sup>396</sup> BBC News, 15 November 2024. See <<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/crlne0n191wo>>.

<sup>397</sup> BBC News, 6 September 2025. See <<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c62ngkpxk9lo>>.

<sup>398</sup> NPR, 27 March 2025. See <<https://www.npr.org/2025/03/27/nx-s1-5342368/addiction-trump-mental-health-funding>>.

<sup>399</sup> Science.org, 2 February 2025. See <<https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.adw6467>>.

<sup>400</sup> New York Times, 29 June 2025. See <<https://shorturl.at/Azynu>> or <<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/29/us/politics/trump-policy-bill-health-insurance-cuts.html>>.

state-level laws, and allowed parents to opt out of vaccinating their children on religious or conscientious grounds. Kennedy announced:

States have the authority to balance public health goals with individual freedom, and honoring those decisions builds trust. Protecting both public health and personal liberty is how we restore faith in our institutions and Make America Healthy Again.<sup>401</sup>

The result has again been a sudden restoration of the long-dormant powers of individual US states, with each jurisdiction following its own chosen path.<sup>402</sup>

As well as loosening the federal justice system's hold on the localised justice systems of individual US states, Trump is simultaneously hollowing out the federal government. As of the end of 2025, some 15 per cent of the government workforce has been done away with, by a combination of redundancies, buyouts,<sup>403</sup> and forced but deferred resignations. Trump's frequent denunciations of the Deep State during his first term in office are now bearing their inevitable fruit. As Trump appointee Vivek Ramaswamy put it, soon after Trump's victory: 'Took a band of small government revolutionaries to start this country. It'll take a band of small government revolutionaries to save it.'<sup>404</sup>

The harvest is most acutely felt in the former Department of Agriculture (jobs lost: 21,564), the Department of Defense<sup>405</sup> (jobs lost: 31,644) and the Treasury (jobs lost: 61,633). Naturally, the effect on government employees is workplace anxiety and infighting, financial unpredictability, and consequent emotional turmoil.<sup>406</sup> There is no sign that this systematic gutting of the

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<sup>401</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 4 September 2025. See <<https://shorturl.at/IU3sQ>> or <<https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/hhs-reinforces-religious-conscience-vaccine-exemptions.html>>.

<sup>402</sup> Described in e.g. the *New York Times*, 3 September 2025. See <<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/09/03/us/rfk-jr-vaccines-western-health-alliance.html>>.

<sup>403</sup> Paying workers large lump sums to quit, not unlike voluntary redundancies. Within weeks of Trump's second inauguration, the Office of Personnel Management sent a mass email to some two million government employees, offering potential quitters a lump sum of eight months pay as a 'golden goodbye'. Federal News Network, 28 July 2025. See <<https://shorturl.at/H5Jvb>> or <<https://federalnewsnetwork.com/federal-report/2025/07/a-never-ending-nightmare-federal-workers-detail-mental-health-toll-of-government-downsizing/>>.

<sup>404</sup> Vivek Ramaswamy, Twitter, 15 November 2024. See <<https://x.com/VivekGRamaswamy/status/1857649827603165525>>.

<sup>405</sup> Now renamed the Department of War, a decision which many might call long overdue.

<sup>406</sup> Federal News Network, 28 July 2025. See footnote 404 above.

federal government will slow down, never mind cease, in the foreseeable future. Russell Vought, the Trump administration's Director of the Office of Management and Budget, had planned this 'reign of terror' all along, as chairman of the Center for Renewing America, an advisory body to Project 2025.<sup>407</sup> In 2023 Vought told a private audience that:

We want the bureaucrats to be traumatically affected. We want . . . when they wake up in the morning, we want them to not want to go to work because they are increasingly viewed as the villains. We want their funding to be shut down so that the EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] can't do all of the rules against our energy industry because they have no bandwidth financially to do so. We want to put them in trauma.<sup>408</sup>



Russell Vought

While it bears little resemblance to the blood-soaked party political purges ordered by e.g. Josef Stalin or Saddam Hussein, the far-reaching and deliberately cruel evisceration of the federal government is recognisably a revolutionary purge. It owes more to modern state 'cleansing', such as began in Turkey after the failed *coup d'état* of 2016. Hundreds of thousands of Turkish judges, civil servants, and military officers have been cumulatively dismissed, and forbidden to seek other government roles in future. At face value, the US federal purge is concordant with libertarian principles of shrinking centralised government. However, as the Turkish comparison suggests, it is also ambiguously concordant with a well-known motive for political purges: an autocratic leadership, tightening its grip on power by pre-emptively disempowering and removing internal dissent and opposition.

This interpretation is strongly supported by the published aims of the American Accountability Project (AAF), a participant in Project 2025, which was awarded a Heritage Foundation grant in 2024. With this money, the AAF began the construction of a database of civil servants and other federal government employees who might oppose Trump's plans to tighten USA border controls and clamp down on immigration. The AAF's announcement stated that 'Shining a light on these individuals is vitally important, as, if allowed to remain in their

<sup>407</sup> *The New Yorker*, 27 October 2025. See <<https://shorturl.at/bghmO>> or <<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2025/10/27/russell-vought-profile-donald-trump>>.

<sup>408</sup> *ProPublica*, 28 October 2024. See <[https://youtu.be/oBH9TmeJN\\_M](https://youtu.be/oBH9TmeJN_M)> Archived at <<https://archive.org/details/trump-vought-bureaucrats-trauma>>.

positions operating in the shadows, they can be expected to obstruct any future president's effort to fix the problem and secure the border.<sup>409</sup>

To some extent, the way in which Trump packed the Supreme Court with like-minded Justices has served as an enabling act. Having stacked the Supreme Court in his favour, Trump's path to the White House was smoothed when he sought the presidency again in 2024. In late 2023, the state of Colorado had attempted to remove Trump's name from appearing on ballot papers for the 2024 election. The justification advanced was that Trump had 'engaged in insurrection or rebellion' against the US, meaning the 6 January 2021 incident at the Capitol. Trump took Colorado to the Supreme Court, which obligingly ruled that whether Trump was disqualified as an insurrectionist was a matter for Congress to determine, and in the absence of such a determination, Colorado could not disbar him.<sup>410</sup>

In July 2024 (so, during the presidential election campaign period) the Supreme Court ruled on an appeal by Trump, who was being pursued through the lower federal courts for his attempts to overturn the results of the 2020 election. The Supreme Court decided that the US President has immunity from criminal charges arising from his core conduct (official acts), and a presumption of immunity for perimeter conduct (unofficial acts but connected to official duties), but no immunity for acts beyond either of those.

