

# Is America in the Grip of Social Madness?

August 11, 2022



“This is madness,” said Utah Senator Mitt Romney as President Donald Trump began denying the 2020 election result and claiming that he actually won a second term. A patrician’s judgement, Romney’s use of “madness” was also an assertion of incredulity that many of us have repeated a number of times over the last few years. Endless lies with no repercussions, calling for a 2,000-mile wall at our southern border to be paid for by Mexico, the mania about foreign Muslims, approaching the pandemic magically including rejecting public health mandates about vaccines and wearing masks, the Big Lie about the stolen election followed by the craze about “election security,” the storming of the Capitol to stop the ritual of confirming the election of Biden as President—and then the panic about “Critical Race Theory,” the virtually overnight diffusion of QAnon’s daffy theories, and the spread of The Great Replacement Theory. These recent assaults on reason and reality took root in soil well prepared by other uniquely American insanities, including the widespread rejection of evolution, the denial of climate change, and the dissociation from reality built into the gun culture. Many of these started well before Donald Trump, and all go well beyond simple irrationality.

They demand that we look beneath the media and political world’s obsession with a “Trumpism” focused on the man himself—his lies, his extravagances, his madness, his brilliance, his domination of his “base.” The fixation on Trump reached its peak as the January 6 hearings unrolled to their climax, focusing on what the man himself was doing during the 187 minutes of the Insurrection. We ended up with a story of a madman in charge, his rational and well-meaning staff opposed but paralyzed, a handful of enablers cheering him on, and the mob, Trump’s “base,” doing his bidding. This picture continues to evade the most important question of all: are millions of Americans in the grip of madness?

Even when we use it casually, the term “madness” turns on a basic grasp of reality: mad actions go *against* reality. They are based on systematically distorted perception, or worse, stem from being enclosed in subjectivity to the point of denying decisive aspects of the world. This entails substituting a made-up or fundamentally distorted fantasy-world, and then acting upon that. More than making mistakes about what is “out there,” this is about systematically rejecting facts, evidence, and rational argument and replacing them with an alternate reality. Insofar as people become heavily invested in an alternate reality and belong to a culture where this is widespread, returning to the real world becomes virtually impossible for them.

Of course, judgements about madness are always historically and socially grounded. And the insanity we are witnessing today takes place within an already irrational society, where almost all human needs have long been given over to the tender mercies of private profit, whose direction and coordination has increasingly relied on the quasi-religious magic of Adam Smith's "invisible hand," a "consumer society" where production is tailored to the needs of capital rather than people—in short where the profit system has swallowed up the rest of social functioning. As Michael Lerner argued well before Trump came on the scene, our society's soulless materialism increasingly creates a spiritual desert where vital needs for deep connection and meaning are starved.<sup>1</sup> Also before 2017 it was clear that our society's unmoored individualism—reflected in boundless consumerism, increasing cynicism, and privatization of hope—were attacking our very (and deeply social) being itself.<sup>2</sup> These irrationalities have become part and parcel of American capitalism, built into the system's very logic. Keyed to the profit system, they are what we might call system-rational. But recently we have been experiencing and undergoing kinds of madness, even more distinctly American, that serve no one's long-term interest, are fundamentally disruptive, and threaten our society with disaster.

The best term I have been able to come up with to describe today's Trump-encouraged processes—not wholly dissimilar from those that unfolded in Nazi Germany—is "social madness."<sup>3</sup> Although it runs the constant risk of being confused with our understanding of individual psychology, this term describes a *historical* and *social* process that:

- goes well beyond being simply nostalgic or even irrational,
- is marked by decisively rupturing with reality,
- radically rejects hard-won societal norms and understandings,
- acts on delusions,
- has violent or potentially catastrophic consequences, and
- leaves no space for arguing rationally with those who are participating in it.

