
Conflicting Narratives of the American Dream: Obama's Equality of Opportunity and Trump's "Make America Great Again"¹

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You have to describe your country in terms of what you passionately hope it will become, as well as in terms of what you know it to be now. You have to be loyal to a dream country rather than to the one you wake up to every morning. Unless such loyalty exists, the ideal has no chance of becoming actual.

Richard Rorty, (2008) "Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America"

I am the son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas. I was raised with the help of a white grandfather who survived a Depression to serve in Patton's army during World War II and a white grandmother who worked on a bomber assembly line at Fort Leavenworth while he was overseas. I've gone to some of the best schools in America and lived in one of the world's poorest nations. I am married to a black American who carries within her the blood of slaves and slave owners - an inheritance we pass on to our two precious daughters. I have brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, uncles and cousins, of every race and every hue, scattered across three continents, and for as long as I live, I will never forget that in no other country on earth is my story even possible.

Senator Barack Obama, (2008) "A More Perfect Union"²

Introduction

Richard Rorty (1998), the American pragmatist philosopher, begins his book "Achieving Our Country" with the comment, "National pride is to countries what self respect is to individuals: a necessary condition for self improvement" (p. 3). He provides a narrative re-crafting of the dream in pre-Vietnam America by reference to Walt Whitman and John Dewey. According to Rorty, Whitman and Dewey shaped the secular dream of America based on the notion of exceptionalism without reference to the divine – a society where all Americans would become mo-

1 This essay is an updated and substantially rewritten paper based on Peters (2012) with a new section on Trump and the American Dream.

2 For the full speech and video see http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/03/18/obama-race-speech-read-th_n_92077.html.

bilized as political agents in the cause of democracy. He argues that, for Whitman and Dewey, the conjunction of the concepts "America" and "democracy" is an essential part of a new description of what it is to be human. Rorty's success as a philosopher is related to his ability to tell a new story about America and the American Dream, to re-describe the past using a different vocabulary and to highlight how a new philosophical history can make us feel differently about who we are and who we might become. Rorty offers us a "philosophy of hope," a philosophy based on the narrative of cultural invention, self-discovery and national self-creation.³

What Rorty's book also draws attention to is the power of narrative and the way in which the American Dream is a specific narrative that comes into being at a particular time and place and then can be "read back" onto American history – on the Puritan beginnings and those who wrote the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. It is a narrative that can be "read forward," projected onto the future, as a means of establishing a vision for a society and economy. This is the art of narrative retellings of the America Dream, which, in the hands of Rorty or Barack Obama, becomes a shining beacon to unify the people in recognizing what is best in America. The question is whether, in a time of radical change and transition – when America is losing its world position as the only superpower, when millions of Americans are losing their homes and jobs as a result of the recession and financial crisis, when America enters into a massive budget-cutting and deficit-financing mode – whether the American Dream can be reclaimed, refurbished, re-articulated and retold in era of decline.

Obama is a skillful politician and is well known for his oratory. He has consistently made reference to the American Dream in his campaigning for the presidency and after, often focusing on his own remarkable story as emblematic of the possible. He has also carefully used the intellectual resources of the American Dream to unify Americans and to provide the vision for the society he wants others to dream of. The question is, in a time of decline, how serviceable is this dream: Can it be restored? Are its core ideals able to be refashioned?

Fareed Zakaria, like Obama, believes that it is possible to restore the America Dream and, like millions of immigrants in developing countries, remembers the attraction of America when he was young:

3 See Rorty's (1999) "Philosophy and Social Hope," which represents his hope for, "a global cosmopolitan, democratic, egalitarian, classless, casteless society" (p. xii) and runs this hope together with his antagonism towards Platonism – towards the search for Truth (as correspondence), certainty, reality and essences. He finds the roots of his view in the work of the American native tradition in pragmatist philosophy best represented in the work of John Dewey.

The American dream for me, growing up in India in the 1970s, looked something like the opening credits of *Dallas*. The blockbuster TV series began with a kaleidoscope of big, brassy, sexy images – tracts of open land, shiny skyscrapers, fancy cars, cowboy businessmen and the very dreamy Victoria Principal.

A few years later, when I got to America on a college scholarship, I realized that the real American Dream was somewhat different from *Dallas*. I visited college friends in their hometowns and was struck by the spacious suburban houses and the gleaming appliances – even when their parents had simple, modest jobs. The modern American Dream, for me, was this general prosperity and well-being for the average person. European civilization had produced the great cathedrals of the world. America had the two-car garage. And this middle-class contentment created a country of optimists.