In 1864, Abraham Lincoln had confessed that he would break the law as the very last resort, if it was necessary to save the Constitution and the Union.<sup>411</sup> More than century later, Richard Nixon had caused widespread outrage by abandoning any pretence at Lincolnian mitigation, and trying to justify his Watergate misconduct with the remark: 'When the president does it, that means it's not illegal.'<sup>412</sup> Now the Supreme Court had effectively decided the case of Trump v United States in Nixon's posthumous favour.

Recording her dissent, Justice Sonia Sotomayor (nominated by President Barack Obama in 2009) pointed out that the ruling created a potential scenario

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<sup>409</sup> American Accountability Foundation, 20 May 2024. See <<https://shorturl.at/jw0ya>> or <<https://americanaccountabilityfoundation.com/blog/2024/05/20/breaking-announcing-project-sovereignty-2025/>>.

<sup>410</sup> Trump v. Anderson, 2024. See <[https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/23pdf/23-719\\_19m2.pdf](https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/23pdf/23-719_19m2.pdf)>.

<sup>411</sup> Letter to Kentucky newspaper editor Albert G. Hodge, dated 4 April 1864. See <<https://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/hodges.htm>>.

<sup>412</sup> David Frost: 'Nixon Interviews', transmitted 20 May 1977. See <<https://shorturl.at/k7ymX>> or <<https://www.nytimes.com/1977/05/19/archives/nixon-says-a-president-can-order-illegal-actions-against-dissidents.html>>.

in which a serving president could make an official announcement that he intended to have a political rival assassinated, remaining confident in the knowledge that this confession of premeditation would be excluded from evidence if he ever faced trial for the rival's murder. She observed:

Looking beyond the fate of this particular prosecution, the long-term consequences of today's decision are stark. The Court effectively creates a law-free zone around the President, upsetting the status quo that has existed since the Founding. This new official-acts immunity now "lies about like a loaded weapon" for any President that wishes to place his own interests, his own political survival, or his own financial gain, above the interests of the Nation.<sup>413</sup>



Sonia Sotomayor

In the Court's majority opinion, Chief Justice John Roberts wrote, such dissent 'in the end boil[s] down to ignoring the Constitution's separation of powers and the Court's precedent and instead fear mongering on the basis of extreme hypotheticals'. The court's opinion was joined by Justices Alito, Gorsuch, Kavanaugh and Barrett. It was effectively a ruling by the Federalist Society, which counts all five Justices as alumni. Justice Clarence Thomas did not recuse himself, even though his wife had been involved in the 2020 'Stop the Steal' pro-Trump operation run by Roger Stone (see page 3 above).

## **E Unibus Plurum**

Trump's future actions are indeed extreme hypotheticals, to borrow Chief Justice Roberts's phrase, because his personal conduct is unguessable at the best of times. However, it is possible to see how the plans he has already set in motion are proceeding, and to consider where their natural progress might realistically lead. Plato's 'Ship of State' is a familiar metaphor. To extend that metaphor, we have a map of some of the submerged rocks and dangerous currents ahead, on Trump's chosen direction of travel. Like real maps, it does not dictate a single route and has no time component.

In 1798, vice-president Thomas Jefferson wrote of his vision of the relationship between the states and the federal government as 'like the planets revolving round their common Sun, acting & acted upon according to their respective weights & distances [...] exhibit[ed] to the world in a degree of

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<sup>413</sup> Sotomayor: dissent, *Trump v United States* (2025). See <<https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/603/23-939/>>.

perfection unexampled but in the planetary system itself'.<sup>414</sup> Jefferson's ideal federal government would have been far less powerful than the actual government that Trump is attempting to dismantle in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But nevertheless, the unavoidable implication of Jefferson's simile is that if the 'Sun's' gravity were to diminish (by excessively weakening the federal government) the centripetal force holding the states in stable orbits could be rapidly overcome by a quasi-'centrifugal' force: namely, devolution. The devolutionary force exists, if it can ever be said to have gone away in the first place.

For Donald Livingston, emeritus professor of philosophy at Georgia's Emory University, this Jeffersonian concept of the naturally harmonious United States is opposed to a mechanistic 'Lincolnian' model. In this Lincolnian model, which Prof. Livingston sees as persisting to the present day, individual American states are locked irrevocably into a greater entity, with state powers inexorably ebbing away toward the centre.<sup>415</sup> Prof. Livingston asks how this has been allowed to happen, and concludes that the federal government has taken bold political actions to expand its own powers and sequester state rights, and that individual states have acquiesced in this gradual transfer of power. Speaking a month after Donald Trump was first elected to the presidency, Prof Livingston proposed that:

To regain the powers of sovereignty, the states must do the same thing. That is, they must through bold but prudent political action break down the bounds within which a usurping central government has confined them. This requires civic virtue. Patience. Prudence. Knowing when to act, and when to pull back. It should begin with matters that are easy to win, even if they are small.<sup>416</sup>

Professor Livingston's field of study is the culture and traditions of the US

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<sup>414</sup> Letter to Peregrine Fitzhugh, 23 February 1798. See <<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-30-02-0089>> NB that Jefferson, an ardent supporter of state-level autonomy, carefully acknowledges the individuality of US states ('their respective weights & distances').

<sup>415</sup> This definitiveness of centralised power is the traditional symbolic meaning of the *fasces* that decorate the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C., unveiled in May 1922. Benito Mussolini's election in Italy, in October that year, was a twist of fate that means the memorial's symbolism now reads rather differently. For a fuller description, see <<https://www.nps.gov/articles/secret-symbol-of-the-lincoln-memorial.htm>>.