### *Social not Clinical*

When applied to individuals, "madness" or "insanity" are the old-fashioned terms for what we're seeing. There is a current clinical term for what I'm talking about: "psychosis." As the National Institutes of Mental Health describe psychosis, the key is "loss of contact with reality." "Symptoms of psychosis include delusions (false beliefs) and hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that others do not see or hear)." My concern is not to diagnose individuals medically, and certainly not Donald Trump, but rather to describe our current societal disorder—by focusing on its quality of delusion and denial, the inability or unwillingness of large masses of people to distinguish between reality and fantasy, and their willingness to act politically according to this derangement. This is what has been happening more and more among tens of millions of Americans recently described as Trump's "base," and they have reshaped American politics. The Republican party has remade itself to be at their head, just as Trump became their leader by shaping himself in relation to them: their anger, their hatred of the "politically correct" elite, their passion to end abortion, their gun culture, their denial of global warming. And underlying this, on the part of many of them, has been their racism and their embrace of Evangelical Christianity. All of this came together in the cult of Trump and continues to roil our politics.

A supreme leader, surrounded by those eager to find their way to power by "breaking" the system as historian Timothy Snyder describes it, assisted by others seeking to "game" the system, and cheered on by delusional followers unwilling to listen to reason and eager to resort to violence: this is a recipe for disaster. It was foreshadowed on January 6, and it is being further advanced today.

Historian Eli Zaretsky treats it as mass psychological phenomenon, using Freud's theory of the demagogue to apply to Trump's supporters, stressing that they have replaced reason with loyalty. In other words, embracing Trump as their leader entailed raising his words, thoughts, and fantasies over the normal perceptions and reasoning process of tens of millions of Americans.

In contrast with Zaretsky, however, I am not, to repeat, talking about a psychological phenomenon that refers us back to questions of individual mental health. I am making a non-psychological yet social statement about the derangement in our midst. Taking place within societies, such processes are inevitably historical: what is mad at one time may not be seen as such at another time, as Foucault argued in *Madness and Civilization*, stressing that behaviors may indeed be judged as such by the powers that be for their own purposes. The same is true of shifting historical and social definitions of reality. Thus any statement about a "rupture with reality" is inherently subject to contestation. At the moment I am less concerned to create any kind of general theory of social madness than to understand what is happening today among a huge number of Americans and threatening to upend our central practices and institutions: today's social madness.

### *The Cultural Cognition Project*

Understanding this entails at least some reference to an important new project called Cultural Cognition: people get their cues about what to consider true or false from the communities in which they're imbedded. For example, if a person "forms the wrong position on climate change relative to the one that people with whom she has a close affinity—and on whose high regard and support she depends on in myriad ways in her daily life—she could suffer extremely unpleasant consequences, from shunning to the loss of employment." So her individual acceptance of irrationality is in itself rational. In other words because "the cost of being out of synch with her peers [is] potentially catastrophic," an individual is likely to intellectually conform "to that of others in her cultural group."

The Cultural Cognition Project wants to acknowledge that there is much intelligence behind opposing positions in today's "culture wars," and to use research rather than informed guessing to understand where opposing positions might meet. It has produced dozens of analyses and papers following this approach.

But what if a subculture has gone off the rails in a decisive respect, for example denying the pandemic, or ignoring time-tested public health conclusions, or embracing the Big Lie about the 2020 election? Yes, their subculture might be demanding that its members accept these lies, and doing so might be seen as rational in their world, but they are still wholesale distortions, fundamental and dangerous acts of denial. The premises of that particular form of rationality might indeed be becoming so deranged as to cause a danger to the society, or to the planet itself. Moreover, deploying enormous resources to defend it further strengthens people's commitment to it, its point of view seemingly moving on its own, reshaping reality with potentially disastrous consequences. As the American gun culture, for example, denies the clear link between the easy availability of assault weapons and the proliferation of mass killings, recasting the original rationale behind the Second Amendment along the way, it ever-more-madly explains away the epidemic of slaughter.

