

**Laboring for Whiteness: The Rise of Trumpism and What that Tells us about Racial and
Gendered Capitalism in the United States**

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On December 14, 2015, the far-right news, opinion and commentary website, Breitbart News Network, published the article, “America’s Middle Class is Now a Minority,” on income inequality in the United States (Street 2015). In many respects, the article’s content was no different than that reported by more mainstream news outlets at the time: it described new data showing that the number of middle-income households shrank in the decade between 2005 and 2015, exacerbating a trend that was decades in the making (cf. Parlapiano, Gebeloff and Carter 2015). Yet the substance of the article diverged from mainstream coverage on several points. First, in its account of the postwar expansion of the middle class, the article contradicted the conventional narrative by emphasizing that it was the GI Bill benefit of “sub-college training,” not university education, that boosted wages and incomes for middle-class households. Second, the article used deceptive statistics in support of the assertion that Blacks have been less affected by the squeeze on the middle classes than have all other groups (this assertion is statistically true, but only because Black access to the middle class was so heavily restricted prior to 1965). “All of this does not bode well for the recovery of the middle class anytime soon,” the article ended (Street 2015), reinforcing a far-right criticism of President Barack Obama, who, Breitbart New Network was fond of repeating, was the “worst president for the middle class in ‘modern times’” (Pollak 2013). Breitbart readers posted dozens of comments below the article expressing outrage at what they saw as the liberal establishment’s betrayal of the middle class. A post by *ken* is suggestive of far-right rank-and-file sentiments and of its budding enthusiasm for the presidential candidacy of Donald Trump, which was beginning to coalesce in late 2015:

7 years of democratic policies have not helped and you want 4 maybe 8 more to all my liberal friends go f-ck your selves, Trump 2016 or the republic could end.

We use these examples from Breitbart to open up a discussion about the rise of Trumpism and what it tells us about racial and gendered capitalism in the United States. What we see on display on this website is the end-of-civilization-as-we-know-it disdain for liberalism and fury over the perceived decline of the “middle-class” that are commonplace among white nationalist digital posters. Many posters exclaimed the perils of big government. Others expressed outrage at immigration, the “importing” of the “Third World” into the United States, the offshoring of industry and jobs, the “brainwashing” of voters with government handouts, and the imminent collapse of US society where once “men were free.” Some posted expressions of outrage at a vast Democratic Party-led conspiracy, aided and abetted by centrist Republicans, to usher in a Marxist revolution by eliminating the middle classes and making everyone poor.

Our goal in this chapter is to use examples such as these to shed some light on the race, gender and class politics of Trumpism, with a particular focus on the interpretive processes that its proponents use as they confront political challenges, work to consolidate and expand their movement, and elaborate an economic vision for the United States. In particular, we are interested in how whiteness works to categorize labor in the 21st century United States. In our main argument, we suggest that the gradual fraying of longstanding political arrangements that freighted rights and recognition with access to public resources has been accompanied by a mad-dash scramble to formulate workable political programs in defense of an ever-ambiguous category of “the middle class” in the United States. These efforts were strained to the breaking

point by the early 2010s. Trump's signature move was to innovate a revanchist middle-class politics framed in largely racial—and racist—terms. This entailed distrusting the dominant liberal centrist race projects of multiculturalism and colorblindness and explicitly asserting whiteness as the basis for national belonging for the first time since the 1960s (Maskovsky 2020). This is not inconsequential or epiphenomenal. On the contrary, it is a project that seeks to articulate how race, gender, and class relate to each other in a very specific way. We reject the view that white nationalism and nativism are a form of confused working-class politics in which closing borders, punishing immigrants and vilifying Black people distracts white working-class people from their shared economic interests with other working-class fractions. Rather, Trump's project, in the first instance, prioritizes putting people in their proper racialized place in an economically diverse society. Stuart Hall said famously that “race is the modality through which class is lived” (Hall 1980: 341). In the United States, for white nationalist followers of Trump, class — the middle class in this case — is the modality through which race is lived, and by this logic a significant fraction of white America is committed to the racial project of reproducing a white social order through which their economic lives are mediated.