<sup>416</sup> Prof Emerit. Donald Livingston, 'What is an American State?' Address to 2016 Scholars Conference, Abbeville Institute, 15 December 2016. See <<https://www.abbevilleinstitute.org/what-is-an-american-state/>> (23m 40s, to 25m 11s). Archived at <<https://archive.org/details/livingston-what-is-an-american-state>>.

south, but he points out that the federal government surrendered without a fight in the mid-1990s, when west coast California partly decriminalised marijuana cultivation and possession for medical purposes. This was a straight defiance of the federal government's Controlled Substances Act of 1970, which classed cannabis as a Schedule 1 controlled drug. And yet almost nothing happened, even when the Supreme Court told California to back down.<sup>417</sup> Within eight years, another 11 states had relaxed their own marijuana laws, and the federal government was seemingly powerless to do much about it except grumble.

As of 2025, recreational cannabis is legal in virtually half of the USA (24 states), and medicinal cannabis is legal in a dozen more. The older generation of libertarian hippies, and their figurative offspring the California Ideologues, have all but won a long-running countercultural war on their home turf, because, when push came to shove, their opponents didn't even show up. While this gradual opting-out might seem quaint and amusing to foreign observers, California has quietly entered an era of state nullification (a concept discussed further, below) and encouraged other US states into its wake.

Professor Livingston was also pulling his punches a little. California's secessionist tendencies are more pronounced than a simple flouting of federal laws. A month before Professor Livingston delivered his remarks, when Trump was first elected president, something extraordinary had happened. The acting president of the California senate and the speaker of the Californian assembly immediately issued a joint statement announcing that they felt 'like strangers in a foreign land' and that the election result was 'clearly inconsistent with the values of the people of California'.<sup>418</sup> In January 2017, California's Secretary of State gave permission for independence campaigners to gather a petition that would trigger an official plebiscite on Californian secession.<sup>419</sup> In the first three years of Trump's first term in office, the Californian state government launched 43 separate lawsuits against his administration, across 17 separate policy areas, an average of a new legal action approximately every fortnight.<sup>420</sup>

Despite this constant and very public conflict, the so-called 'CalExit'

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<sup>417</sup> Livingston (see note 417) commencing at 25m 8s.

<sup>418</sup> Joint Statement from California Legislative Leaders on Result of Presidential Election, 9 November 2016. See <<https://shorturl.at/Fb8LI>> or <<https://sd24.senate.ca.gov/news/2016-11-09-joint-statement-california-legislative-leaders-result-presidential-election>>.

<sup>419</sup> CNBC, 27 January 2017. See <<https://shorturl.at/2VrPA>> or <<https://www.cnbc.com/2017/01/27/california-succession-movement-starts-gathering-petition-signatures.html>>.

<sup>420</sup> David French: *Divided We Fall* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2020) p. 230.

movement ran out of steam, but Trump's re-election in 2024 revived it.<sup>421</sup>

As of December 2025, the Golden State's secessionist efforts have stalled again, but the persistence of the idea suggests America has not heard the last of it. As the homeland of the Californian Ideology, there is a large and currently untapped social reservoir of libertarian separatist and secessionist sentiment. Considered in isolation, California is roughly the same comfortable size as Sweden, and its thriving local economy gives it a GDP consistently ranked alongside those of the top ten independent nations. No-one can doubt that California is more than capable of mounting a serious attempt to go it alone. The state's habitual electoral support for the modern Democratic Party also means that Californian secession would serve as a solid exemplary rebuttal to any claims that only the only rebels are in the former Confederate states.

Texas, a former Confederate state, also has a modern history of secessionist tendencies, even though the state's brief episode in the Confederacy was the very issue that settled the illegality of secession. The Supreme Court decided in 1869<sup>422</sup> that rebel Texas had never actually left the Union in the first place. The secession, which had been ratified by a Texan plebiscite,<sup>423</sup> was null and void, and so were all subsequent decisions and acts that had flowed from it. But the court left the exit door slightly ajar by saying that there were only two legitimate routes for leaving the Union: the first was the consent of the other US states; and the second was outright revolution.

After Donald Trump lost the presidential election of 2020, talk of Texan independence started to make a comeback. Just three weeks after Trump's failed 6 January insurrection, one Texan legislator tried and failed to create a state committee for examining ways Texas could become independent.<sup>424</sup> In November that year, Republican Senator Ted Cruz (a sporadic Trump ally) suggested half-jokingly that conditions might become so bad under Joe Biden that Texas would leave the US: '[I]f there comes a point where it's hopeless, then I think we take NASA, we take the military, we take the oil.'<sup>425</sup> It may be

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<sup>421</sup> *Reuters*, 20 December 2024. See <<https://shorturl.at/wygDN>> or <<https://www.reuters.com/breakingviews/california-will-put-secession-back-map-2024-12-20/>>.

<sup>422</sup> In the case of *Texas v White*. See <<https://shorturl.at/oL41f>> or <<https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/ll/usrep/usrep074/usrep074700/usrep074700.pdf>>.

<sup>423</sup> Secession was approved by 46,153 voters, against 14,747, on 23 February 1861. See <<https://www.tshaonline.org/texas-day-by-day/entry/562>>.

<sup>424</sup> Texas House of Representatives: Bill 1359 (filed 26 January 2021). See <<https://capitol.texas.gov/BillLookup/history.aspx?LegSess=87R&Bill=HB1359>>.

<sup>425</sup> <<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/ted-cruz-joe-rogan-texas-secede-president/>>

illegal for states to leave the Union, as Texas accidentally proved, but illegality is not remotely the same thing as impossibility.<sup>426</sup> With the general principle of US deconstruction now established, and with (for at least a decade) a Supreme Court that will be favourable to 'state rights' arguments, it is conceivable that the micro-secessionist states will be emboldened to accumulate micro-secessions to macro-secessionary levels, by attacking and overruling other federal laws, policies, and bodies.

