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Chapter Title: Frankfurt School Critical Theory and the Persistence of Authoritarian Populism in the United States

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Book Title: Critical Theory and Authoritarian Populism

Book Editor(s): Jeremiah Morelock

Published by: University of Westminster Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.com/stable/j.ctv9hvtcf.5>

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# Theories of Authoritarianism



## CHAPTER I

# Frankfurt School Critical Theory and the Persistence of Authoritarian Populism in the United States

John Abromeit

### 1.1. Introduction

Although the rise of right-wing populist movements and parties in Europe in the past few decades and the more recent success of the Tea Party in the United States has received ample attention from social scientists, the continuing growth of these parties in Europe and the recent election of Donald Trump as the President of the United States has confounded and surprised many scholars. Ten years ago, very few scholars would have predicted that right-wing populist parties would be actually governing (as in Hungary and Poland); threatening to govern (as in France and Switzerland); forming powerful and influential opposition parties (as in Austria, The Netherlands, Denmark, and Slovakia); or emerging as a new force in electoral politics (as in Britain, Sweden, Finland, and even Germany). Before 2016, very few scholars would have predicted that the British would vote to leave the European Union and Donald Trump would be elected president. In what follows, I would like to argue that this widespread

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#### How to cite this book chapter:

Abromeit, J. 2018. Frankfurt School Critical Theory and the Persistence of Authoritarian Populism in the United States. In: Morelock, J. (ed.) *Critical Theory and Authoritarian Populism*. Pp. 3–27. London: University of Westminster Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16997/book30.b>. License: CC-BY-NC-ND

astonishment among social scientists, and their difficulty in explaining the persistent and growing success of right-wing populism in Europe and the United States, reveals historical and critical theoretical blind spots in their work, which could be addressed by revisiting the rich body of work on right-wing populism and authoritarianism in the writings of the members of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research. Beginning the late 1920s and continuing into the post-war period, Max Horkheimer and his colleagues at the Institute produced a number of important historical, theoretical and empirical studies that can still shed light on the persistence of right-wing populism and authoritarianism from the twentieth into the twenty-first century.

This paper will examine the ways in which Critical Theory was decisively shaped during its exile in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s. It will also examine how and why the 'scientific experiences' of the Critical Theorists in the U.S. are still relevant to explaining contemporary social and political developments in their country of exile.<sup>2</sup> The first part of this essay will provide a brief overview of the Critical Theorists' studies of authoritarianism and right-wing populism. I will emphasize, in particular, the empirical studies they carried out in the U.S. in the 1940s, but I will also examine some key concepts from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, such as the concept of bourgeois anti-Semitism. The second part of the paper will examine the emergence of the Tea Party and Donald Trump's success in expanding and intensifying this right-wing populist movement by harnessing it to his own authoritarian leadership. Drawing on the conceptual resources outlined in the first section, I will demonstrate how the Critical Theorists' analyses of right-wing populism and authoritarianism can still explain key aspects of the Tea Party and Trump that have taken many contemporary social scientists by surprise. Throughout this essay Critical Theory and right-wing populism will be situated within two levels of historical periodization. The first – to which I will only gesture – will be the modern bourgeois epoch as whole. The second will be specific periods within that epoch: in particular, the historical periods that coincide with the emergence, decline and re-emergence of right-wing populism from the late nineteenth century to the present. The aim of the latter periodization is to illuminate the specific historical and social conditions that have inhibited or favoured the emergence of right-wing populist and authoritarian movements.

## 1.2. Revisiting the Critical Theorists' Analyses of Right-Wing Populism and Authoritarianism

### 1.2.1. Horkheimer's Analysis of the Sociohistorical Roots of Authoritarian Populism

Crucial to the development of Frankfurt School Critical Theory were their ongoing efforts to understand fascism. They understood fascism to a significant

extent as a form of right-wing authoritarian populism, which reached unprecedented extremes in National Socialist Germany, but which was by no means unique to Germany. They viewed fascism as a result of powerful socio-historical and social psychological tendencies that were present in all advanced capitalist societies. 'Der Fascismus ist kein Zufall gewesen,' as Adorno once put it.<sup>3</sup> A good point of departure for a re-examination of the Critical Theorists' rich body of work on authoritarianism is Max Horkheimer's 1937 essay, 'Egoism and Freedom Movements: On the Anthropology of the Bourgeois Epoch,' in which he analyses the historical origins of fascism in terms of a transformation of popular protest movements – what he calls 'bourgeois freedom movements' – from the left to the right, which corresponds to the historical transformation of the relationship of the bourgeoisie to the lower classes that occurred in Europe during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It is important to revisit Horkheimer's essay not only because of its argument about the transformation of popular protest movements and the populist ideology of their leaders, but also because it provided the historical and theoretical foundations for much of the empirical work on authoritarianism that the Institute carried out in the United States in the 1940s. As Martin Jay put it, 'as a seed-bed for much of the Frankfurt School's later work, it is virtually unparalleled.' (Jay 1982, 5).

In the 'Egoism' essay, Horkheimer examines different leaders of popular social movements in the early modern period, whose attempts to mobilize or to control the lower classes consolidated the power of bourgeois society. His case studies are Cola di Rienzo and Savonarola, the leaders of popular protest movements in Rome and Florence in the fourteenth and fifteenth-century; Luther, Calvin and the Reformation; and Robespierre and the French Revolution. In each case, Horkheimer stresses the peculiar relationship between the bourgeois leaders and the lower classes that plays itself out over the course of these movements. He writes,

The bourgeoisie's efforts to push through its own demands for a more rational administration against the feudal powers with the help of the desperate popular masses, while simultaneously consolidating its own rule over the masses, combine to account for the peculiar way the struggle for the 'the people' is carried on in these movements (Horkheimer 1993, 61–62).

On the one hand, Horkheimer emphasizes the genuinely progressive aspects of these social movements, which result from the shared interest of the bourgeoisie and the lower classes in overthrowing aristocratic and/or absolutist rule. On the other hand, Horkheimer pays close attention to the authoritarian aspects of these movements, which express the incipient divergence of the interests of the bourgeoisie and the lower classes. After the bourgeois revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this latent conflict of interest would emerge with the rise of a powerful socialist movement in the nineteenth century, which would

challenge the new hegemony of the bourgeoisie. The emergence of fascism in Europe in the 1920s represented something qualitatively new, insofar as it broke with the traditional conservatism of the nineteenth century and involved the mobilization of ‘the people’ against a perceived threat from the socialist left. Looking out over a rising tide of fascism in Europe in 1937, Horkheimer wrote,

The uprisings that have taken place in the most recent past in some European states are [...] not absolutist or clerical reactions but the staging of a bourgeois pseudo-revolution with radical populist trappings, wholly contrary to any possible reorganization of society. The forms they take seem to be a bad imitation of the movements previously discussed (Horkheimer 1993, 97).