Writing in *Time* in October 2010 and rerunning the theme on CNN in February 2011, Zakaria notes the angry and dispirited mood of Americans who, after the worst recession since the Great Depression, are strikingly fatalistic about their prospects. The middle class has been hollowed out and American workers are losing jobs as American companies locate off shore. The American Dream can be restored, Zakaria argues, but it will involve hard and painful choices, and he makes the following recommendations: shift from consumption to investment; invest heavily in education and training; develop “fiscal sanity”; and simplify the tax code and benchmark. He goes on to argue:

My proposals are inherently difficult because they ask the left and right to come together, cut some spending, pare down entitlements, open up immigration for knowledge workers, rationalize the tax code – and then make large investments in education and training, research and technology, innovation and infrastructure. But the fact that it is a solution that crosses political borders should make it more palatable, not less. And time is crucial.

Zakaria buys into the concept of the American Dream without scrutinizing or historicizing it and the way it has changed and been narratively re-crafted for every age: “That dream or hope has been present from the start. Ever since we became an independent nation, each generation has seen an uprising of ordinary Americans to save the American Dream from the forces which appear to be overwhelming it.”

Yet with all narratives of this kind that serve as a basis of a national ideal and spell out an appeal to the better nature of citizens to unify them

by alluding to a vision, we need to ask: What is the history of the narrative? Who are the main storytellers, and to what ends do they tell the tale? When we ask these questions, the American Dream seems a very white dream, one that does not recognize how the dream rested on exploitation of indigenous peoples, the black slave economy, and a corporate America that increasingly squeezes wealth from the American people and exploits cheap labor elsewhere in developing countries. While it is based on an ideal of inclusiveness, it never offered indigenous peoples or African-Americans much hope.

“The Epic of America”

James Truslow Adams was the historian who first coined the term “American Dream” in “The Epic of America,” published in 1931, significantly at a time when America was suffering the early years of the Great Depression. He chose his title well. The term “epic” refers to a long, narrative poem detailing the heroic deeds and events significant to a culture, tribe or nation. In archaic Greek style, these poems followed a certain format, exhibiting set literary conventions that described a heroic quest, normally beginning with an invocation to the muse, where genealogies are given and the values of a civilization are heralded.

Homer’s “Iliad” and “Odyssey” are classic examples that begin the Western tradition. These epics were often long national poems that described and embroidered the development of episodes or events important to the history of a nation or race, and were told in an elevated style. It is a form that persists through the medieval into the modern era.

To describe America as an epic is to make an appeal to noble sentiments, and Adams was aware of this; especially in the context of the 1930s, he wanted to highlight and romanticize the ethic of equality – and in particular, equality of opportunity and equality before the law. He also wanted to use these ideals and principles to describe a country based on the conscious development of a secular social order that found its origins in the Declaration of Independence, which holds certain truths to be self-evident, “that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.” But do epics make good history? And is the American Dream is still an attainable and serviceable ideal?

Adams depicted a dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wag-

es merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position (pp. 214–215)

Adams was a writer rather than an academic, and as a freelance writer, he wrote colonial histories. His trilogy on the history of New England was warmly received, and he won the Pulitzer Prize for the first volume, “The Founding of New England” (1921). He was active in the American Society of Arts and Letters and various historical societies. In his “The Epic of America,” Adams attempted to address the historic development and philosophic vision of America that strongly reflected the values of the Declaration as uniquely American and extolled the advantages of education as a means for the promoting of equality of opportunity, meritocracy and social mobility. When he wrote “The Epic of America” while living in London, 16 percent of the workforce was unemployed – some 8 million Americans – and unemployment was to get much worse as the Depression dragged on. He died disappointed in his country after a heart attack in 1949.

Jim Cullen (2003) historicizes the American Dream, focusing on the founding fathers and the Declaration of Independence as “the charter of the American Dream,” as well as on Abraham Lincoln and his dream for a unified nation, and Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream of racial equality. He argues that the contemporary version of the American Dream has become debased, built on its outlandish dreams of overnight fame and fortune. Perhaps most significantly, Cullen sees the American Dream as embodying the ideal that all men are created equal. Even with the obvious contradiction of slavery, the essence of this dream allowed for the possibility of racial equality, class mobility and home ownership – values that are part of the core of collective consciousness of Americans.