### *Manipulation or Belief?*

On the other hand, perhaps it can be argued that much of what moves people today is no more than lies and cynical manipulation. According to Snyder, many of these are wielded by those seeking to maintain power by gaming the system through “constitutional obscurities, gerrymandering, and dark money” as well as by patently false claims, aiming to win elections through mobilizing a minority of voters. Just how much of what seems to be outright craziness is really a matter of lies and manipulation—in other words deployed cynically—to stoke specific feelings in order to generate a desired response? The “Critical Race Theory” panic focuses on one or two outlandish examples and mobilizes whites to support repressive legislation limiting what teachers can teach about America’s racial history and present. Its practitioners, such as the Battlefront project at Hillsdale College, have clearly thought out their goals and are highly skilled at whipping up hysteria on behalf of supporting such laws. It is after all a time-honored American political practice.

Granted, many—Most? All?—Republican operatives today have deliberately bought into the Big Lie for specific reasons, including to continue the age-old practice of anti-Black voter suppression. Their evidence-free complaints about “election integrity” are merely the latest ploy on behalf of minority rule. But seeing this solely as a matter of manipulation ignores asking why the terrain is ripe for such a project today. Why do millions sincerely and sometimes passionately believe its lies? Are they simply manipulated? Falsely informed? Stupid? Where does their belief rank on any scale of derangement? The point, as we see from post-election Trump rallies and repeated polling, is that the delusion contained in Big Lie has become a governing idea: some promote it, many believe in it, and many are willing to act on it. Although false, it has created its own climate of belief, and now moves on its own, beyond control, spawning other delusions such as hysteria over Critical Race Theory and the spread of QAnon and the Great Replacement Theory. Along the way, as psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton points out, the liars come to believe their lies.<sup>4</sup> For all of them, reality becomes lost, remade by fantasy. This is what I mean by social madness.

### *Us vs. Them*

There is evidence of belief, and not just manipulation and cynicism, in Trump’s relation to his supporters. Many of them have been following him from rally to rally, and certainly found a meaningful cause in Trumpism’s movement-style energy. Beyond its entertainment and excitement, they have been sharing at least two features that explain why Trumpism is not going away soon. One, the obvious negative one, is often noticed by outside observers: the sense of grievance, resentment, and anger at *them*. The *them* starts with terrorists and would-be terrorists. It continues towards America’s Others—Blacks, Muslims, Spanish-speaking immigrants—who are seen as enjoying attention and benefits that *they* don’t get. And those in the educational, entertainment, political, and media establishment appear to advocate for the Others and arrogantly set the “politically correct” norms for everyone else. These “elites,” along with other activists and advocates for Black Lives Matter, say, or against climate change, casually bandy about the infuriating labels “racist” or “stupid” for those they disagree with, only deepening their opponents’ resentment.

Less noticed is the positive bond between Trump and his followers. Besieged by and hostile to the same establishment, Trump “gets” them and they “get” him. He defies political correctness and voices what they feel towards women, the elites, Blacks, immigrants, and Others, although within the prevailing dog-whistle conventions against being too explicit. When he comes on the stage at a rally, a superstar yet ordinary like them, Trump and his people greet each other lovingly. They are there for him, and he is there for them, in a way that has simply no parallel in recent American politics.<sup>5</sup>

So Trump rallies are group hate rituals aimed at political opponents (“Lock her up!”), the media

("enemies of the people"), and all those in the "elite" who criticize or make fun of Trump and his people. And the rallies are also warnings against Others who are threatening Americans: drug-runners, rapists, killers, and thieves among the would-be Mexican immigrants ("Build the wall!") and terrorists among Muslim and Central American asylum-seekers. These rallies stoke and direct anger and fear as they develop the "us versus them" that is the driving theme of Trumpism. Trump uses the term "movement" to describe what he has created and what his supporters *belong* to—not only the t-shirts and caps, the sense of belonging to a common cause, the fellowship the members of his "base" feel for each other as they wait for the rallies to begin, the radio and television personalities they enjoy, sharing hatred of the media at the rallies, the fact that they often drive hundreds of miles to get to the rallies.<sup>6</sup> Whatever its lies and manipulations, Trumpism is about community gatherings, entertainment events, and above all love-fests between the man and his followers—a fellowship missing elsewhere in American politics, as Lerner points out, even on the left<sup>7</sup>: their being together for their shared cause of listening to Trump, loving him, and sharing their common grievances. Crazy? All this is real.