Searching for an analogous period in the histories of other countries, the obvious parallel would be the 'Parade of Sovereignties' during the last phase of the Soviet Union. The reforms of premier Mikhail Gorbachev in the late 1980s had included the introduction of semi-democratic processes, which indirectly amplified public dissent and undermined the entire USSR, instead of revitalising it. Countries that had been subsumed as republics by the centralised Moscow government began to reassert their identities, first by insisting on approving their own 'local' versions of centrally mandated laws, and then (during what became known as the 'War of Laws') by outright legislative divergence. Gorbachev had not intended for any of this to happen, and Trump's devolutionary schemes could have similar consequences.

A comparison with Gorbachev is loose and far from perfect, but has other facets worth remarking upon. What hastened the end of the Soviet Union were his two most ambitious reforms. The first was *perestroika*, literally 'restructuring', a set of macroeconomic policies to steer the Soviet economy away from centralised command and toward a mixed communist/free market system. Gorbachev's calamitous *perestroika* can in part be traced to the secretive studies of the cabal headed by Yegor Gaidar (see page 94 above). What we might call Trumpian *perestroika* is an attempt to move the US economy away from a traditionally free market and into a radically 'even freer market'.

Gorbachev's other suite of reformist policies was labelled *glasnost*, meaning 'openness'. The overall intention was to 'democratise' public debate and participation within the Soviet system. While Gorbachev's relaxation of media censorship (and the accompanying near-cessation of domestic propaganda) was an overdue act of liberalisation, it meant untrammelled

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<sup>426</sup> There is a serious unresolved argument about Texan independence, in the form of the joint resolution that annexed the independent Republic of Texas in 1845. That resolution preserved an agreement that Texas could be split into five separate states, so long as one of them was still legally Texas. Furthermore, the resolution only stated that the four new states would be *eligible* for admission to the Union, rather than bound into the Union from the outset. See <<https://www.tsl.texas.gov/ref/abouttx/annexation/march1845.html>>.

criticism could be (and inevitably was) levelled at him when his clumsy and piecemeal *perestroika* created economic disorder at the societal level. The *glasnost* of the Trump era might be found in the growth of the online alternative media ecosystem, which began in earnest during the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and soon represented a serious challenge to traditional media. Trump played no role in creating that ecosystem, which is an organic phenomenon underpinned by market forces and entrepreneurial publishers. But he has exploited this digital *glasnost* in a historic and distinctively American way, denouncing establishment media outlets (notably, TV news channel CNN) as propagandists who peddle 'fake news'. Simultaneously, Trump positioned himself for digital audiences as an outsider challenging a corrupt and decrepit state that has run out of ideas, selling his project to voters as a kind of sinister parody of *Mr Smith Goes to Washington*.

Returning to the runaway fission initiated by Gorbachev's reforms, which ultimately broke up the USSR, something similar could befall the USA as a result of its centuries-old internal tensions. When a political research NGO conducted a nationwide survey in 2022, to discover which parts of the US harboured pro-secession sentiments, the 11 states that had formed the Confederacy were still the staunchest proponents.<sup>427</sup>

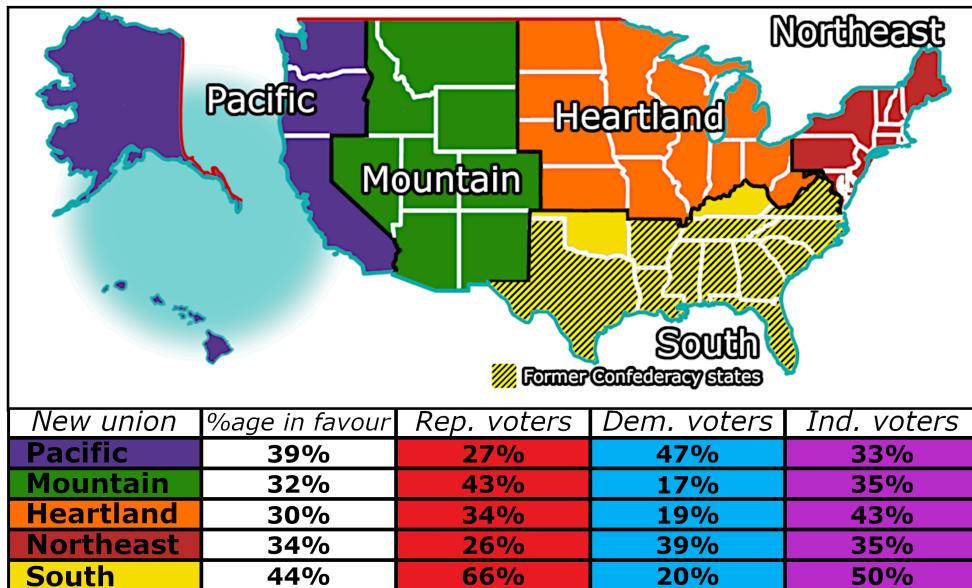
In Bright Line Watch's scenario, the 11 former Confederate states joined a theoretical 'Southern' union of 13 states.<sup>428</sup> The strength of opposition to the existing federal US was reflected among both left wing and right wing respondents in the former Confederacy areas. Across the states that would make up the hypothetical 'Southern' union, 50 per cent of independent voters, 20 per cent of Democratic Party voters, and 66 per cent of Republicans said they would support secession, a balance that only seems extraordinary until one remembers the less than glorious legacy of the Democratic Party in the deep US South.

It was also a scenario that was strikingly similar to the post-federal model of mini-republics that had been suggested by George F. Kennan in 1993, as he surveyed the post-Cold War world and saw how the former USSR had

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<sup>427</sup> The NGO, Bright Line Watch, offered respondents the choice between their state remaining part of the USA in its existing configuration, or seceding into one of five sub-unions. The aim was to give respondents a clear geopolitical alternative to current arrangements, rather than offering state independence as an abstract proposition.

<sup>428</sup> Of the two remaining non-Confederacy states in this hypothetical 'Southern' bloc, Kentucky had been a slaving but pro-Union state and Oklahoma would not become a state at all until 1907. Bright Line Watch research, published July 2021. See <<https://shorturl.at/2fUj5>> or <<https://brightlinewatch.org/still-miles-apart-americans-and-the-state-of-u-s-democracy-half-a-year-into-the-biden-presidency>>.



Hypothetical subdivision of the United States, as proposed by Bright Line Watch (see footnote 429).

disintegrated under the weight of its internal contradictions. (See page 21 above.)