Here we can see that Horkheimer stresses the populist elements of fascism, but also the different function these elements play within the changed social and historical conditions of early twentieth-century Europe. Simplifying somewhat, one could say that the progressive elements that had characterized the early modern movements disappeared, and only the authoritarian elements remained.<sup>4</sup>

The main point for our purposes here is that Horkheimer’s essay provides a historical analysis of the transformation of populism within the larger transformation of bourgeois society, which highlights the emergence of powerful right-wing populist tendencies in Europe in the late nineteenth century and which led to successful fascist movements in several European countries in the 1920s and 1930s. One must stop to reflect upon the fact that the very idea of a ‘right-wing populism’ must have seemed like a contradiction in terms at the time. Populism and appeals to ‘the people,’ ‘das Volk,’ were a staple of nineteenth-century liberal and democratic movements, and nineteenth century traditional conservatives were firmly anti-democratic and anti-populist. Yet, by the late nineteenth century they had also come to realize that the battle against democracy was hopeless; if conservative elites hoped to protect their positions of power in an ‘age of the masses’ they would need to learn to play the game of democracy, to insure outcomes that were favourable to them.<sup>5</sup> Symptomatic of the new right-wing populist strategy was the archconservative *Kreuz-Zeitung*, which changed its masthead after WWI from ‘Vorwärts mit Gott für König und Vaterland’ to ‘Für das deutsche Volk’ (Fritzsche 1998, 111)<sup>6</sup>. But as more recent historical scholarship has emphasized, this new right-wing populism was by no means simply an invention of conservative elites.<sup>7</sup> Such elites were eager to manipulate it, but its origins were genuinely spontaneous and popular. The emergence of right-wing populism at the beginning of the twentieth century as a qualitatively new social and political force in industrial capitalist societies must, in other words, be understood as a combination of genuinely grassroots activism and attempts by conservative elites to manipulate these movements for their own purposes.

Horkheimer and his colleagues at the Institute were interested in both of these aspects of right-wing populism. Already in their first major empirical study of blue and white-collar workers in the final years of the Weimar Republic, Horkheimer and Erich Fromm sought to determine how susceptible German blue and white-collar workers were to the temptations of authoritarian political movements on the right (Fromm 1983). The study indicated that if such a movement attempted to take power in Germany, resistance from these groups would be minimal. Their findings would be confirmed just a few years later. The Institute's next major empirical study sought to examine how authoritarian attitudes among the middle and lower classes in Europe and the U.S. were conditioned by the changing structure of the family. For my purposes here, I would like to dwell a bit longer on the empirical studies that were carried out in the United States in the 1940s, which illustrated the basic assumption that right-wing populist and authoritarian social and political tendencies were by no means limited to Germany or Europe.

### *1.2.2. The Paradigm Shift in Critical Theory around 1940*

But before proceeding to a discussion of some of the findings of these studies, I would like to briefly examine the paradigm shift in Critical Theory around 1940. This shift reflected the larger socio-economic, historical and political transformations that had occurred in Europe and the United States over the course of the 1930s. Summarizing quickly, one can say that the Great Depression led to the final collapse of the old liberal economic order and the rise of new forms of state-centric capitalism in Europe.<sup>8</sup> This global economic and political realignment was registered most clearly in Horkheimer's Critical Theory in his adoption of his friend Friedrich Pollock's state capitalism thesis, which had far-reaching implications for the Institute's theoretical and empirical work in the following decades.<sup>9</sup> Whereas Horkheimer's Critical Theory in the 1930s had rested firmly on a critical, and undogmatic Marxist theory of the historical transformation of modern bourgeois society, Pollock's state capitalism thesis implied that Marx's critique of political economy was no longer as important, since the independent dynamic of capitalism had been brought under control by relatively autonomous states. Social domination was now exercised directly through politics, rather than indirectly through underlying economic relations. Other symptoms of the paradigm shift in Critical Theory included the theory of rackets and of the administered society, which Horkheimer and Adorno introduced in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. These theoretical categories reflected the new hegemony of the Fordist-Keynesian model of capitalism that developed in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s, and was consolidated in Western Europe after World War II. From our vantage point today, we can see that this period of twentieth-century capitalism, which lasted through the end of the 1960s in Europe and the United States, was an anomaly. Historians



and economists such as Eric Hobsbawm and Thomas Piketty have described it as a 'Golden Age,' because of the historically unprecedented growth of capitalism and the redistribution of wealth downward that occurred during this time (Hobsbawm 1994, 257–88; Piketty 2014, 20–27, 271–303). The hegemony of Keynesian models of economics and the broad acceptance of a robust welfare state during this time also created a historical climate that was unfavourable to right-wing populist movements in Europe and the United States, with a few exceptions, such as McCarthyism in the United States and the Poujadist movement in France.

That said, when the Institute was carrying out their major empirical studies of anti-Semitism, prejudice and authoritarianism in the United States in the 1940s they were still very much concerned with the question of 'could it happen here?' (Ziege 2009, 169–71). The fact that the Institute attributed so much importance to this question, demonstrates once again their belief that right-wing populist authoritarianism was not merely a pathology of German culture or German backwardness, but was instead a potential threat in all advanced capitalist societies, and one that could become more powerful in the future if objective conditions changed. In his 1949 preface to Löwenthal and Guterman's *Prophets of Deceit*, Horkheimer justifies their study of the techniques of authoritarian agitators in the following way:

American hatemongers are at present at a low point in influence and prestige. [...] But because the emphasis of the book is on the meaning of the phenomena under analysis, the agitator should be studied in the light of his *potential effectiveness* with the context of present-day society and its dynamics, rather than in terms of his immediate effectiveness (Horkheimer 1949, xii, emphasis my own).

In short, even though the objective conditions for authoritarian social movements were unfavourable in the U.S. in the 1940s, Horkheimer and his colleagues at the Institute dedicated much of their energy and resources to studying them. *Prophets of Deceit* is an excellent example. In the preface to the study, they explicitly acknowledge their theoretical debt to Horkheimer's analysis of the social and social-psychological dynamics at work in earlier popular protest movements (Löwenthal and Guterman 1949, xvi). Through a content analysis of the speeches and writings of American right-wing populist agitators from the 1930s and 1940s, Löwenthal and Guterman sought to uncover the unconscious dynamics at work in the relationship between leaders and followers in authoritarian movements. In their study Löwenthal and Guterman identify approximately twenty different themes that recur in the texts of the agitators. Many of themes have remained remarkably relevant in terms of analysing right-wing populist movements in Europe and the U.S. right up to the present day. In what follows, I will focus on just a few that are directly relevant to the right-wing populist movement in the U.S. that began with the Tea Party and

continues at present under the leadership of Donald Trump – both of which will be discussed in the subsequent section.