This argument contributes to two important strains of anthropological scholarship on labor. The first directs attention to the ways that racialism and paternalism permeate the key dynamics of capitalism such as accumulation, dispossession, class formation, financialization, underdevelopment, labor market formation, and so forth (Day 2020; Gilmore and Lambert 2019; Robinson et al. 2021; Robinson and Kelley 2000; Federici 2004). The second places “the differently valued and spatially distinct laborers of global capitalism within a web of connection” (Kasimir and Carbonella 2008: 7) and recognizes the divided, struggled-over nature

of labor, treating it, as Sharyn Kasmir insists, “as a political formation” (Kasmir 2020: 3; see also Carbonella and Kasmir 2008, 2014, 2015; Kasmir and Carbonella 2008, 2014; Mitchell 2005). Taken together, these approaches encourage us to take a more expansive view of labor relations than is typical in anthropological literature. Accordingly, we treat Trumpism as a complex political culture that is oriented around the advancement of a new racialized and gendered labor regime.

We are also interested in locating this labor regime beyond the regime of neoliberalism and in connection with the rise of an emergent global regime that we are calling corporate authoritarianism. Whereas the US middle classes were fragmented under neoliberalism with fractions faring differently depending on their forms of labor (Kasmir 2020), we see Trumpism as a political formation that coalesced to shore up the position of petit bourgeois fractions of the white middle classes -- and of white men in particular as leading figures in those classes -- in an emerging global labor regime that is increasingly defined by the actions of large technology and financial firms and their coordinated efforts to corporatize (not just economize) the social realm (cf Kapferer and Kapferer 2021; Clarke 2003). Importantly, we argue that the Trumpian economic project is connected to, and co-constitutive of, the far-right effort to establish a new, expansive form of global white supremacy via white nationalism (Beliso-De Jesús and Pierre 2020). In the anthropological work on labor, far more attention has been paid to movements involving precarious workers, proletariat struggles, and social democratic and anticapitalist solidarities than have been paid to right-wing efforts to reshape processes of capital accumulation and dispossession via popular anti-democratic programs (Kasmir 2020; Kalb and Mollona 2018). Yet this latter form of struggle is gaining ground in its capacity to reshape

capitalist relationalities in the current conjuncture (Maskovsky and Bjork-James 2020; Kalb and Halmai 2011). Our contribution is to view race and gender formations of labor as co-constitutive of those of class and capital. Indeed, we call the chapter *laboring for whiteness* to insist that the labor imagined in Donald Trump's political project is directed as much towards white supremacist and paternalistic ends as it is towards capitalist ones. In short, we argue for a view of the United States as much as a capitalist racist and gendered formation as a racial and gendered capitalist one.¹

This chapter unfolds in three parts. First we describe the rise of Trump's "middle class" politics. The term "the middle class" is an almost empty signifier in US political culture and race and racism have long been central in setting the terms of political debate about what the middle class should be. We emphasize Trump's cultivation of a white, hetero-patriarchal, nationalist middle-class politics for the 21st century. We also show how the Trumpian right imagines "the middle class" as the vanguard of the insurrectionist politics that surfaced after Trump's electoral defeat in November 2020. Second, we explore far-right conspiracy theories concerning China, tracing their emergence to the increasingly acute imperialist rivalry between the US and China in the context of "capitalism alone" (Milanovic 2020). Moral panics about China, and anti-Asian racism in its newest forms, are, we argue, expressions of racialized anxiety. They are organized as expressions of white masculine superiority over those whom they see as an imperial threat to their global positioning (Robotham 2020). We end with a discussion of the present-day crisis in political authority and its connection to racial and gendered capitalist transmutations. Ultimately, we view Trump as a transitional figure in the

¹ We build on anthropological work on the inter-relations of race, class and gender in the United States (Brodin 2007; Collins 2017; Davis 2004; Di Leonardo 1998; Haley 2016; Morgen 2002; Mullings 2005, 2020)

move away from neoliberal capitalism to the new corporate authoritarianism. We tease out the implications of this shift in terms of an emerging racialized and gendered labor regime rooted in the privileged position of the petit bourgeoisie, demonstrating the importance of labor in shaping racialized and gendered capitalist relationalities and transmutations.²