### *Becoming Crazy on Purpose*

Even if celebrating *his* power, then, it is important to stress that the members of this movement are participating actively. If they are delusional, it is not because they somehow "lose" contact with reality, but because *they break it off*, intentionally. They have become incapable of recognizing reality because for some reason they have made themselves unwilling or unable to do so—by organizing themselves around something else, loyalty to the leader. Factual information doesn't matter, evidence doesn't matter. Truth stems from loyalty to Trump.

I say "for some reason," but what is the reason? Stressing human self-determination even in the most difficult situations, Jean-Paul Sartre can guide us here. His basic philosophical point from the beginning to the end of his career was that people choose their course no matter what. But as Sartre also said, some situations are impossible. In other words, it may be that no course of action can possibly solve the problems they confront, or that as individuals they lack the wherewithal to deal effectively with the situation, or that the paths to doing so might be blocked. When effective action is difficult or impossible, individuals nevertheless remain self-determining. They might respond by changing their perception of the situation, or by changing themselves. Sartre gives us a sense of this kind of dynamic by noting that, in the case of an individual, a neurosis may be invented by the organism "in order to be able to live an unlivable situation."<sup>8</sup> Indeed, in conditions of severe stress and with few other available options, an individual may well choose a deranged and self-diminishing stance toward reality.

### *Unlivable Situations*

Today, in the United States, what have been the "unlivable situations" in which millions of people find themselves? What collective stresses are they experiencing, what dead-end situations, what absence of alternatives, that have led them to surrender their reason to Donald Trump, to believe his lies, and become a negative social force moved by resentment and hostility?

There are various useful and ultimately connected explanations of what is motivating the people who have become part of Trump's "base," beginning with the *New York Times* discussions in November 2016 of working-class Trump voters,<sup>9</sup> and much further discussion everywhere of the Trump supporters in declining areas and industries, especially those hardest hit by neoliberal

globalization.<sup>10</sup> An unnoticed key to this is the decline of the labor movement, as described by Steve Fraser in *The Age of Acquiescence*,<sup>11</sup> which turns out to be essential background to understanding the “Tyranny of Merit” discussed by Michael Sandel.<sup>12</sup> As traditional collective sources of dignity and collective power such as labor unions have faded, college and university degrees have become the society’s highest value and measuring rod. As Sandel asks, what becomes of their sense of dignity among the two-thirds of the population without degrees? Fraser might add, what happens to their sense of power, of belonging and contributing, without unions?

Trump famously said: “I love the poorly educated.” And what did Democrats say? Obama and Hillary Clinton famously spoke about people clinging to “religion and guns” and being a “basket of deplorables.” These comments fit a political party that had largely left behind its onetime commitment to the dignity and worth of every American and the goal of guaranteeing them decent housing, food, income, and health care. Long after the New Deal and even Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society, by the time Trump came on the scene the Democrats’ major remaining “progressive” goal had become a mirage for most Americans: equal opportunity.

No wonder Trump’s great strength has been among those who felt most neglected, those living in declining rural areas and deindustrializing towns and cities. *The Left Behind*, the title of the book by sociologist Robert Wuthnow about rural America, is a common descriptor of the over 2,500 declining counties that have become “Trump Country.”<sup>13</sup>

These realities provide much of the socioeconomic, political, and even social-psychological basis for Trumpism. But these are often experienced by people through the lenses of a specific cultural orientation, who see the world and themselves in specific ways. A few commentators noticed Trump’s rock-solid popularity among white Evangelical Christians who provided nearly half of his votes in both elections.<sup>14</sup> What is it about their common racial-religious outlook that predisposes them to become, first, Republicans and then Trump’s “base”? As Robert P. Jones explains in “The End of White Christian America” and “White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity”<sup>15</sup> those who have embraced Trump are the people most liable to be negatively affected by seeing Blacks in high office, especially the presidency. Remember that the Tea Party exploded on the scene in 2009 with the watchwords: “Take our country back.”