### 1.2.3. Löwenthal, Guterman, and Adorno's Analyses of Authoritarian Populism in the U.S.

Löwenthal and Guterman emphasize that, in contrast to European fascist movements, the American authoritarian agitator has no pre-liberal-democratic tradition to fall back on, yet this lack 'does not prevent him from conveying the principal social tenets of totalitarianism to his audience' (135). They write, 'The American agitator falls back on the clichés of professional Patriotism, Fourth of July Americanism' (106). 'All he can offer is a rededication to the established institutional and ideological framework of the American republic as it has persisted since the founding fathers...If anything has gone wrong, it can be only because we Americans...have strayed from American ways' (96). The agitator appeals to 'individualists who still believe in Constitutional government and the American way of life' (108). Populist anti-intellectualism also figures prominently in his rhetorical arsenal. They write, 'Seizing on the "simple folk" theme as a pretext for fostering an aggressively anti-intellectual attitude, the agitator describes his American Americans as a people of good instincts and, he is happy to say, little sophistication' (109). Despite these appeals to conservative tradition and the common people, the agitator is hostile to politicians and the government, especially to Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the New Deal. He is 'amazed at the lack of courage exhibited in America by its foremost business executives and managers to resist the aggressions of political bureaucrats and revolutionists in Washington' (48). Löwenthal and Guterman continue, 'Such seemingly trivial remarks serve to glorify the direct rule of economic power groups at the expense of representative government' (48). Although the agitator is hostile to the government, he 'invariably identifies himself with the forces of law and order, and especially the police' (100).

In his contribution to *The Authoritarian Personality*, Adorno addresses many of these same themes, especially in his discussion of the concept of pseudo-conservatism, which was his most direct attempt to describe the typical beliefs and character structure of those most drawn to authoritarian populist social movements in the U.S. In contrast to the genuine conservative, who is willing to defend basic democratic institutions such as minority rights and representative government, the pseudo-conservative 'is a man who, in the name of upholding traditional American values and institutions and defending them against more or less fictitious dangers, consciously or unconsciously aims at their abolition' (Adorno et al. 1950, 676). The pseudo-conservatives' suspicion of existing democratic institutions is based on what Adorno calls a 'usurpation complex,' which is the idea that these institutions have been captured by forces that are hostile to 'genuine Americans.' In the 1940s this pseudo-conservative

vitriol was often directed against Roosevelt, whom they viewed as both a socialist and snobby elitist. Roosevelt and other progressives are seen as usurpers because they ‘assume a power position which should be reserved for the ‘right people’ [...] legitimate rulers are those who are actually in command of the machinery of production – not those who owe their ephemeral power to formal political processes’ (676). Adorno argues that ‘the pseudo-conservative mentality strives – diffusely and semiconsciously – to establish a dictatorship of the economically strongest group. This is to be achieved by means of a mass movement; one which promises security and privileges to the so-called “little man”’ (685). Pseudo-conservatives’ deep distrust of government and politicians as a whole, goes hand-in-hand with a lack of empathy for the poor and rejection of social welfare programs. Adherents of ‘economic rugged individualism,’ pseudo-conservatives object to state interference in the ‘natural’ laws of the market and embrace the spirit of the adage, ‘those who do not work, shall not eat.’ This contempt for the poor as parasites usually goes hand-in-hand with admiration for the wealthy and successful as the supposedly most productive members of society.

This ideology of producers and parasites also reappears in the Institute’s study of anti-Semitism among American workers in the 1940s.<sup>10</sup> The study revealed that, when comparing the United States to Europe, anti-Semitism was not only more widespread among workers than among the middle class, but also that it assumed more ‘modern’ forms. In other words, American workers were largely free of the more vulgar and crudely conspiratorial forms of European anti-Semitism, which portrayed Jews as lecherous and/or violent predators. The forms of anti-Semitism widespread among American workers almost always involved economic issues and the belief that Jews sought to avoid manual labour at all costs. Through deception and manipulation, they survived as parasites and exploiters among the majority of virtuous, hard-working Gentiles. Interestingly, this form of anti-Semitism among American workers corresponded most closely to what Horkheimer and Adorno described in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as ‘bourgeois’ anti-Semitism. Bourgeois anti-Semitism rested upon an ideological distinction between the ‘schaffend’ and the ‘raffend.’ The former, the virtuous producers, include not just workers and peasants, but also manufacturing and large industry. The latter, the immoral parasites, include bureaucrats, politicians, merchants and especially bankers. Drawing on Marx and Engels’ critique of Proudhon, Eugen Dühring, and of left and right-wing forms of populist anti-Semitism in the nineteenth century, Horkheimer and Adorno point out that bourgeois anti-Semitism rests on the concealment of social domination in the ownership of the means of production. Whereas Marx and Engels had focused on the exploitation of wage labour by capital, populist anti-Semitism and fascism portray wage labour and capital as productive allies in the struggle against parasitic politicians and bankers. The fact that these bourgeois forms of anti-Semitism were so widespread among American workers, points to what Adorno would describe later as the ‘radically bourgeois’

character of American society as a whole; that is, to the fact that socialist consciousness – which in Europe had also included a critique of anti-Semitism as the ‘socialism of fools’ – was virtually non-existent among American workers.<sup>11</sup> Their anti-Semitism was a distorted protest against the capitalist exploitation of labour, but one which rested upon a complete identification of workers with the bourgeois values of hard work and self-discipline (Worrell 2008, 119–88).

#### *1.2.4. Frankfurt School Critical Theory and the History of the Twentieth Century*

Before continuing with some remarks on how the Tea Party and Donald Trump exemplify many of the characteristics of right-wing populist movements identified by Horkheimer, Adorno and Löwenthal, I would like to return to my earlier reflections on how the development of Frankfurt School Critical Theory fits into the larger history of the twentieth century. I mentioned earlier that the rise of state-centric forms of capitalism in the mid-twentieth century created conditions unfavourable to authoritarian social movements in the U.S. and Western Europe. In the 1970s there was a transition from the Fordist-Keynesian model of capitalism in the 1950s and 1960s, to a new post-Fordist, neo-liberal phase, which has lasted through the present. If only briefly, I would like to advance the claim that these changed social conditions have created a climate which more closely resembles the 1920s and 1930s in some ways and which is more conducive to right-wing populist movements in Europe and the United States. After a period of transition in the 1970s, the new hegemony of neo-liberal ideas was marked by the elections of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, but also by Helmut Kohl and the conservative ‘Tendenzwende’ in West Germany in the early 1980s. In all three cases, some key right-wing populist ideas were adopted and put into practice – albeit in a more moderate form – by newly dominant conservative parties. Even in France, François Mitterand was forced to abandon his ambitious campaign promises of socialist economic reforms and to adopt much more business-friendly policies in the early 1980s. France offers a particularly clear example, not only of the defeat of traditional socialist ideas, but also the emergence of new right-wing populist, authoritarian political movements in the 1980s. At the same time that the French socialist party was making serious concessions to the new neo-liberal orthodoxy and the French communist party was entering a period of terminal decline, the right-wing populist Front National was emerging as a new force in French electoral politics. As the Dutch political scientist, Cas Mudde, has pointed out, the Front Nationale was only one of a whole new family of right-wing populist movements and parties that would emerge in Europe in the 1980s and 1990s (Mudde 2016). The collapse of Soviet Communism in 1989 only reinforced the now triumphalist hegemony of neoliberalism and the ‘Washington Consensus.’ Bill Clinton and Tony Blair made clear that ‘new’ Democrats and ‘new’ Labour

had fully embraced neo-liberal ideas. When asked in 2002 what her greatest achievement was, Thatcher replied, ‘Tony Blair and New Labour.’