In the Soviet case, as in the American one, the fault lines were already there. Kennan diagnosed the underlying American problem as that of 'a monster country' suffering from 'the hubris of inordinate size'. His insight was that an orderly and legislated 'semi-dissolution', executed in peacetime, would prevent a disorderly rupture during future crises.

In truth, the prospect of a semi-united America comprising smaller republics is far older: as Kennan must have known, it had been one of the first constitutional challenges quashed by George Washington at the end of the American Revolution.<sup>429</sup> The relentless power-games among the former colonies were the reason that the US Articles of Confederation (effective from March 1781) were ultimately superseded by the more stringent and constraining US Constitution of 1789.

Similar ideas to Kennan's began springing up in earnest during Trump's 2017-2021 term. Activists in Oregon opened a legislative petition to take the state out of the Union, encouraging its neighbours Washington and California to form a new separate nation. The organisers soon withdrew the petition, 'spooked by how seriously it was being taken by supporters and opponents alike'. It was an echo of the forgotten scheme to unite the pre-union states of California and Oregon as an independent Pacific Republic, in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>430</sup>

<sup>429</sup> Richard Kreitner, *Break it Up* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2020) pp. 62 and 63.

<sup>430</sup> Kreitner p. 367.

But, typifying the deep socio-political fractures in the modern USA, the state of Oregon is also in the sights of a white nationalist movement. Along with the states of Idaho, Montana, Washington, and Wyoming, Oregon would be amalgamated into a new whites-only Northwest American Republic, with a tricolour flag in blue, green, and white. The people behind this atavistic scheme explained their flag with the charming motto 'The sky is the blue, and the land is the green. The white is for the people in between.' The project has already attracted 'thousands of hardcore libertarians, conservative Christians, and apocalypse-fearing "preppers"'. One of the would-be residents of this new republic told reporters: 'Even if God has withdrawn his blessing from our nation as a whole, he will continue to provide for and protect his *remnant*'. (Emphasis supplied.)<sup>431</sup>

While the reintroduction of apartheid in 21<sup>st</sup> century America (let alone slavery and the plantation system) seems very unlikely, the seemingly ineradicable slogan 'The South Will Rise Again' is a permanent reminder of the strength of hostility to the US federal government that still exists in the thwarted secessionist states.<sup>432</sup>

### **The effect of immoderate greatness**<sup>433</sup>

With a now well-known slogan, 'Make America Great Again', Trump has presented the US electorate with the implicit proposition that America has lost its greatness, and with the explicit proposition that he can restore it. This has now connected successfully with the attitudes and feelings of the US electorate, at two presidential elections. Whatever the objective truth of the

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<sup>431</sup> Kreitner (see note 430) p. 361. An overview of the Northwest Front movement has been published in *Politico.com* 7 July 2015. *Inter alia*, the article explains the historical reasons that Oregon is attractive to white separatists. See <<https://shorturl.at/laQkC>> or <<https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/07/northwest-front-americas-worst-racists-119803/>>.

<sup>432</sup> Although it must be noted here, as a matter of no small concern, that some modern Libertarians, in line with their philosophy of maximal commodification, believe that individuals should have the right to sell themselves into slavery. Discussed in Walter Block's 'Toward a Libertarian Theory of Inalienability: A Critique of Rothbard, Barnett, Smith, Kinsella, Gordon, and Epstein'. *Journal of Libertarian Studies* Vol. 17, No. 2 (2003): pp. 39–85. See <[https://cdn.mises.org/17\\_2\\_3.pdf](https://cdn.mises.org/17_2_3.pdf)>.

<sup>433</sup> Edward Gibbon, *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*; Volume Three; chapter XXXVIII. Gibbon's full judgement was:

'But the decline of Rome was the natural and inevitable effect of immoderate greatness. Prosperity ripened the principle of decay; the causes of destruction multiplied with the extent of conquest; and as soon as time or accident had removed the artificial supports, the stupendous fabric yielded to the pressure of its own weight. The story of its ruin is simple and obvious; and instead of inquiring why the Roman empire was destroyed, we should rather be surprised that it had subsisted so long.'

situation, the social proof has been decisive. Trump has sailed to victory on a tide of popular discontent and despair. He did not create this national mood.

Leaving aside for now the question of whether Trump can actually do anything about it, is there any evidential basis for believing that the USA is (or has been) in serious decline? This is a question that only historians of the future will be able to answer with certainty. For now, we have the work of Emmanuel Todd, a French historian, anthropologist, and political scientist who in 1976 published *The Final Fall*, a book that predicted, with surprising accuracy, the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>434</sup>

Many had anticipated or claimed to predict the same historical outcome, but only Todd approached the question through objective analysis. Using statistical indicators, Todd was able to see through the secrecy of the USSR and deduce that the supposedly-menacing superpower was actually in terminal disrepair. Based on his study, Todd stated that the Soviet Union would eventually be forced to attempt economic reforms, which would in turn prove lethal and cause the disintegration of the country. Twenty five years after publication, Todd was vindicated, and the true scale of his vindication only became apparent as the 1990s progressed. So in 2002, Todd applied the same methodology to the USA, which resulted in a book titled *After the Empire: The Breakdown of the American Order*.<sup>435</sup>



Emmanuel Todd

Rather than the sudden implosion that befell the Soviet Union, Todd foresaw a global reordering to which the USA would be ill-suited, as more and more previously underdeveloped countries modernised and stabilised. The three key drivers of this modernisation, Todd said, would be: the spread of literacy; the emancipation of women from reproduction-dependent status; and (related to the last point) a corresponding decline in birthrate. These factors would, Todd predicted, lead to more democratic forms of government taking root in the developing world and, with smaller and better-educated populations, less global conflict per se. This projection has some similarities with Fukuyama's 'End of History' thesis (see page 22 above), but without the deadening finality. Todd scotched notions that the USA might develop a true

<sup>434</sup> *La Chute Finale. Essai sur la décomposition de la sphère soviétique* (Paris: Éditions Robert Laffont). First published in an English translation in 1979.