Middle Class Insurrectionists

Let us start by illustrating the protean set of claims concerning the “middle class” that the Trumpian right uses to advance its political project. A core tenet of Trumpian thought and action is a visceral, affective sense of the “middle class” in crisis and in need of restoration. This is not unusual politically. The “middle class” has long been a central, fought over precept in the American political lexicon and if anxiety and uncertainty were endemic in the class formative processes through which the middle-class expanded in the immediate post-war period, they only intensified later as some middle-class fractions felt more precarious in the neoliberal era (Heiman 2015; Ehrenreich 1989). Yet, because of the frequency of its use, the boundaries of what groups “the middle class” contains and the forms of labor, lifestyles, consumption practices, affects, and compartments it reflects has been subject to near constant debate and reinvention. Our point here is less to reach an objective, materially-grounded definition of what the middle-class *is*, though this and its connection to the rise of specific global bourgeois social

²Our work on white nationalist political culture is based on a deep ethnographic plunge into the white nationalist digital world. This entailed reading all kinds of online media content including YouTube testimonials, news articles, blogs, opinion pieces, and message board postings on forum websites such as 4chan and 8chan/8kun and websites such as Fox News, Breitbart, and Stormfront.org. Our ethnographic approach is inspired by scholarship on online political cultures that looks at the proliferation of digital communities and the ways that computer-mediated communication shapes political thought and action (Coleman 2014; Juris 2008; Bjork-James 2015). The rise of new forms of US-based white supremacy online has received a great deal of scholarly attention of late (Daniels 2009; Hawley 2017; Feagan 2013; Bjork-James and Maskovsky 2017; Maskovsky in press).

formations and political cultures are issues of considerable scholarly interest (see López and Weinstein 2012 and Heiman et al 1992 for a discussion of this on a global scale).³ Rather, we are interested more narrowly in how far-right white nationalists used the term to stake out a political project that interpellates people's direct experience of labor-cum-economic prosperity or its lack *as racialized, classed and gendered*.⁴

As is well known, the definitive middle-class political project in the United States in its broadest sense was constructed in the crucible of the New Deal and Great Society eras when economic prosperity and the politics of redistribution were set politically in relation to the Fordist wage bargain and union protections that were unevenly distributed along lines of race, gender and geography (Morgen and Maskovsky 2003; Kasmir 2020). They were then transformed in the neoliberal period as elites offered the false promise of enfranchisement by “free market” participation to everyone, including those who were discriminated against by the racist and sexist welfare state of the prior era. The result was more unevenness and inequality, as fractions of the middle classes exploited entrepreneurialism, financialization, and their attendant forms of professionalized labor to achieve upward mobility while other fractions lost

³In, *We Have Never Been Middle Class*, Hadas Weiss (2019) argues that the middle class works worldwide to cultivate in those who aspire to it or who believe themselves to have achieved it a false sense of investment-driven self-determination that distracts them from their exploitation and prevents the real fulfillment of their desires. Weiss sees political potentiality in the disillusionment with the ideal of freedom as it is expressed through the middle class aspiration. Although we are sympathetic to this line of argument, our focus is on the right-wing political projects that surface in response to this disillusionment, in the race and gender politics that shape the sense of middle class belonging, and of the unpredictable political potentialities associated with such a protean concept.

⁴We draw provisionally on Ernesto Laclau's classic discussion of hegemony here (Laclau 1994). Laclau argued that an empty signifier's political potency comes from its ability to stand in for something that is experienced by its absence. Using the example of “order” as an example, Laclau explained: “‘Order’ as such has no content, because it only exists in the various forms in which it is actually realised, but in a situation of radical disorder ‘order’ is present as that which is absent; it becomes an empty signifier, as the signifier of the absence... political forces can compete in their effort to present their particular objectives as those which carry out the filling of that lack. To hegemonise something is exactly to carry out this filling function.” (1994: 72).

ground. Moreover, long-standing blame ideologies that freighted blackness, dependency, and depravity with the city on the one hand, and self-sufficiency, whiteness, and virtue with the suburbs on the other became unsettled. In this situation, anxiety, doom and an overwhelming sense of loss spread across the metropolitan landscape, affecting rural areas acutely as well (Berlant 2011; Edelman 2021; Maskovsky 2018; Mühlebach and Allison 2012). Politics in the name of the middle-class was transformed again, most recently, by the Trump era right wing, which is attempting to remake “the middle class” into a revolting, insurrectionist white nationalist political bloc.