The larger point I am trying to make here – far too briefly – is that the 1980s and 1990s were marked by a very significant shift to the right in the overall political spectrum in both Europe and the United States. Socialists, Democrats and Social Democrats’ embrace of neoliberalism; rising levels of inequality and unemployment; and the threat of new capitalist crises, such as the one that occurred in 2008, have created fertile ground for the emergence of new right-wing populist movements. To be sure, democratic institutions and traditions are much stronger now in Europe than they were in the 1920s and 1930s, and even the new right-wing populist parties generally accept the pre-conditions of democracy, rather than opposing them. Nonetheless, three and a half decades of neo-liberal hegemony have created conditions – rising levels of poverty, insecurity, hopelessness – that resemble the 1920s and 1930s more closely than the 1950s and 60s. For this reason, I think it is also worth revisiting what I have called elsewhere the model of early Critical Theory, which guided the Institute’s work in the 1930s and which explored the relationship between capitalist crisis and authoritarian social movements. Horkheimer’s essay on ‘Egoism and Freedom Movements’ is – as mentioned – paradigmatic in this regard, but Erich Fromm’s closely related writings from the 1930s on the social-psychological dynamics of authoritarianism should also be mentioned in this context.<sup>12</sup> In contrast to the post-World War II period, when social and economic conditions were not conducive to the emergence of authoritarian movements, Horkheimer and Fromm’s writings from the 1930s are based on direct observations of the links between capitalist crisis and right-wing populism and, thus, should be revisited in light of the recent reemergence of crisis and authoritarianism in the U.S. and Europe.

### 1.3. The Resurgence of Right-Wing Populism in U.S.: The Tea Party and Donald Trump

#### 1.3.1. *Right-Wing Populism from Below: The Tea Party*

In the next section of my paper I would like to take a closer look at the Tea Party movement in the United States. The Tea Party burst upon the American political scene in the Spring of 2009, in response to the election of Barack Obama and the economic crisis of 2008. The original call for Tea Party rallies came from a reporter in Chicago by the name of Rick Santelli, who went ballistic over newly elected President Obama’s declared intention to help people threatened with losing their homes as a result of the sub-prime lending crisis. In his rant, which soon went viral on YouTube, Santelli accused the government of ‘rewarding bad behavior’ and he called on ‘America’s capitalists’ to protest measures to ‘subsidize losers’ mortgages’ (Skocpol and Williams 2012, 7). The Tea

Party soon developed into one of the largest upsurges of grass roots political activism in the United States since the 1960s. This grass roots activism, combined with generous support from wealthy, ultraconservative national political organizations and powerful conservative media outlets, such as Fox News, made the Tea Party a new political force to be reckoned with. At the high-point of its political influence, the midterm elections in November, 2010, the Tea Party contributed significantly to a Republican landslide. The Republicans won 63 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives, six seats in the Senate, six new governorships, and they made equally impressive gains in state legislatures across the nation. Many of the victorious candidates supported by the Tea Party had defeated more moderate Republicans in primary elections. The overall effect was to shift national politics significantly to the right.<sup>13</sup> Polls conducted in 2010 and 2011 demonstrated repeatedly that approximately 30% of Americans ‘supported,’ and 20% ‘strongly supported’ the Tea Party. Although they failed to prevent Barack Obama’s re-election in 2012, they played an important role in the Republicans’ sweeping gains in the midterm elections of 2014. In their study, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*, the Harvard sociologist and political scientist, Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson, argue that the Tea Party has succeeded in revitalizing the Republican Party, which as recently as 2009 seemed like a party in decline. In the process, the Tea Party has also succeeded in pushing the Republican Party to the right on many issues; one could say, using Adorno’s aforementioned distinction, that Tea Party pseudo-conservatives have succeeded in strengthening their position vis-à-vis traditional conservatives within the Republican Party.

Contrary to some commentators who viewed the Tea Party as a new independent force in American politics, Skocpol and Williamson argue convincingly that it represents ‘the most recent incarnation of American conservative populism’ (81). So, when one studies the Tea Party more closely, it should not come as a surprise that a strikingly high level of correlation exists between their unifying beliefs and the main characteristics of the right-wing populist agitators and authoritarian personalities that Horkheimer, Adorno and Löwenthal studied in the U.S. in the 1940s. These include hyperbolic ‘Fourth of July Patriotism’ and frequent appeals to the Founding Fathers and a return to government based directly on the U.S. Constitution, which is interpreted dogmatically as supporting Tea Party doctrine. One very popular book among the Tea Party called *The Five Thousand Year Leap*, purports to explain the links between the Bible and the U.S. Constitution.<sup>14</sup> Such historical fundamentalism also illustrates the widespread belief among the Tea Party that the United States has been corrupted by foreign elements and needs to purge itself in order to return to its former pristine state – what Adorno called the ‘usurpation complex.’ Such foreign elements include undocumented immigrants, whom 82% of Tea Party members view as a ‘very serious’ problem. Much more serious, however, in the eyes of almost all Tea Party members, is President Obama himself. It is not a coincidence that the Tea Party emerged shortly after his election. Not unlike

Löwenthal's agitators and Adorno's authoritarian personalities, who viewed Franklin Delano Roosevelt as both a communist and a snobby elitist, Tea Party members view Obama as a socialist and a condescending elitist, but also as a foreigner and a Muslim. Skocpol and Williamson stress the centrality of Obama as 'the devil incarnate' to the Tea Party, and 'free-wheeling anti-Obama paranoia' as common fare. Hatred of Obama is also fuelled by the Tea Party's more general distrust of government, which is grounded in their ultra-liberal and Social Darwinist economic views. The 'natural' laws of the market must be allowed to run their course and government should not intervene to help the poor. The Tea Party is anti-union and pro-business for the same reason. They make no distinction between small businesses and large corporations and they are opposed to raising taxes on anyone, including the wealthiest Americans. A few interesting exceptions to their generally anti-government views include a lack of concern about large military budgets, a pro-police and pro-military stance, and the belief that stricter policing of undocumented immigrants is necessary. Here we see the same anti-government, pro-police attitude that Adorno described in *The Authoritarian Personality* and also linked to the rise of fascism in Europe.