<sup>435</sup> *Après l'empire: essai sur la décomposition du système Américain* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard). Page references are to the English translation, published by the Columbia University Press in 2003.

global hegemony, pointing out that America, for all its boasts of military might, has only ever picked on smaller and weaker countries (and not always successfully) and had never really fought a peer power either. The sole instance that Todd considered a US war against a peer power was the Second World War, and Todd took it as read that US intervention was not the decisive factor in that conflict anyway.

For Todd, the strength of his imperial explanation lay in the modern USA's economic reliance on imported goods. Next to nothing was exported from Rome, and its reliance on imports hollowed out its own manufacturing and production, which ultimately left it at the mercy of its own over-extended (and, as it proved, unstable) empire. Todd stated his utter conviction that the world's steadily-improving economies meant this hollowing-out would also prove to be modern America's undoing.<sup>436</sup>

Writing in 2002, Todd did not dwell on the grandiose world-bestriding schemes of the Project for the New American Century, the Washington think tank that had provided President George W Bush with so many of his cabinet appointees. Perhaps, in the aftermath of the September 2001 terrorist attacks on New York, he hardly needed to. As one of Bush's White House advisors privately boasted to a journalist:

We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality -- judiciously, as you will -- we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors [...] and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.<sup>437</sup>

The Project for the New American Century was centred on a showpiece plan in which the US would topple a series of despotic regimes in the Middle East, creating capitalist economies that would establish US dominance of the entire subcontinental area around Israel. (The fact that this would also tighten US grip on the region's fossil fuel reserves was never explicitly spelt out, but most analysts spotted it.) In the event, the aggression of the George W Bush administration created a disaster in Iraq, which only helped destabilise the region even more and created new terrorist groups, most notably ISIS. The world noticed, with concern that deepened into alarm, and then into outright scepticism about America's boasts of global supremacy. It was also noted that

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<sup>436</sup> Todd (see note 436) p. 74 and pp. 90–94.

<sup>437</sup> *New York Times Magazine*, 17 October 2004. See <<https://shorturl.at/5JJq2>> or <<https://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/17/magazine/faith-certainty-and-the-presidency-of-george-w-bush.html>>.

the USA was sliding into a system of mass surveillance and adopting the use of torture.

American voters felt all these demoralising effects. Bush's public approval rating had hit 90 per cent immediately after the September 2001 terrorist attacks, but by the end of his second term 75 per cent of voters no longer supported him. There would clearly be no 'New American Century', and this left the figurative ideological space into which Donald Trump later rose, offering disorientated and dissatisfied Americans a return to an ill-defined glorious past instead.

Writing long before Trump's ascendancy, Emmanuel Todd believed that the USA became a latter-day Roman Empire in the years after the Second World War, when it was able to afford the cost of magnanimously rebuilding Europe with the Marshall Plan, and turned two beaten Axis powers (Germany and Japan) into geostrategic protectorates. Simultaneously, America's global rival the Soviet Union had borne the brunt of the war, by ensuring the Allied victory at the cost of over-decimating its own people, a demographic catastrophe from which modern Russia has still not recovered. An estimated 26 million Soviet citizens died in the war, a loss of around 17 per cent of the USSR's population.

For Todd, America's unexpected rise to 'dominance by default' quickly led to a carnival of consumerist abandon,<sup>438</sup> underpinned by huge trade deficits and excitable over-investment in US stocks.<sup>439</sup> The phantom victory of the Cold War dramatically aggravated this tendency.<sup>440</sup> Per Todd's forecasts, America's belief in its own exceptionalism will slowly deflate as global development approaches a new equilibrium. The US will settle instead into a more realistic and post-imperial role, ultimately becoming one global power among many by around 2050, somewhat wiser for the experience.

But there is another way of looking at this.

### **'Get ready for the jubilee'<sup>441</sup>**

That empires have seemingly similar lifespans is a fairly well-attested view among historians, and various studies have shown that the average imperial duration is somewhere between 200 and 250 years. In his *The Life-Spans of Empires, Historical Methods*, Harvard research fellow Samuel Arbesman

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<sup>438</sup> Todd (see note 436) pp. 66–68.

<sup>439</sup> Todd pp. 92–94.

<sup>440</sup> Todd pp. 88–90.

<sup>441</sup> Patrick Gilmour, *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*, 1863, verse three.

estimates the average empire lasts 220 years.<sup>442</sup> Working outside academia and citing individual cases with slightly varying imperial floruits, the British historian Lieutenant-General Sir John Glubb<sup>443</sup> independently estimated 250 years.<sup>444</sup> On the eve of America's quarter-millennium, the comparison effectively invites itself.

Despite the USA's age, the suggestion that the country is an authentic and mature empire seems, on the face of it, hard to accept. The standard model of 'empire' is a distinctly European one, which makes other imperial forms hard to recognise. Emmanuel Todd himself instinctively went straight to European antiquity, and unconsciously forced himself to choose between the Greek and Roman empires to find his template for thinking about the USA, a trope verging on cliché that has appeared in commentary for decades.<sup>445</sup> The issue is clouded further by the fact that America was itself once part of the British Empire, and thus seems somehow anti-imperial (despite all the evidence to the contrary). This may be one reason that Todd perceived an imperial interval that started accidentally in 1945, as Great Britain went into 'imperial receivership'.<sup>446</sup> Historically, European nations tended to develop foreign empires, and then connect them via sea routes in order to exploit their resources for home consumption. This accords with Todd's assessment of the US as 'an empire living hand to mouth'. But the sheer size of the USA, and its abundant natural resources, means it has no pressing need for foreign expansion. Its expansion has already occurred, internally, and reached its internal limits a century ago.

Trump himself has made some off-the-wall remarks about Canada and Greenland being absorbed by the USA. The absorption of Canada is a deliberate echo of the forgotten invitation in Article XI of the USA's Articles of Confederation (1781).<sup>447</sup> The idea of annexing Greenland (which would afford

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<sup>442</sup> *A Journal of Quantitative and Interdisciplinary History*, 44:3, pp. 127-129. See <<https://pdodds.w3.uvm.edu/files/papers/others/2011/arbesman2011a.pdf>>.