We can begin to glean some insights into this most recent development by looking at what we know about Trump supporters. In addition to big money donors, evangelicals, and anti-big government Republicans, Trump’s base is disproportionately made up of small business owners, “white” and “pink collar” workers, and well-paid “blue collar” workers such as contractors (O’Connor 2020). Importantly, the median household income of Trump voters, in 2016, was approximately \$72,000 a year, considerably higher than the median national average household income in the United States of \$56,000 (Silver 2016). This is below the media income of Republican voters who primaried for “establishment” party candidates such as John Kasich, whose median household income was \$92,000 a year, suggesting that the Trumpian voter has more economic privileges than the average American voter but falls short of “establishment” Republican voters who are college educated and more affluent. Yet Trump supporters were well-off enough to be less worried about their economic prospects than they were about “cultural displacement,” as numerous studies have shown (Cox 2017; cf Hochschild 2016). This changed only slightly in 2020 when fear spread about the economic impact of coronavirus

lockdowns (Edison Research 2020). Despite small gains among affluent white voters, Latinx voters and Black male voters in 2020, Trump lost support from just enough low- and middle-income white voters to lose his bid for re-election in 2020 (Frey 2021; Schaffner et al. 2018; Alcantara et al. 2020). Importantly, these data contradict the simplistic—and ultimately inaccurate—story, promoted popularly and politically, that Trump was voted in and broadly supported by the disgruntled, downwardly mobile fractions of the white working classes. Instead, it was Trump’s talent for stoking fears of white cultural displacement, especially by non-college educated white men and women, that made him popular. Trump’s mobilization of these petit bourgeois fractions of the US middle classes helped to legitimate far-right extremism in US party politics and political culture.⁵

“The middle class” works in Trumpian political talk in ways that are fundamentally racist and sexist and that establishes a hierarchy of labor with white small business owners and their blue- and pink-collar allies in a privileged place below a distrusted corporate elite. This hierarchy comes into view first in the way that those on the Trumpian right tend to refer to the unmarked category of “the middle class,” not the white middle class, because the presumption is that white people are the morally and politically valued laborers who are entitled to middle class status while their racialized and gendered others categorically are not. We can see this hierarchy at play in a variety of places across the Trumpian right blogosphere. In an article from

⁵These developments are, of course, a part of a longer-term Republican project of using race-baiting to gain the support of white voters. Although we do not have time to discuss this history at length, suffice it to say that there is a throughline from the 1970s, when white ethnicity became politically legitimate and even fashionable, and the Trump era, when white community grievances became the explicit basis for the new white nationalism that became synonymous with the alt-right and then with Trumpism. More detailed accounts of white identity politics and the ways that race, class and gender politics shaped US political culture from the 1970s to the 2010s can be found in diLeonardo 1998, Steinberg 1981, 2001, 2007; Maskovsky and Goode 2001, Maskovsky 2020, and Maskovsky in press; Bjork-James and Maskovsky 2017; Hawley 2017) .

Fox News entitled, "Small Businesses Giving NYC Real-Estate Post-COVID 'Rebirth'" (2021), for example, small businesses are described as the cornerstone of post-COVID economic revitalization. Fox News reader *Albe* was inspired to post this comment under the article: "NYC is not going to get back until they stop the crime and violence. People just don't want to vacation in danger." Poster "*JeffryD*" added: "Until the fascist/communist Dem Party is gone.....it will still be a sanctuary city for the worst of humanity." Here we see how racially coded expressions against Black and Brown people are elaborated through references to urban crime and "illegal" immigration, which serve in this instance as a threat to the implicitly white middle class's post-COVID prospects. This exemplifies a pattern in Trumpian right political talk in which the complaint is not against the economization of social and political life via the imposition of neoliberal rationality, as it is on the left (cf Brown 2019). Rather, the racial other looms as a constant specter threatening middle class prosperity, and the economy's racialization is essential to securing white supremacy in an economically diverse nation. In this formulation, anxiety and uncertainty are thus less about declining economic prospects than they are about the political and cultural challenges of maintaining white supremacy with its special claims to middle class status. They are also frequently about uppity women, such as feminists, who are frequently chastised for violating the purportedly natural sex and gender order (Maskovsky in press). Furthermore, it is precisely in the exercise of control over the empty signifier of the middle class – in the capacity of Trump and his supporters to saturate the field of political deliberation, to define for themselves and others what the middle class is and who is entitled to belong to it, and further to do so through a politics of white identitarianism –

that white supremacy *trumps* class in the making of labor and capital in the Trumpian right's political imagination.