I would like to dwell slightly longer on the other exception to the Tea Party's anti-government views, because it represents one of Skocpol and Williamson's most interesting findings. They found that most grass roots members of the Tea Party do support certain government programs, such as Social Security and Medicare, which they view as helping 'deserving' American citizens. Some of the far-right libertarian national organizations that have supported and funded local Tea Party groups advocate for the privatization of Social Security and Medicare. But these views remain unpopular among rank-and-file members, whose sense of deserving and undeserving members of society is even stronger than their opposition to government. Skocpol and Williamson write,

Above all, Tea Party activists see themselves as productive members of society. [...] A well-marked distinction between workers and nonworkers – between productive citizens and the freeloaders – is central to the Tea Party worldview and conception of America. As Tea Partiers see it, only through hard work can one earn access to a good income and to honourable public benefits.<sup>15</sup>

Here I think we can see another important link with earlier forms of right-wing populism analysed by Horkheimer, Adorno and Löwenthal, namely, the ideology of producers and parasites.<sup>16</sup> We saw how this ideology figured prominently not only among right-wing populist agitators and authoritarian personalities, but also among anti-Semitic American workers. We also saw this ideology in the Nazis' distinction between the 'schaffend' and the 'raffend.' Horkheimer's analysis in 'Egoism and Freedom Movements' of the historical formation of dominant character structures in the modern bourgeois epoch, can still offer

us important insights into the origins and function of the ideology of producers and parasites. We are dealing here with an attitude that became widespread first among the ascendant bourgeoisie, but which was gradually imposed upon the lower classes as well, during the long, drawn-out process of integrating them into modern capitalist society.<sup>17</sup> The ideology of producers and parasites was used during the French Revolution to justify a revolt against the aristocracy, and it was taken over in the nineteenth century by some non-Marxian socialists to attack the bourgeoisie. But it also found its way easily into the Fascists' ideological arsenal.<sup>18</sup> This shift of the ideology of 'producers and parasites' is a prime example of the transformation of populism from the left to the right, which I discussed at the beginning of this paper in relation to Horkheimer's essay on 'Egoism and Freedom Movements.'

### *1.3.2. Right-Wing Populism from Above: Donald Trump*

More recently, Donald Trump has succeeded in harnessing and expanding the right-wing populist movement, which exploded onto the political scene with the Tea Party.<sup>19</sup> In order to understand Trump's remarkable political success – despite the opposition of most of the party's traditional leadership – one needs to look more closely at some of the similarities and differences in his rhetoric and that of the Tea Party. In many regards, Trump has continued to emphasize key elements of Tea Party ideology. These include, for example, virulent and frequently conspiratorial denigration of President Obama;<sup>20</sup> celebration of the police and Second Amendment gun rights, combined with scathing attacks on the current government and government, in general; hyper-patriotic calls to restore the U.S. to a nostalgically imagined state of former greatness; and vitriolic denunciation of immigrants. Regarding the latter, Trump has – as in well known – gone well beyond the Tea Party in his call for the immediate deportation of over ten million undocumented workers, the revocation of citizenship for their children born in the U.S., and the construction of a wall along the Mexican border, which will prevent any further immigration and will allegedly be financed by the Mexican government. Trump's claim that many Mexican immigrants are murderers and rapists, combined with his reinforcement of the popular, prejudicial association of Muslims with terrorists, and his threat to severely limit Muslim immigration to the U.S., have demonstrated his willingness to outstrip even the Tea Party in xenophobic rhetorical excesses.<sup>21</sup> Another key area in which Trump has adopted and amplified Tea Party rhetoric is in regard to what Adorno called the 'usurpation complex.' Like the Tea Party, Trump constantly suggests that the government has been captured by special interests (for example, politicians beholden to lobbyists) and needs to be 'taken back' in order to properly serve the people. Trump emphasizes his status as an outsider, who is financing his own campaign rather than accepting any corrupting money from established special interest groups, and who is running for president only



because he is ‘fed up’ with the ‘crooked system’ that is destroying American democracy and thwarting the expression of the will of the people.<sup>22</sup> Trump repeatedly assures his audience that ‘the last thing I ever thought I would do is become a politician.’ But, in words that could have been taken verbatim from any number of the proto-fascist agitators studied by Löwenthal in the 1940s, Trump explains to his audience that he has decided reluctantly to enter politics, because the U.S. needs to get its house in order and that he is the perfect man for the job. He insists that his achievements as a wealthy businessman, successful real estate developer and tough negotiator are the ideal qualifications to ‘make America great again.’ Here one sees, even more clearly than in the Tea Party, Trump’s appeal to those who believe that government should be run like a business and that political power should be placed in the hands of ‘those who are actually in command of the machinery of production – not those who owe their ephemeral power to formal political processes,’ as Adorno described the pseudo-conservative attitude towards government (Adorno et al. 1950, 676).

Trump has also adopted the rhetoric of ‘producers and parasites,’ which plays such a central role in Tea Party ideology. In fact, at a speech that Trump delivered at a Tea Party convention in South Carolina on 16 January 2016, he dedicated nearly half of his time to describing a project to build an ice-skating rink that he took over from the government of New York City, because it was behind schedule and over budget. He then boasted how, under his direction, the project was completed ahead of schedule and under budget, thereby contrasting his own productive efficiency to the wasteful incompetence of government.<sup>23</sup> Trump always describes his own professional activity as a real estate developer as contributing directly to the productivity of the U.S. by directly employing many thousands of people. Probably the single most important way in which Trump has set himself apart from other Republican candidates – particularly those of the party establishment – has been his embrace of economic populism and protectionism. He promises to make America powerful again by bringing back the hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs that have disappeared in the U.S. since the 1970s as a result of trade agreements like NAFTA, which have benefitted large corporations at the expense of American workers. Trump promises to punish corporations who choose to produce abroad by levying hefty tariffs on their products. He rails against government and corporate elites who have completely forgotten, or are against, ‘wage earners.’<sup>24</sup> He has even promised to transform the Republican Party into a workers’ party.<sup>25</sup> While many commentators have argued that Trump’s xenophobia and racism appeal most to his constituents, other veteran scholars of American right-wing populism view his economic populism as more important.<sup>26</sup> The ideology of producers and parasites is also apparent in Trump’s frequent criticisms of finance – in the form of ‘paper-pushing’ hedge fund managers – and banking. Trump repeatedly criticized his most serious challenger in the Republican primaries, Ted Cruz, for his willingness to take money from big Wall Street banks.<sup>27</sup> In contrast to Cruz and the rest of the Republican primary candidates, Trump never lets

his audience forget that he is financing his campaign with his own money. He even extends the rhetoric of producers and parasites to international military and trade relations. In his pledges prior to becoming president Trump promised to force countries like Germany, Japan and Saudi Arabia, which allegedly rely upon the largesse of the U.S. for their military defense, to either pay for this service or provide for their own defense. Similarly, in international trade, Trump points again and again to Mexico, and China, in particular, as deceiving the current naïve and/or inept American government and taking advantage of the American people by running large trade surpluses.