Like Adams, Cullen deplores the way the American Dream increasingly becomes the pursuit of material prosperity and consumerism. David Camp (2009) suggests that while it matured into a shared dream under Roosevelt’s New Deal, when a new level of security was cemented in place by The Social Security Act of 1935,⁴ it was re-calibrated during the period of postwar prosperity:

Buttressed by postwar optimism and prosperity, the American Dream was undergoing another recalibration. Now it really did translate into specific goals rather than Adams’s more broadly defined aspirations. Home ownership was the fundamental goal, but, depending on who

4 See the wonderful set of photos that accompanies this article at <http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/features/2009/04/american-dream200904?currentPage=1>.

was doing the dreaming, the package might also include car ownership, television ownership (which multiplied from 6 million to 60 million sets in the U.S. between 1950 and 1960), and the intent to send one's kids to college. The G.I. Bill was as crucial on that last count as it was to the housing boom. In providing tuition money for returning vets, it not only stocked the universities with new students – in 1947, roughly half of the nation's college enrollees were ex-G.I.'s – but put the very idea of college within reach of a generation that had previously considered higher education the exclusive province of the rich and the extraordinarily gifted. Between 1940 and 1965, the number of U.S. adults who had completed at least four years of college more than doubled.

This was an ideal that translated the American Dream into a new society based upon purchasing power, epitomized by John Kenneth Galbraith's (1958) "The Affluent Society," focusing on attaining hitherto undreamed levels of personal affluence. The succeeding decades exposed a commitment to high levels of personal debt via new credit cards, easy credit and family investment portfolios in the bull markets of the day. At the same time, the American Dream was being drained of its substantive content and, "decoupled from any concept of the common good (the movement to privatize Social Security began to take on momentum) and, more portentously, from the concepts of working hard and managing one's expectations." As he goes on to comment:

These are tough times for the American Dream. As the safe routines of our lives have come undone, so has our characteristic optimism – not only our belief that the future is full of limitless possibility, but our faith that things will eventually return to normal, whatever "normal" was before the recession hit. There is even worry that the dream may be over – that we currently living Americans are the unfortunate ones who shall bear witness to that deflating moment in history when the promise of this country began to wither. This is the "sapping of confidence" that President Obama alluded to in his inaugural address, the "nagging fear that America's decline is inevitable, and that the next generation must lower its sights."

As S.L. Hanson and J. Zogby (2010) indicate: "Cullen (2003) and others (Sherraden, 1991; Newman, 1993; Shapiro, 2004; Moen and Roehling, 2005; Johnson, 2006; Ho, 2007) have suggested that the American Dream may be unraveling as we see a growing wealth gap, ongoing race and gender inequality, and expanding poor immigrant populations. Perhaps the 21st century is not a time of increasing progress toward the American Dream."

Obama on the American Dream

Obama is a savvy politician who knows the currency and power of the concept of the American Dream. His second book, entitled “The Audacity of Hope,” (2006) was subtitled, “Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream.”

Most Americans have simple dreams. A job that can support a family. Health care we can count on and afford. A retirement that is dignified and secure. Education and opportunity for our kids. But today, the price of the American dream is going up. All across the country, Americans are working harder for less. We’ve never paid more for health care or for college. It’s harder to save, and it’s harder to retire. There are things we need to do right now to give our economy a boost, but a short-term stimulus is not enough. We have to put the American dream on a firmer foundation.

His recipe was clear: “stop giving tax breaks to companies that ship jobs overseas, and to put a tax cut in the pocket of middle class Americans”; “protect a secure retirement by easing the burden on America’s seniors”; “change our bankruptcy laws to protect workers’ pensions instead of protecting banks”; “make health care affordable and accessible for all Americans.” He wrote, “We also have to be clear that the American dream must never come at the expense of the American family.” He also indicated the, “need to expand paid leave” and, perhaps most fundamentally, “It’s time to put a college education within reach of every American.”

The book became a national bestseller in the fall of 2006, and its promises and policy sketches became part of his 2008 campaign for the presidency. The phrase, “the audacity of hope” was one adopted from his pastor, Jeremiah Wright (whose version was, “the audacity *to* hope”), and Obama also used it as the basis also for his keynote at the 2004 Democratic Convention.⁵ In that speech, he began by recalling his grandfather’s dream and his family heritage to say: “I stand here today, grateful for the diversity of my heritage, aware that my parents’ dreams live on in my precious daughters. I stand here knowing that my story is part of the larger American story, that I owe a debt to all of those who came before me, and that, in no other country on earth, is my story even possible.”

In the same paragraph, Obama then alludes to the Declaration as a basis for America Dream: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal. That they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights. That among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,” and he goes on to say, “That is the true genius of Amer-

5 For the full speech, see <http://www.librarian.net/dnc/speeches/obama.txt>.

ica, a faith in the simple dreams of its people, the insistence on small miracles,” and ends his speech with his own version of the Dream: “I believe we can give our middle class relief and provide working families with a road to opportunity. I believe we can provide jobs to the jobless, homes to the homeless, and reclaim young people in cities across America from violence and despair. I believe that as we stand on the crossroads of history, we can make the right choices, and meet the challenges that face us. America!”