Trump's notion of the middle class further offers an opportunity to those who are on the margins of whiteness to launch themselves into the center of US political culture. Take, for example, the case of Cuban Americans in Miami, Florida. Hernandez-Reguant (in press) explains Cuban exile community support of Trump in connection with the anxiety that exiles and their descendants experience. For them, Trumpism offers a political path to free themselves from the weight of the Cuban expatriate experience and of the burdens of multicultural belonging offered by the liberal establishment. As for other immigrants to the United States, Trumpism is a compelling political project that advances the transcendence of Cuban expatriates' off-white, in-between immigrant racial status via access to whiteness, which is achieved, so it is thought, by embracing the phantasmagoria of the good life associated with the American dream (cf Berlant 2011). The expanded realm of whiteness that is created by political belonging in this way threatens democratic politics rooted in multicultural difference and calls into question the inevitability of progressive politics ushered in by demographic shifts that bring about the purported end of the "white majority." That Trump gained popularity among Latinx, Asian and Black voters between 2016 and 2020 suggest that similar processes of racialization are happening among other groups who see access to whiteness as preferable to multicultural belonging and the burdens of living on the wrong side of the US color line (cf Steinberg 2007).

Ultimately, anxieties about the declining middle class intensified during the Trump presidency, in large measure because Trump himself stoked the flames of white community

resentment to maximize voter turnout by his base in the 1996 and 2020 elections. And they intensified even more after Trump's 2020 electoral loss, as insurrectionist plans and sensibilities traveled from the far-right fringe into the center of the post-election "Stop the Steal" political showdown. What kind of class politics are insurrectionists trying to advance? Pro-insurrectionist posters on Trump-friendly online fora wax histrionically about the plight of the middle class, which they see as being on the verge of annihilation by policies dictated by the "radical left," which, it is widely believed, took over the White House in January 2021. This "radical left" is trying to sacrifice "the middle class" in pursuit of its anti-American racial justice agenda. And the middle class must revolt now to save itself from "the excesses of the left," as Breitbart News Network reporter Neil Munro put it (Munro 2021). Breitbart poster *Basicman* gives us a good sense of what this revolt ought to look like, from the Trumpian right's point of view. He posted, "The middle class already revolted against progressives in 2016, and progressives responded by rigging the 2020 elections in key swing state counties. As long as they can cheat with impunity, our votes mean nothing, sorry to say." Breitbart poster *deplorableinsurrectionist* concurs: "President Trump's election was the revolution. The left doesn't even know they are the establishment." Another poster, *Michael Thomas* wrote: "The revolt is happening right now-----in of all places---School Board meetings nationwide! Turns out parents are rejecting Critical Race Theory and sex education for 2nd and 3rd graders!" Many posters hope the insurrection can happen swiftly enough to preserve the middle class "while it still exists."

Conspiracies of Whiteness

On a parallel track, Trump supporters' perspectives on labor shape their sense of middle-class grievance, though the way that they envision its relationship to capital puts them at odds with Marxist academics and economic populists on the left whose perspectives are informed by the idea of class as a struggle between workers and capital. In contrast, Trump voters tend to view class and capital through a nationalist lens; they tend not to see class politics but to focus instead on the intra-capital struggle between the bourgeois owners of international capital, whom they refer to as the globalists, and the petit-bourgeois owners of small, geographically localized capital. This is not an unusual perspective for the American polity. What distinguishes the Trumpian right is the degree of hatred for liberal elites who they see as representing the political arm of the globalist bourgeoisie and the extent as well of hatred and distrust towards China, which combine, from Trump supporters' point of view, to decrease the value of white people in globalist labor regimes.