<sup>443</sup> For a 1986 obituary, see <<https://shorturl.at/Lsxjf>> or <<https://www.nytimes.com/1986/03/18/obituaries/sir-john-glubb-is-dead-at-88-commanded-the-arab-legion.html>>.

<sup>444</sup> In his 1976 *The Fate of Empires and Search for Survival*. See <<https://people.uncw.edu/kozloffm/glubb.pdf>>.

<sup>445</sup> Todd (see note 436) pp. 58-61.

<sup>446</sup> Christopher Hitchens's memorable phrase, in *Blood, Class and Nostalgia: Anglo-American Ironies* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990).

<sup>447</sup> 'Canada acceding to this confederation, and joining in the measures of the united states, shall be admitted into, and entitled to all the advantages of this union: but no other colony shall be admitted into the same, unless such admission be agreed to by nine states.'

the US geostrategic dominance of the North Atlantic and improved access to the North Pole) would put the USA into military conflict with the Kingdom of Denmark, another NATO member. Potential future treaties about mineral extraction rights seem more plausible. But further external growth probably cannot succeed anyway, if the Trumpian plan of eviscerating the federal government succeeds. Trump has vastly expanded the military budget, but he has simultaneously wrecked the coordinating bureaucracies, a combination that does not hold great promise for anything beyond short-term territorial gains.

A better imperial comparator than Todd's might be the Russian Empire of 1721 to 1917, which expanded across the Eurasian continent and only briefly (in the case of Alaska) acquired overseas territory. The Russian empire transmuted into the Soviet Union (which occupied some 95 per cent of formerly imperial territory), and at the dissolution of that Union began to fragment back into something like its original components. When viewed through the lens of Russian history, an authentic American empire starts to come into focus.

At inception in 1776, the USA comprised 13 newly-independent states, clustered on the East coast of the North American continent. By the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, three more states had joined the Union. Across the span of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, another 29 new states acceded as the frontier pushed westward across the continent, toward the Pacific Ocean. Three of these 29 states (California, Nevada, and Utah) were created on land captured during a war with a neighbouring power, namely Mexico, part of the Spanish Empire. Another of those states, Texas, was originally part of Mexico, but declared itself an independent republic in 1836, before being formally annexed by the USA in 1845.

When examined in aggregate, the cumulative growth of the American internal empire follows a near-perfect bell curve of 'normal distribution' – states joined slowly at first, accelerating to a peak of admissions in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and then slowing again as the continent approached its territorial capacity in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The same general pattern can be seen in the growth of other historical empires, including Britain's and Tsarist Russia's. However, few if any Empires offer such a simple and symmetrical curve as can be seen in the case of the USA.

Whether or not the historical Russian Empire is the most appropriate comparator, the contiguous continental 'land empire' model is a hand-in-glove match with libertarian perceptions of the USA: a variety of independent entities, gradually assembled and bound together (with varying degrees of willingness and satisfaction) by one governmental superstructure.

In 1943, with the contiguous 48-state USA completed<sup>448</sup> and years before Emmanuel Todd's perceived post-war 'empire' would begin, the proto-libertarian Albert Jay Nock denounced the internal American Empire in his memoirs:

I knew what imperialism meant in former times, what its springs of action were, and what its customary models of procedure were. My classical studies had thoroughly acquainted me with these phenomena of the old days around the Mediterranean, and I had as yet seen nothing to suggest any essential difference between modern imperialism and the imperialism which I had studied and understood. Thus I was able to read between the lines of standard American historical writing, even such as was dished up for the young in our educational institutions. It was clear to me that our acquisition of Texas was a matter of sheer brigandage, and that force and fraud played approximately equal parts in our acquisition of California. I carried on my survey of American imperialism through the Mexican War, our systematic extermination of the Indians, and so on back to the colonial period, and I emerged with the conviction that at least on this one item of imperialism, our political history from first to last was utterly disgraceful.<sup>449</sup>

There is, then, a potentially fatal blind spot in Todd's imperial thesis. When making prognostications about the Soviet Union, his forecasts had a stable long-term horizon thanks to the stagnation that set in during the Brezhnev era. Things would deteriorate along a reasonably predictable path toward a final ideological crisis. This torpidity does not apply to a more dynamic and adaptive society like America's, and it certainly did not apply in 2002, when Todd published *After the Empire*. Todd (who, in the same book, also wrote confidently of the UK's future within the European Union)<sup>450</sup> could not have foreseen, and did not foresee, the immediacy of the failure of the Project for the New American Century; nor the ideological vacuum it would leave; nor the rise of a rabble-rousing quasi-Gorbachevian reformer. Like many other political predictions, Todd's schedule for America's future has been seriously disrupted

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<sup>448</sup> The last contiguous states, Arizona and Mexico, had both been admitted to the Union in 1912. The non-contiguous states of Hawaii and Alaska would not join until 1959.

<sup>449</sup> Albert Jay Nock, *Memoirs of a Superfluous Man* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1943) pp. 103–104.

<sup>450</sup> Todd did vaguely foresee some kind of conflict in which Russia would menace Ukraine, but the haphazard dissolution of the USSR had created that identifiable problem a decade previously.

by real life events, and it is possible that it might not get back on track.

Similarly, Todd's view of the gradual obsolescence of the USSR was fortunate in that the country was a one-party state and only changed its leaders slowly by nominations made among party loyalists. There was little chance of the country's power structure altering through any electoral processes, which afforded Todd's foresight an almost unnatural steadiness. The same does not hold true of America, which is nominally a two-party democracy and is becoming increasingly polarised between left- and right-wing voters.

The last time the electoral college produced a landslide for a new president was George H.W. Bush in 1988, with 426 collegiate votes against Michael Dukakis's 111, a margin of 315. The widest margin of victory since then was Clinton's re-election in 1996, with 379 votes against 159 for Bob Dole, a margin of 220. By the time of Barack Obama's re-election in 2012, the margin of victory had shrunk to 126. The next three US presidents all won by electoral college margins that were even narrower: Trump in 2016, by 77 votes; Biden in 2020, by 74 votes; and Trump again in 2024 by 86 votes.