The final, but probably most important way in which Trump has adopted and intensified the rhetoric of the Tea Party lies in the cluster of ideas – discussed above – that Adorno refers to as ‘pseudo-conservatism.’ In order to explicitly link the key concept of pseudo-conservatism in *The Authoritarian Personality* to Horkheimer’s earlier analyses of authoritarian tendencies among bourgeois freedom movements in the early modern period, it is worth recalling that Adorno views pseudo-conservatism as a deep historical tendency, which has accompanied the rise of modern capitalism as a whole, but whose expression is hindered or facilitated by the social and political conditions that exist in different periods within the modern bourgeois epoch.<sup>28</sup> To understand the recent success of the Tea Party and Trump, it is also worth recalling the reason why Adorno distinguished ‘pseudo-’ from genuine conservatives, namely, to contrast the authoritarian tendencies of the former to the more or less successful identification of the latter with the ideals of liberal democracy. According to Adorno, a crucial defining characteristic of the latter’s acceptance of the ‘anti-repressive and sincerely democratic’ aspects of U.S. political ideals is an ‘unqualified rejection of antiminority prejudice’ (Adorno et al. 1950, 675). Adorno’s prediction that ‘the ‘genuine’ conservatives will be driven into the liberal camp by today’s social dynamics,’ seems to have been confirmed by the deep divisions that have emerged within the Republican Party in the past decade, with a rebellion first from the Tea Party and now – to an even greater extent – with Trump’s open rebellion against traditional conservative elites within the party.<sup>29</sup> But now that the pseudo-conservative rebellion begun by the Tea Party and expanded by Trump has taken control of the Republican Party and placed their self-appointed leader in the White House, several high-ranking Republicans who have been very critical of Trump in the past – including the current Speaker of the House of Representatives, Paul Ryan and the 2012 Republican Presidential candidate, Mitt Romney – are already demonstrating a greater willingness to work with Trump.<sup>30</sup>

If one asks how Trump’s rhetoric reflects the content of pseudo-conservatism, as described by Adorno, many continuities with the points outlined above in relation to the Tea Party are readily apparent. But one also sees what I would like to argue is the biggest difference between Trump and the Tea Party, namely, Trump’s much more explicitly authoritarian rhetoric and self-presentation. Whereas the Tea Party still prided itself on being a grassroots, decentralized

movement, Trump has given the movement a new centralized focus with his pompous and aggressive leadership. Adorno describes the desire of pseudo-conservatives for authoritarian leadership in the following way:

Their idea of the strong man [...] is colored by an image of real strength; the backing of the most powerful industrial groups. To them, progressives in the government are the real usurpers [...] because they assume a power position which should be reserved for the 'right people.' Pseudo-conservatives have an underlying sense of 'legitimacy': legitimate rulers are those who are actually in command of the machinery of production – not those who owe their ephemeral power to formal political processes [...] Formal democracy seems to this kind of thinking to be too far away from 'the people,' and the people will have their right only if the 'inefficient' democratic processes are substituted by some rather ill-defined strong-arm system (Adorno et al. 1950, 677–78, 686).

Although Trump is not himself an industrialist – which may itself be of less significance in a 'post-industrial' period – he certainly presents himself as a productive and efficient businessman with an intimate understanding of 'how to get things done' in the 'real world' of the economy, and as someone who will apply these methods in order 'to make America great again.' Although there has been a debate among scholars and journalists about whether Trump is more authoritarian or populist, this debate overlooks the fact that right-wing populism and authoritarianism very often go hand in hand, as the experience of European fascism in the 1920s and 1930s made clear.<sup>31</sup> This is not to say, as other commentators have claimed, that Trump is an outright fascist himself. Although his calls for the deportation of over ten million undocumented workers and his threats to use violence – and tolerance of it among his followers – against his enemies and opponents certainly places his rhetoric well within fascist traditions, he has not called for the overthrow of U.S. political institutions and he has yet to form his own anti-democratic political party or militias – although a number of militant far-right and/or white supremacist groups have expressed their support for him.<sup>32</sup>

However, Trump and many of his followers do fit the mould of authoritarian right-wing populism – that is, what Adorno described as 'pseudo-conservatism' – very well. And as Adorno kept repeating until his death in 1969, the threat of authoritarianism in modern capitalist societies that comes from *within* democracy is probably greater than the threat posed by explicitly anti-democratic movements.<sup>33</sup> In *The Authoritarian Personality* Adorno describes this threat in the following way:

It cannot be disputed that formal democracy, under the present economic system, does not suffice to guarantee permanently, to the bulk of the population, satisfaction of the most elementary wants and

needs, whereas at the same time the democratic form of government is presented as if [...] it were as close to an ideal society as it could be. The resentment caused by this contradiction is turned by those who fail to recognize its economic roots against the form of democracy itself. Because it does not fulfill what it promises, they regard it as a 'swindle' and are ready to exchange it for a system which sacrifices all claims to human dignity and justice, but of which they expect vaguely some kind of guarantee of their lives by better planning and organization (Adorno et al. 1950, 678).

Trump plays on this type of populist, anti-political resentment, when he states repeatedly in his speeches that the current political system is corrupt, but that he as an individual possesses the wherewithal not only to reverse America's lamentable decline, but to do so quickly: 'You need somebody fast,' and 'it's gonna go fast,' and 'I alone can fix this problem,' as he told a huge audience at a speech on 10 April 2016 in Rochester, New York – a city decimated by post-industrial decline. Trump's message of economic protectionism, which sets him apart from other Republican candidates and from the neo-liberal ideology of American conservative elites more generally, is tailor-made for predominantly white, lower and lower-middle class audiences, such as the one he was addressing in Rochester. Not unlike the National Socialists' promises to restore a powerful *Volksgemeinschaft*,<sup>34</sup> Trump tells his listeners to join his 'movement' to restore a mythical United States in which we will 'protect and love one another.' Trump rails against big banks and corporate lobbyists and tells his audience that he is 'the only one who will save social security.'<sup>35</sup> Here again we can see Trump very perceptively placing himself on the side of the grassroots activists in the Tea Party, and against the neoliberalism of conservative elites, such as the Koch Brothers and Paul Ryan, who favoured the privatization of Social Security. So Trump has appropriated the communitarian elements of the Tea Party ideology, while at the same time intensifying them, by combining them with his own appeal as an authoritarian leader who allegedly possesses the power to enact them and to punish those 'enemies of the people' – both domestic and foreign – who are responsible for America's decline.