The key figures who want to hurt imperiled white communities to enrich themselves are global technology companies such as Facebook, Democratic politicians such as Joe Biden and Hillary Clinton, liberal philanthropists such as George Soros and Bill Gates, the Ford Foundation, and international agencies such as the United Nations. Together, these individuals and organizations are part of a globalist cabal that champions offshoring, factory flights, and free trade agreements, the argument goes. In some respects, this view resonates with left-wing criticisms of neoliberal globalization. But it frequently veers into explicitly racist, sexist, and anti-democratic political demagoguery. For example, as with the left, the Trumpian right's antiglobalism is highly critical of finance capital. But Trump and his followers tend not to criticize global finance for closing down factories to enhance shareholder profits or for enacting

predatory lending schemes that heighten economic volatility for workers. Rather, for the Trumpian right, finance is understood to be dangerous because it is Jewish. This anti-Semitic formulation is suggestive of how the Trumpian right experiences its economic reality racially and further justifies and legitimates its preference for a paternalistic national capital that, it imagines, is more trustworthy than are racially different but class-adjacent groups.

Along these lines, let us move to a brief consideration of right-wing conspiracy theories about the “Chinese coronavirus” to show the kinds of cultural and political-economic problems and concerns that further preoccupy Trump supporters. In her *The Resonance of Unseen Things: Poetics, Power, Captivity, and UFOs in the American Uncanny*, Susan Lepselter (2016) traces conspiracy theories ethnographically to tease out the connections – resonances, in her parlance – between overlapping and sometimes wildly disparate cultural narratives. Although she is not interested in defining conspiracy theories exclusively in terms of the political rationalities and projects with which they are associated, her approach helps us to unhide some of the hidden structures of right-wing thought and to see the world so that “it all fits together....” the way that a Trump supporter might see it (Lepselter 2016: 5). Right-wing conspiracy theories, including those famously associated with QAnon, are invested in uncovering the existence of the “deep state” and of a cabal of globalist elites, who they see as having played a role in manufacturing the coronavirus pandemic, an artificially produced crisis that is being used to curtail freedom and put everyone under a new form of global corporate and state surveillance. In QAnon and related theories, China is cast as the terrifying communist dictatorship. It is the enemy of American democracy and free enterprise and its officials covered up the true origins of the pandemic. The question, so far as Chinese coronavirus

conspiracy theorists are concerned, is: Are they covering up an accident or a deliberate attack?

In his public comments about the coronavirus, Trump sought repeatedly to gain political advantage by mentioning China's responsibility for the spread of the coronavirus and by suggesting that this could be a reason to sever economic ties between the US and China, thwart China's growing technological, economic and scientific power, and undermine globalist collusion with China. There is widespread concern across the Trumpian right blogosphere of the globalist elite using the coronavirus crisis to create a "New World Order" enforced by deadly vaccines, draconian lockdown rules, new surveillance technologies, and international cooperation that will ultimately lead to the establishment of a world government. This feared future echoes two popular far right themes: over-regulation and cancel culture. Restricting businesses from operating during the pandemic is proof, many Trump supporters believe, of the liberal globalists' disdain for ordinary American small business owners. De-platforming COVID-19 conspiracy theorists is part of the "muzzling" of free speech that is being orchestrated by global technology firms. The right-wing response to this situation is to call for protectionist economic policies and the reindustrialization of the US, so that the country is no longer dependent on Chinese goods. Trump and his supporters have also called for the break up of global tech firms, asserted the right to privacy and freedom of movement and speech by resisting coronavirus lockdowns, and attempted to expose secret government and tech firm surveillance programs. What becomes clear in all of this is the extent of the work that China conspiracy theories do for the Trumpian right: they help to align capital, the state, and labor under the authoritarian force of Trump himself, who is uniquely capable of defeating China and its globalist apologists. Indeed, as QAnon conspiracists would have us believe, Trump, the

authoritarian, is the only force powerful enough to preserve American freedoms. Accordingly, conspiracy theories also have the added bonus of pushing US political culture in post-truth, authoritarian directions. In his astute essay, "Lying as a Cultural System," Jack David Eller shows the work that lying does for Trump (Eller in press). Among its many uses, it serves up a defiant comeuppance against the liberal establishment, works also to shore up Trump's anti-intellectual *bona fides*, and confuses his political opponents. Most importantly, as Eller argues, lying is a performance of seemingly unbridled political power, forcing political deliberation into a fantastical dreamland space that Trump can dominate with his false assertions, disinformation and self-serving tall tales.