The west coast states of California, Oregon, and Washington haven't changed hands from the Democratic Party since the mid-1980s. A large number of landlocked US states, including Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Wyoming, have consistently voted Republican since the mid-1960s. 'The electoral battlefield' is a familiar metaphor, and to extend it more accurately, American voters have readied themselves on either side of a former electoral centre ground that has become a steadily-abandoned 'No Man's Land'. The illusion of a stable stalemate is a psephological figment: politically, America has already turned into two nations.<sup>451</sup>

Founding father Benjamin Franklin understood the irreconcilable cultural distinctness of the original American states. They had, he wrote in 1760: 'Different forms of government, different laws, different interests, and some of them different religious persuasions and different manners.'<sup>452</sup> And, it is worth emphasising, Franklin was remarking only on the differences between the states that were still beholden to Great Britain. Even halfway through the American revolutionary war, John Adams fretted privately that:

The Characters of Gentlemen in the four New England Colonies, differ as much from those in the others, as that of the Common People differs, that is as much as several distinct Nations almost [...] I dread the Consequences of this Disimilitude of Character, and without the Utmost

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<sup>451</sup> French (see note 421) pp. 35–36.

<sup>452</sup> Kreitner (see note 430) p. 36.

Caution on both sides, and the most considerate Forbearance with one another and prudent Condescension on both sides, they will certainly be fatal.<sup>453</sup>

Although there is clearly much to be said for Emmanuel Todd's 2002 interpretation of the post-war USA as an imperial power, he has (from a libertarian perspective) failed to recognise the country's true imperial history and instead convinced himself that America's late 20th-Century 'moment' was the whole phenomenon rather than simply its exuberant culmination. On this reading, Trump's attempt to reconfigure the USA marks the expiration of an exhausted 250-year-old traditional empire. That reconfiguration is intended to lead America in a new and energetic direction, 25 years before the anticipated *dénouement* of Emmanuel Todd's endgame.

The central unanswerable question about the present situation is whether Donald Trump himself is stable enough not to yield to his authoritarian tendencies, and to see his idiosyncratic libertarian defederalisation project through to any convincing conclusion. He began his first term by saying

[W]hat we're doing is we're talking about the power structure, we're talking about its entrenchment [ . . . W]e have begun the monumental task of returning the government back to the people on a scale not seen in many, many years.<sup>454</sup>

The danger is that Trump may come to see himself as a consolidator in the mould of the Russian Federation's autocratic president Vladimir Putin, whom by all accounts he greatly admires. Putin managed to hold together the post-communist Russian state, even as separatist movements tried to establish independence in constituent territories.

One form of reorganisation that could eventually emerge as a consequence of Trump's plans would be an analogous 'American Federation' of semi-devolved but allied states. The stark difference between the roles of Putin and Trump in holding their respective countries together would be that Putin did not cause the Soviet Union to disintegrate in the first place. Trump's simultaneous programmes of defederalisation and semi-secession risk that outcome.

In addition to his monarchist restructuring project, Trump has also taken a course that, when tried in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, led to one of America's worst

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<sup>453</sup> Letter dated 25 November 1775; cited in e.g. Kreitner (see note 430) p. 46.

<sup>454</sup> President Donald Trump: Remarks to White House press conference; 16 February 2017. See <<https://shorturl.at/YqOB6>> or <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-press-conference/>>. (Page deleted, archive only.)

constitutional crises. That was the so-called 'Tariff of Abominations', a schedule of customs fees imposed in 1828, vastly inflating the cost of importing foreign goods. The intention was to protect and support domestic US industries, but its most serious adverse effects were felt in the southern states that depended on reciprocal trade with Great Britain. South Carolina voted to nullify the federal law within its own state borders, and then launched the first state government-led attempt to leave the Union. South Carolina was only brought to heel by a show of federal force and a lightening of the trade tariffs. Twenty-eight years later, the lingering economic imbalance between the tariff burdens on the agricultural south and the industrial north was a root cause of the US Civil War, and South Carolina was the first state to formally secede from the Union.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Donald Trump's own gargantuan tariffs also impose punishing duties on imports, but the difference is that America no longer has the domestic manufacturing base to supply its own industries. In particular, California, a state whose enormous IT sector relies almost entirely on computer components from south-east Asia, has been battered by the highest total extra tariff costs in the whole country.<sup>455</sup> Trump, as an ardent admirer of Andrew Jackson – the US president at the time of the 'Tariff of Abominations'<sup>456</sup> – must know that he is simultaneously courting both economic and constitutional disaster.

Even if he artificially extends his time in office (whether legitimately, via a new Constitutional amendment, or otherwise) Trump is entering his eighties. He has limited natural time to enact his monarchist libertarian visions across the fractious North American continent. It is also not prohibitively improbable that he will be prematurely stopped by force (such as a military coup, as almost happened to Soviet reformer Mikhail Gorbachev) or by *force majeure* (e.g. hemorrhagic stroke). His libertarian revolution might outlive him, under some other leader, e.g. current vice-president J.D. Vance, who has a close relationship with libertarian billionaire Peter Thiel.

The 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of America is a suitably symbolic moment for reorganising and renewing the country. Trump could rise to the challenge he has set himself, or go down in history as a failed reformer – or, ultimately, something much worse. Thomas Jefferson's words at the birth of

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<sup>455</sup> California state governor's office, 30 July 2025. See <<https://shorturl.at/g2eq8>> or <<https://www.gov.ca.gov/2025/07/30/trump-tariff-policy-continues-to-cause-chaos-in-american-economy/>>.

<sup>456</sup> Trump's esteem for Jackson is widely known, and has been examined by e.g. *Newsweek*, 1 May 2017. See <<https://shorturl.at/bJHlw>> or <<https://www.newsweek.com/understanding-donald-trumps-obsession-andrew-jackson-592635>>.

the nation should haunt his libertarian dreams:

I have no fear that the result of our experiment will be that men may be trusted to govern themselves without a master. Could the contrary of this be proved, I should conclude either that there is no god, or that he is a malevolent being.<sup>457</sup>

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<sup>457</sup> Letter to British Commissioner, David Hartley MP, 2 July 1787. See <<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-11-02-0441>>.