#### 1.4. Conclusion

One reason why Fascism has a chance is that in the name of progress its opponents treat it as a historical norm. The current amazement that the things we are experiencing are 'still' possible in the twentieth century is *not* philosophical. This amazement is not the beginning of knowledge – unless it is the knowledge that the view of history which gives rise to it is untenable.<sup>36</sup>

— Walter Benjamin

These words that Benjamin wrote in the face of the undiminished appeal and continuing advance of fascism in Europe in the late 1930s, can still illuminate dominant, unreflective historical attitudes of the twenty-first century that have led to a significant underestimation of the threat – and consequent surprise about the actual rise – of right-wing populism in Europe and the United States. As we have seen, Horkheimer, Fromm, Adorno, and Löwenthal grounded their analyses of fascism, authoritarianism, and right-wing populism in a historical theory of the modern bourgeois epoch as a whole. The provocative thesis of Horkheimer's path-breaking essay, 'Egoism and Freedom Movements' – which provided the historical and theoretical foundations for much of the Institute's later work on authoritarianism – was that the particular social and social-psychological dynamics that led to fascism in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s had been present from the beginning of modern bourgeois society. To be sure, the constellation of social relations between the aristocracy, middle, and lower classes underwent a transformation as the bourgeoisie gradually established its hegemony over a period of centuries. It was not until this *dialectic of bourgeois society* had reached its later stages that fascism became an objective possibility, and then a catastrophic historical reality.<sup>37</sup> In contrast to many 'progressive' and 'evolutionary' theorists in the post-WWII period, who attributed the success of fascism in Germany and Italy to a *Sonderweg* – that is, a 'modernization deficit' in comparison to other Western democracies – Horkheimer and the Critical Theorists recognized that fascism had sprung from some of the deepest and most powerful tendencies slumbering in modern capitalist societies and that these tendencies had not been removed by the unconditional surrender of fascists in 1945. Adorno's reformulation of Kant's categorical imperative in the 1960s – 'unfree mankind [must] arrange their thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself, so that nothing similar will happen' – expressed his conviction that, even within post-war liberal democracies, such tendencies still existed. Even if one questions claims – as I do – that the Tea Party, or even the more explicitly authoritarian Donald Trump can be described as 'Fascist,' the Critical Theorists' insight that fascism represents an extreme form of the right-wing populist tendencies that have deep roots in modern capitalist societies, provides a very important corrective to the naïve and ahistorical approaches to right-wing populism and authoritarianism, which have been caught off-guard by their recent reemergence in the United States. Critical Theory offers a much more incisive explanation than such ahistorical approaches of the (not so) surprising *persistence* of right-wing populism into the twenty-first century.

Examples of the historically naïve approach can be found in a number of recent journalistic essays on Trump which describe the recent 'rediscovery' of authoritarianism among American academic social scientists. Rather than exploring the merits and demerits of this social scientific literature here, I would like simply to make note of the remarkably blithe dismissal of the entire corpus of the Critical Theorists' studies of authoritarianism. For example, in March, 2016 Amanda Taub published a widely discussed article in the online political

journal *Vox*, which explored this new body of work on authoritarianism and its implications for understanding the surprising success of Donald Trump. Her giddy confidence in the forward march of progress in the social sciences comes through clearly in the following statements: ‘after a period of junk science in the mid-twentieth century, a more serious group of scholars has addressed this question, specifically studying how it plays out in American politics.’ Eliminating any doubt about the culprits in question, Taub continues:

...the early work wasn’t particularly rigorous by today’s standards. The critical theorist Theodor Adorno, for instance, developed what he called the ‘F-scale,’ which sought to measure fascist tendencies. The test wasn’t accurate. Sophisticated respondents would quickly discover what the ‘right’ answers were and game the test. And there was no proof that the personality type it purportedly measured actually supported fascism (Taub 2016).

Fortunately for us, however:

...in the early 1990s, a political scientist named Stanley Feldman changed everything. [...] He realized that if authoritarianism was a personality profile rather than just a political preference, he could get respondents to reveal these tendencies by asking questions about a topic that seemed much less controversial: [...] parenting goals (Taub 2016).

Taub’s characterizations here are not unusual; one finds very similar claims in a number of recent articles on authoritarianism and Trump. Unfortunately they reflect nothing more than current misconceptions about the Institute’s sophisticated and substantial studies of authoritarianism. Many of the supposed shortcomings of their work mentioned by Taub and others were, in fact, integral parts of the methods they used. For example, the alleged discovery in more recent work of attitudes towards child rearing as a key indicator of authoritarianism was employed in many of the Institute’s studies.<sup>38</sup> One need not refute the foolish claim that the Institute viewed authoritarianism as a political preference rather than a complex constellation of character traits, since this was the most basic working hypothesis of *The Authoritarian Personality*. Also, Adorno and other Institute members never made the mistake of assuming that authoritarianism coincided in any simple way with ‘left’ and ‘right,’ or ‘liberal’ and ‘conservative’ political views, as the discussion above of pseudo-conservatism should have made clear. The Critical Theorists’ discussion of ‘conformist rebellion,’ motivated by ego weakness, rather than critical insight, is another example – this time of a ‘pseudo-critical’ stance. Finally, from very early on, they clearly recognized the need to obtain empirical information about authoritarianism indirectly, to avoid self-censorship among respondents. Their psychoanalytic expertise aided them greatly in developing increasingly refined techniques of

gaining access not just to the openly professed, but also to the private or even unconscious attitudes of participants in their studies.<sup>39</sup>

The reemergence of a powerful right-wing populist movement in the U.S. in the wake of the Great Recession of 2008, and more recent expansion of that pseudo-conservative movement and the intensification of the authoritarian aspects of its rhetoric, should be a signal to recover the Critical Theorists' important insights into the roots of authoritarian populism in modern capitalist societies, which can still contribute greatly to explaining its *persistence* from the twentieth into the twenty-first century. The most common reaction of contemporary, historically myopic social science to the Tea Party and especially Donald Trump's success has been embarrassed surprise. The reemergence of right-wing populism – first in Europe and now in the U.S. – during the consolidation and, more recently, the crisis of global neo-liberal capitalism, will hardly come as a surprise to anyone familiar with the Critical Theorists' studies of authoritarianism. But, for a variety of reasons, the memory of these studies has weakened substantially in the present. The attempt by more recent theorists in Germany – who proudly place themselves in the 'Frankfurt School' tradition, while at the same time often dismissing the contemporary relevance of its founders – to place Critical Theory on firm 'normative' foundations, has diverted attention from real, existing catastrophic tendencies.<sup>40</sup> Like the utopian socialists of old, the normative theorists think they can tell us the way society *ought* to be developing, but they are at a loss to explain why it is actually moving in the opposite direction. As we have seen, Horkheimer and his colleagues were convinced that the threat of authoritarianism was minimal in the immediate post-war period, and the economic prosperity and relative security of the 1950s and 1960s continued to dampen the threat. But rising levels of inequality, frustration and anxiety since the 1970s have created conditions much more favourable to right-wing populist movements. So even if the memory of the Critical Theorists' studies of authoritarianism and right-wing populism has become weak, we should seize hold of it as it flashes up in this moment of danger.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This essay was completed in February 2017 and thus does not take into account political developments since then.
- <sup>2</sup> For Adorno's own account of his 'scientific experiences' in the U.S., see Adorno (1969).
- <sup>3</sup> 'Fascism was not a coincidence.' Adorno made this state in his 'Lectures on Aesthetics' 30 November 1967 (Kraushaar 1998, 328).
- <sup>4</sup> Horkheimer's analysis here of the transformation of populism anticipates more recent historical scholarship on the relationship between fascism and populism by scholars such as Peter Fritzsche, Geoff Eley, Ernesto Laclau and Zeev Sternhell. For a discussion of this scholarship and its

reconceptualization of the relationship between populism and fascism, see (Abromeit 2016).