We need to treat pro-Trump conspiracies not just as legitimizing tools. They are also ideological and materially productive, in the sense that they generate new ways of articulating labor to concrete projects of white supremacy and reshape what constitutes legitimate and illegitimate forms of labor.. It has already been said that these conspiracies, and Qanon in particular, imbue Trump with a heroic level of political authority. Indeed, in them, Trump is given near-apocalyptic power to domesticate global capital, to purge the old political guard ("drain the swamp") while offering his base "freedom" from a degenerate neoliberal reality that threatens their social standing and prosperity. But to Qanon believers, this idea is animated by a view of the globalist elite as an organized cabal of satanic pedophilic cannibals that preys on young white female minors, whom they purportedly traffic. This narrative casts Trump also as a righteous strongman who is uniquely capable of rescuing a feminized America from the globalist cabal. Qanon believers read Trump's tweets and press statements as coded messages that disclose his struggle to expose high ranking members of the "swamp".

This narrative is intimately connected to the project of creating a new ideological framework for revaluing culturally degraded fractions of labor and for securing white-hetero-patriarchal dominance in a situation in which its place in the emerging global order is uncertain. Like many other reactionary narratives, pro-Trump conspiracies draw their appeal by promising redemption -- redemption, above all, for the "forgotten" middle class of relatively affluent white heteropatriarchs from a moribund neoliberal politics that, personified in this narrative by a cabal of pedophilic neoliberal politicians, has scrapped the Fordist labor-capital compromise and with it, left the powers and privileges of America's middle class in a state of ambiguity. Against the diminishing returns of post-Fordism, Qanon thus posits a new vision of meaningful middle-class labor. Crucially, the foundations of nuclear-hetero patriarchy and white supremacy can be preserved by transmuting the residual Fordist "blue collar" labor regime into a tech-based, "white-collar" milieu through Trumpian authoritarian politics. This rearticulation of white middle class labor is coded into the participatory "work" of Qanon: its workspace is primarily digital (Facebook, internet message boards, Twitter), and the nature of their labor aligns with big tech's information disseminating platforms. This technical work is gendered as male and is affectively hetero-patriarchal (re: the work of "saving" the sanctity of virgin women from defilement from (neo)liberal amorality) and reaffirms a nuclear gender-relation in which women are seen as moral objects whose protection is contingent on the successful completion of men's work. In short, QAnon conspiracists are the content creators, or, better, the creative class, of the Trumpian right. Moreover, supporting and willingly participating in the formation of new technologies of surveillance and control (which has long been a dominant political

critique of tech work both on the left and the right) are reformulated in this narrative as a means of defending one's freedoms.

If the post-neoliberal future will be dictated by who can attract tech-capital and instrumentalize its authoritarian apparatuses politically, Qanon offers an ideological lens through which this future can be *domesticated* into an American scene of redeemed, virtuous and productive white people. Here we can see some major continuities between Fordism and what it offered the "affluent" (read: white, male) worker and what a Trump-controlled technocorporate authoritarianism might offer — a starring role for white, male, technology workers on the global stage, even if their "value" to capital is diminished from its heyday in the 1950s and 60s. In other words, if the future of more valuable labor is increasingly reliant on attracting finance- and tech-capital and the state's means of reshaping itself for corporate-public partnerships that expands its authoritarian forms of governance (re: digital surveillance), then these conspiracies need to be understood as an attempt to shape this transformation as a neo-Fordist compact with a racialized and gendered labor regime for the 21st century.

Conclusion: Racial and Gendered Capitalist Transmutations

It might be tempting to dismiss Trump's supporters as insane quacks who exemplify the age-old paranoid strain in US politics but who have no real power to shape US political culture, let alone global labor regimes. This is how they are viewed by people who see Trump as the ultimate neoliberal insider, the person who ran the United States like a large media or real estate corporation and who was only interested in the short-term extraction of wealth from the state that he happened, by the luck of the draw, to get elected to run (Milanovic 2020). In this