This of course ties in directly with the looming minority-hood of whites in America, whose children are already a minority in the public schools. And indeed, since the 1960s many white Americans have been undergoing the slowly accumulating experience of living in an extreme situation. To those for whom white identity is especially important—keenest in the American South and in churches with the most stubborn history of white supremacy—a Black man in the White House a dozen years ago could not but be seen as troubling, a Black woman vice-president a year ago as threatening. And it goes without saying that those who are hardest hit have the fewest tools for dealing with these changes, especially Evangelical Christians. Since 2020 that fear can only have been sharpened by being defeated in the election by a broad coalition of whites and nonwhites, including countless non-Christians. Those for whom this election produced an unlivable situation might understandably seek escape in the Big Lie about it being stolen.

### *Unable to Cope?*

After what is now a lifetime of listening to frightening sermons about America going to hell, many of Trump’s supporters are deeply conditioned to thinking fearfully and angrily about the changing world.<sup>16</sup> But religious dogmatism, for example Biblical literalism, and rejection of evolution and climate science, makes them ill-equipped to deal with the present on its terms. Looking out into the

wider world and its emphasis on science, technology, and secular education constantly reminds them of their distance from the mainstream, and constantly stokes resentment about being “disrespected”—whether or not this is coming from any individual or group, it is certainly being given off by *the very terms of* the prevailing culture. Totally disrespectful in an impersonal way is the default emphasis on secular knowledge, expertise, gender equality, rationality and the authority of science.

Bernie Sanders created an oppositional movement by using the tools of that culture—critical, analytical systemic thinking—to highlight some of its problems. Listening to him means *thinking* about what was wrong. Those who followed Trump came to his rallies for a very different experience. From the beginning, Trump expertly manipulated the free-floating resentment about being disrespected as a source of grievance and turned it against not only those prizing critical rationality but also the Others—Muslims, immigrants and, implicitly, Blacks.

### *The Future of White Christian America*

In an interview on Pat Robertson’s Christian Broadcasting Network shortly before the 2016 election, Trump explained: “If we don’t win this election, you’ll never see another Republican....” He elaborated: “I think this will be the last election that the Republicans have a chance of winning because you’re going to have people flowing across the border, you’re going to have illegal immigrants coming in and they’re going to be legalized and they’re going to be able to vote, and once that all happens you can forget it.” Translated from the dog-whistle language, “you” means white Christian patriarchal America as understood by Evangelical Christians. “Decline” means that their racial, gender, and religious preeminence is being ended as they become a minority. “You can forget it” means that Trump is the white patriarchal Republican party’s last chance to remain dominant, and that something essential to its people will be lost if they lose power to nonwhites and non-Christians.

Trump’s dark warning points to the decline of white Evangelical hopes after their spectacular rise in the 1970s and 1980s. As the “Moral Majority” a generation ago, their numbers increased enormously and relatively suddenly, in part a cultural and political response to the uprisings of the 1960s. They entered politics, becoming the largest single bloc in the Republican party. Yet the trends they sought to arrest—at first racial integration and sexualization of the culture, and then the widespread acceptance of abortion, women’s equality, and homosexuality—have only accelerated. Their worst moment came in 2015 when gay marriage became the law of the land. Their joy at the minority-based reversal of *Roe v. Wade* cannot stop these deep cultural trends.

White Evangelical Christians are now clearly in relative numerical decline due to immigration trends and because “nones” (those belonging to no religion) have increased significantly, including among their own children. “Evangelical” is now generally seen as a political as much as a religious identity, one that is narrow-minded and dogmatic, and its power to reproduce itself among the young has accordingly diminished. As a result, in strictly religious terms according to the latest surveys Evangelicals are once again outnumbered by mainstream Christians, although paradoxically as a voting block Trump gained many new adherents who for political reasons chose to use that self-description since 2016.<sup>17</sup>