- <sup>5</sup> Gustave Le Bon's *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, which was first published in 1895, is an excellent example of this larger tendency. Le Bon presents himself here as a modern-day Machiavelli, who has written a practical political handbook for conservative elites in order to instruct them on how to manipulate the masses in order to maintain their own power. It is not a coincidence that Mussolini was an avid reader and admirer of Le Bon's work.
- <sup>6</sup> 'Forwards with God for King and Fatherland' to 'For the German People'
- <sup>7</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this scholarship, see the reference in note 3, above.
- <sup>8</sup> For one classical account of this shift, see (Polanyi 1944).
- <sup>9</sup> For a discussion of the shift in Horkheimer's Critical Theory that occurred around 1940 as a result of his adoption of Pollock's state capitalism thesis, see (Postone and Brick 1993). See also, for a somewhat different interpretation of this shift: (Abromeit 2011, 394–424).
- <sup>10</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the Institute's study of anti-Semitism among American workers, see (Worrell 2008) and (Ziege 2009, 180–228).
- <sup>11</sup> Adorno referred to the United States as a 'radically bourgeois country' in (Adorno 1977, 310). For an examination of the much more significant role that racism played in the formation of 'white' identities among the American working class in the United States – identities that also had decidedly bourgeois characteristics – see (Abromeit 2013a).
- <sup>12</sup> For an overview of Fromm's writings in the 1930s on the social-psychological dimensions of authoritarianism, see (Abromeit 2011, 201–11, 282–88).
- <sup>13</sup> Stanford political scientist Adam Bonica has argued that the House of Representatives experienced its most pronounced ideological shift to the right as a result of the elections of 2010 – more radical even than after the so-called 'Republican Revolution' led by Newt Gingrich in 1994. See (Skocpol and Williams 2012, 168–70).
- <sup>14</sup> On the Tea Party's very selective, and tendentially fundamentalist interpretation of the U.S. constitution, see (Jill Lepore 2010, especially 118–25).
- <sup>15</sup> (Skocpol and Williams 2012, 65–66). These beliefs can also be observed at Tea Party rallies, where participants carry placards saying 'Redistribute my work ethic,' or 'Keep working; thousands on welfare are depending on you.'
- <sup>16</sup> On the importance of the 'producers and parasites' ideology for the Tea Party, see also (Formisano 2012, 20).
- <sup>17</sup> For an analysis of the ways in which this process was different in the U.S. from Europe, due to the presence of a large Black underclass, see also (Abromeit 2013a).
- <sup>18</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the transformation of the populist ideology of 'producers and parasites' from the left to the right in Europe in the period from the French Revolution to fascism, see (Abromeit 2016).



- <sup>19</sup> The following analysis of Trump focuses on the rhetorical strategies Trump developed during his campaign. An analysis of the ways in which Trump has – since winning the election – distanced himself from some of the more outlandish of these claims, cannot be pursued here, since this process is still underway at the time of writing.
- <sup>20</sup> Donald Trump was one of the first to question Obama’s citizenship and he actively participated in the so-called ‘birther’ movement.
- <sup>21</sup> On Trump’s willingness to violate tabus maintained by traditional conservatives, see (Perlstein 2015).
- <sup>22</sup> See, for example, the speech Trump delivered in Rochester, New York on 10 April 2016, which can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NqRMaD3HWHo>.
- <sup>23</sup> Trump’s speech can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-zN5k4Gu40>.
- <sup>24</sup> In the speech Trump gave in Rochester in April 2016, cited in note 22.
- <sup>25</sup> As reported in the online journal *Politico*, on May 26, 2016: <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/05/trump-gop-workers-party-223598>.
- <sup>26</sup> For an argument that emphasizes Trump’s economic populism, see (Frank 2016).
- <sup>27</sup> Here, the right-wing populist echo of Bernie Sanders’ left-wing populist criticisms of Hillary Clinton is unmistakable.
- <sup>28</sup> Adorno argues, for example, that ‘The reason that the pseudo-conservative seems to be such a characteristically modern phenomenon is not that any new psychological element has been added to this particular syndrome, which was probably established during the last four centuries, but that objective social conditions make it easier for the character structure in question to express itself in its avowed opinions’ (Adorno et al. 1950, 676).
- <sup>29</sup> Prior to Trump’s capturing the nomination of the Republican Party and, now, the Presidency, many powerful Republican Party elites, such as George H.W. Bush, George W. Bush and Mitt Romney, as well as some of the wealthiest donors to the Party, such as the Koch Brothers, refused to support Trump.
- <sup>30</sup> During the 2016 primary, Trump created a sort of litmus test that forced Republicans to identify with him, as a pseudo-conservative, or against him, as a genuine conservative. But the fact that most of them have in the mean time demonstrated more willingness to work with Trump seems to cast doubt on Adorno’s argument here, that conservative elites’ commitments to liberal-democratic principles would lead them to reject pseudo-conservatives and gravitate towards moderate liberals.
- <sup>31</sup> For one example of a critique of numerous articles that have analyzed Trump as an authoritarian, see (Rahn and Oliver 2016).
- <sup>32</sup> On Trump’s support among the extreme right, white supremacists and neo-Nazis in the U.S., see (Holley and Larimer 2016).

- <sup>33</sup> As Adorno famously put it in 1959, 'I consider the survival of National Socialism *within* democracy to be potentially more menacing than the survival of fascist tendencies *against* democracy' (Adorno 1998, 90).
- <sup>34</sup> On the importance of the concept of the *Volksgemeinschaft* ('people's community') to Nazi ideology, see (Fritzsche 1998).
- <sup>35</sup> As Trump stated in his April, 2016 speech in Rochester, cited in note 22 above.
- <sup>36</sup> (Benjamin 1968, 257).
- <sup>37</sup> For a discussion of the concept of the 'dialectic of bourgeois society,' which I have coined as a description of certain key historical and theoretical assumptions that guide Horkheimer's early work, see (Abromeit 2011, 4, 394–95, 425–32).
- <sup>38</sup> Already in the Institute's first major empirical study – its study of the attitudes of blue and white collar workers in Weimar Germany – Horkheimer and Fromm included questions about child rearing as indirect indicators of manifest or latent authoritarianism. In their major empirical project, the *Studies on Authority and Family*, attitudes toward child rearing once again were central, as the title suggests. In later studies it played a role as well, but the Critical Theorists were far too sophisticated to believe that attitudes towards child rearing alone sufficed to provide reliable indications of authoritarian predispositions.
- <sup>39</sup> For a discussion of these techniques, see (Abromeit 2013b).
- <sup>40</sup> For a more detailed elaboration of this critique of normative approaches, to Critical Theory in the face of right-wing populism see (Abromeit 2017).

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