view, his supporters are at best dupes of a neoliberal enrichment scheme and at worst willing collaborators who are seeking ways to enrich themselves, as Trump does, on the backs of a putatively democratic polity. Furthermore, it is entirely possible that Trumpism will fail. With Trump's electoral defeat, it is unlikely, in fact, that it will achieve hegemonic influence over domestic political arrangements and cultures again, though as of summer 2021, there are no signs of it fading from the political scene. Yet it is very possible (and indeed likely) that Trump himself will fade into political irrelevance with time. But behind the political project that he cobbled together, however incoherent it may sometimes appear, is a broad reactionary white supremacist base, a long line of audacious right-wing political and media entrepreneurs, rich capitalists, and a vanguard of middle-class insurrectionists who, as we saw in January 2021, are easily mobilized. With its authoritarian impulses, this durable political bloc poses an obvious threat to US liberal democratic institutions. But this is not the full extent of its dangers or its potential impact.

Indeed, there is more to Trumpism than the threat it poses to liberal democracy. Bruce Kapferer and Roland Kapferer (2021) make a compelling case for seeing Trump as a transitional figure in a period of dramatic capitalist transmutation. The global economic system, they argue, is shifting away from the US-led neoliberal capitalism of the past four decades and towards a new order dominated, in deeply antidemocratic ways, by cybernetic technology firms such as Google and Facebook (see also Maskovsky and Bjork-James 2020). Accompanying this shift is a great deal of political disorder, as the political elites of the past have lost legitimacy. In this situation, Trump sensed and exploited frustrations that White Americans felt at the upheavals they were witnessing. But Trump is a paradoxical figure, according to Kapferer and Kapferer. He

tapped into right-wing resentments and anger, but he was not able to elaborate a compelling economic program for his constituents. That most of them continued to support him despite this is because of their false consciousness, they tell us. He represented the managerial spirit of the emerging anti-democratic digital age (he's more proficient than most politicians at using social media and is a paragon of mass-mediated popularity), but his political base is comprised mostly of the white people who feel acutely disoriented by the deeper shifts in capitalist political economy and culture of which Trump's own enterprises and his transactional style of governing are a part. Trump is thus best understood not as a specter of a fascist past but as a mediating figure pointing towards a new authoritarian totalitarian future.

There is much to admire in this analysis, but what if we assume that Trump's followers are not mystified by his political act but are instead invested in it for reasons other than the narrow materialist interests that the Kepferer's prioritize? What if we ask also what kind of global labor regime is emergent as different political blocs are unsettled and struggled over as racial and gendered capitalist relationalities are reconfigured in a post-neoliberal way? Answering these questions requires us to take seriously the possibility that Trump is popular for his elaboration of white nationalist and paternalistic sensibilities, that these sensibilities will be decisive in reshaping the US and global political economy from the right in the near-term future, and that US empire's decline and China's rise will unsettle race, class and gender politics, requiring new political and intellectual strategies of engagement. The corporate authoritarianism that is on the rise has still not coalesced into a stable or coherent hegemony. Proponents of Trumpism know this and are invested not in opposing its rise but in gaining a foothold in it. They want a stake in it because they see in it the possibility of negotiating a

better cultural and political economic position for white hetero-patriarchal communities, and Trump, like other right-wing populist leaders across the globe, offers them hope not just for amplifying their white nationalist disgruntlement but also for compromising with capital to establish a labor regime in which they will continue to be favored.

We have argued in this chapter that the middle class is the modality through which race and gender are lived in the United States today and, more specifically, that treating the United States as a society forged through racial and gendered capitalist relationalities that prioritize the privileged positioning of white people in a stratified global labor regime is the key, we think, to getting Trump right. And we must get him right if we wish to abolish Trumpism and related anti-democratic political projects that are invested in white supremacy and paternalistic gender relations if our scholarly work is to contribute, as it should, to the making of a more just and equal world.

Acknowledgements

We owe an enormous debt to Sharryn Kasmir and Lesley Gill, whose intellectual framing, scholarly work, and generous feedback helped us to fine tune the argument we make here. Jane Collins, Dana Davis, Kathy Powell, Don Robotham, John Clarke, and Paul Stubb offered very useful comments on the chapter. We very much wish to thank Nick Welna for invaluable research assistance. We dedicate this chapter to Leith Mullings, whose untimely death cut short an ongoing intellectual and political conversation about many of the themes discussed in this chapter. Her work on race and racism is, of course, foundational to our thinking.

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