Already by the 2016 election, a large majority of them voiced the impression that “things” had changed for the worse since the 1950s, a sizeable majority even claiming to perceive *as much* discrimination being directed at whites as at Blacks and other minorities.<sup>18</sup> In *Strangers in Their Own Land*, sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild tellingly presents white southerners’ feelings of

being overlooked and neglected after playing by the rules but being passed over by the government's sympathy and attention shown to Blacks, women, refugees, and other immigrants.<sup>19</sup>

So by 2015 the wealthy, flashy star of "The Apprentice," who had earlier found his racial-political niche by calling for the death penalty for the Central Park Five and then stoking the Birther hoax, became a champion of male sexual prowess and militant whiteness, and the racial and cultural fear of "his" people essential components of Trumpism. White Evangelical church leaders embraced him, and 81% of those so identifying voted for him in 2016 and a nearly equal number in 2020.

We have lived through the drama of denial on the part of Trump and his acolytes playing out during the pandemic, making his "base" a powerful negative constituency, sometimes taking its cues from him, sometimes moving on its own, crippling their ability to cope effectively with public health issues, the mask drama further fueling their alienation from the mainstream. And although enormous numbers of other whites, and for a moment it seemed America as a whole, were coming to a new reckoning with our racist past and present during the George Floyd uprising, this widespread shift has been met with incomprehension by a majority of white America.<sup>20</sup>

Denial on top of denial: Against "Black lives matter," "All lives matter" shouted from cars at those holding those signs at street corners. Racism against themselves more significant than anti-Black racism. Egged on by Trump before the election, by 2022 nearly ninety percent of Republicans—and a clear majority of nearly every red state—oppose "Black Lives Matter."

### *An American Heritage*

To return to the question, why then are millions of Americans ill-equipped to face the present? Why the turn toward social madness, characterized by collective denial, delusion, and derangement, and perhaps, as some fear, civil war? Journalists and many among the highly educated public seem fixated on the misleading and patronizing question of who has or doesn't have a four-year degree. In the meritocracy of *New York Times* readers, it seems that this is their default explanation for everything bad: *they* are uneducated, indeed, stupid.

Instead, we see that this increasingly emboldened crowd, belonging to no single social or economic class, had a number of reasons behind the alienation and anger that motivated them to follow Trump. According to recent studies these reasons are more social and cultural than economic.<sup>21</sup> Unless those of us who would oppose them face up to these, new waves of furious delusion are inevitable.

But as we try to understand their motivations, we also must realize that they are often descendants of an earlier history, belonging to an ugly American story going all the way back to slavery and opposing progressive movements ever since. It is a history already filled with waves of resistance, defeat, resentment, and defiance, accumulated over generations. More recently, they are descendants of fifty years of embattled struggle—of those who defended racial segregation, supported the campaigns of Barry Goldwater and George Wallace, belonged to or cheered the anti-busing movement, were for the Vietnam war and against the peace movement of the 1960s, defended school prayer in the 1970s, opposed the Equal Rights Amendment, embraced the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition. Today they oppose gay marriage, oppose abortion, give endless support for the gun culture, believe in "religious freedom" to discriminate—and many of them still justify police killings of unarmed Black men.

When a Black president was elected, their representatives in Washington vowed to block him at



every turn and make him a one-term president. They joined the Tea Party under the dog-whistle slogan of taking “our country back” and claiming—other dog whistles—to be against “big government” and for the “original” meaning of the Constitution. Encouraged by none other than Donald Trump, the “Birthers” doubted that Obama was born in this country, and “accused” him of being a Muslim. Trump’s presidency absorbed this bitter edge of our racial history and gave it focus in the present: against Muslims, against women, against Mexican and Central American immigrants, against Black foreign countries, and Black-majority American cities.

This deep story of the people who became Trump’s “base” is also about the sources of today’s Evangelical Christianity in the slaveholding South; how after the Civil War the defeated South restored white rule and overthrew Reconstruction; how its “Redeemers” kept the freed slaves at bay through Jim Crow and terror, including lynching, keeping them as near as possible to their former condition; how achieving this entailed systematic retardation of the South, keeping it as an isolated, impoverished backwater lacking industrialization, cities, education, and immigrants; how the white South felt at home with the kinds of anti-modernist religion that fit its self-chosen backwardness; how its decentralized, Evangelical Christianity spread north and west with millions of white migrants seeking jobs; how as Operation Dixie’s union drive was being defeated in their home states, these migrants and their churches “Southernized” much of American society between the end of World War II and the 1970s; how their religions embraced anti-Communism and foolishly sold themselves to unregulated capitalism during this time; and how new millions joined the faithful of this religious tradition in the process of coming to oppose the transformations being brought about by the Civil Rights movement, the women’s movement, the anti-war and youth rebellions of the 1960s and, soon after, the gay and lesbian struggle for equality.

As most of them embrace the Big Lie, refuse to wear masks, and rage against “Critical Race Theory” without knowing exactly what it is, as some of them even embrace the weirdnesses of QAnon and the Great Replacement Theory, they reflect back to us how the bitter resistance to modernity, equality, and democracy has spilled over from its starting point, slavery, to poison the rest of American life.

## Notes

Parts of this essay are adapted from the author’s earlier essay, “Solid Trumpism,” *Boston Review*, July 25, 2019

1. Michael Lerner, *The Left Hand of God* (San Francisco, 2006).
2. Ronald Aronson, *We: Reviving Social Hope* (Chicago, 2107).
3. Aronson, *The Dialectics of Disaster* (London, 1983); “Social Madness,” *Radical Philosophy* 040, Summer 1985.
4. Robert Jay Lifton, *Losing Reality: On Cults, Cultism, and the Mindset of Political and Religious Zealotry* (New York, 2019), 159-60.
5. Ronald Aronson, “Revolt Against Democratic Modernity: The Unholy Marriage of Trump and his Base,” *Focus: the journal of the Helen Suzman Foundation*, 84, June 4, 2019.
6. Alexander Zaithchik, *The Gilded Rage: A Wild Ride Through Donald Trump’s America* (New York, 2016).
7. Michael Lerner, *Revolutionary Love: A Political Manifesto to Heal and Transform the World* (Univ. of California Press, 2019), 234-5.
8. Jean-Paul Sartre, foreword to R. D. Laing and D.G. Cooper, *Reason and Violence: A Decade of Sartre’s Philosophy 1950-1960* (London, 1964), 7.
9. Nate Cohn, “Why Trump Won: Working-Class Whites,” *New York Times*, Nov. 9, 2016.
10. On the left it has become almost an item of faith needing no explanation that the primary

needs are economic and are essential to Trump's support. For more thoughtful post-election discussions of working-class support for Trump in 2016, see: Mike Davis, "The Great God Trump and the White Working Class," *Jacobin*, July 2, 2017, and Kim Moody, "Who Put Trump in the White House," *Jacobin*, January 11, 2017. More recently, Monica Potts points to research showing the centrality of non-economic appeals over economic ones at FiveThirtyEight.

11. Steve Fraser, *The Age of Acquiescence: The Life and Death of American Resistance to Organized Wealth and Power* (New York, 2015).
12. Michael Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?* (New York, 2020).
13. Robert Wuthnow, *The Left Behind: Decline and Rage in Small-Town America* (Princeton, 2018).
14. Ronald Aronson, "Solid Trumpism," *Boston Review*, July 25, 2019.
15. Robert P. Jones, *The End of White Christian America* (New York, 2017); *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity* (New York, 2020).
16. Frances Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* (New York, 2017).
17. Ryan Burge, "Why 'Evangelical' is Becoming Another Word for 'Republican,'" *New York Times*, Oct. 26, 2021.
18. Don Gonyea, "Majority of Whites Say They Believe Whites Face Discrimination," <https://www.npr.org/2017/10/24/559604836/majority-of-white-americans-think-theyre-discriminated-against>
19. Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* (New York, 2016).
20. By July 2022, the Civiqs poll on attitudes towards "Black Lives Matter" reveals 52% of white Americans opposed to the movement, 35% supporting it.
21. See the Monica Potts article mentioned above.