In his post-election travels, Obama listened to a 30-year-old law school graduate who said he is no longer able to make the interest payments on his educational loans, much less able to have a mortgage or a family. He said he had been inspired by Obama’s campaign. But now, “That inspiration is dying away,” he said. “I really want to know: Is the American dream dead?”

“Absolutely not,” Obama responded. “There is not a country in the world that would not want to change places with us,” he continued. “We are still the country that billions of people in the world look to and aspire to.”

“It’s like the American dream in reverse.” That’s how President Obama, ten days after taking office, described the plight of Americans hit by the faltering economy. His catchy description fell short – the dream has turned into a nightmare for tens of millions.

Opinion polls reveal that increasingly, Americans believe that the American Dream is a thing of the past. Perhaps surprisingly, Hanson & Zogby (2010) report the majority of Americans consistently reported that the American Dream is more about spiritual happiness than material goods. Americans continue to believe that working hard should be the most important element for getting ahead in the United States, but does not guarantee success. A majority of respondents believe that achieving the American Dream will be more difficult for future generations. Americans are increasingly pessimistic about the opportunity for the working class to get ahead and increasingly optimistic about the opportunity for the poor and immigrants to get ahead in the United States.

As Hanson & Zogby (2010) comment, “Beliefs about opportunity are essential aspects of social systems in that they involve subjective interpretations of the legitimacy and openness of the stratification system ... In the United States, there is considerable evidence that systems and structures work to the distinct advantage of some and to the disadvantage of others.” Obviously, growing and structured inequality is not compatible with the American Dream, as its main ideological tenet is to suggest that all can succeed. In this context, inequality is immoral and irresponsible. The American dream has been eclipsed by the power of wealth, and the

racial wealth gap is growing, with generational inequality becoming even more deeply entrenched. Americans cannot continue to hold deep-rooted beliefs in the principles of individualism, equal opportunity and meritocracy in the face of such growing inequalities.

As states cut back on education as a way of balancing their accounts, education as the so-called “great equalizer” is less able to provide an equal playing field, ensuring that every child – regardless of family of origin – gets an equal chance at success (Johnson, 2006).

“In Winner-Take-All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer – and Turned its Back on the Middle Class,” two political scientists, Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, document the fact that during the last few years, the wealthiest Americans have gotten a lot richer while the middle class has suffered: real incomes have fallen, foreclosures have forced millions of Americans from their homes and unemployment is the highest in 30 years. They document the fact that, in 2009, the average income of the top 5 percent of earners went up, while the income of the rest of the population went down. The top 1 percent possessed roughly 8 percent of the total income in the 1960s; today, the top 1 percent “earns” more than 20 percent of the total income. The interesting point they make is that this startling income inequality – the largest of any advanced industrial democracy – is part of a larger, 40-year trend due to deliberate policies that have consistently cut taxes for the rich, made it harder for unions to organize, enabled corporations to pay top executives large bonuses despite company performance and deregulated financial markets that favor banks at the expense of customers. They also point to intentional “policy drift” to refer to a situation where policymakers resist alternatives that might have reduced inequalities. The dramatic growth of inequality is the result of deliberate political choice and business backlash against the form American liberalism took as it emerged after World War II. A conservative counterrevolution and the political awakening of business ensued. Where the policy regime of private provision for a globally dominant industrial economy had previously worked, during the 1970s this regime began to break down as globalization and deindustrialization took hold. The business lobby no longer accepted the contours of the New Deal and the Great Society. Beginning with the Carter administration, the business lobby began to exercise its muscle, defeating reform proposals and instituting a round of tax cuts.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the parties increasingly differed on racial politics. The Republicans became the party of the wealthy and white, while the Democrats became the inheritors of the civil rights movement. If anything, this deep racial divide has grown larger during Obama’s era

– exposing increasing racial inequalities which are likely to become even more pronounced as states begin to trim their budgets and cut back savagely into education and welfare entitlements. Under state budget cuts, students have lost tuition waivers, teachers have been sacked, collective bargaining is curtailed and sometimes abolished, and deep cuts have been made to the funding of K-12 and higher education.⁶

Can education continue to play the role as the great equalizer, sustaining the American Dream and providing the key to equality of opportunity?⁷ Arne Duncan (2011), the Secretary of Education in the Obama administration, addressed the theme of education reform in the United States in a series of remarks to the World Bank. In his remarks, he comments on the traditional values of education as the “great equalizer” and its new role in the competitive knowledge economy of developing human capital. “Education is now the key to eliminating gender inequality, to reducing poverty, to creating a sustainable planet, to preventing needless deaths and illness, and to fostering peace,” said Duncan. “And in a knowledge economy, education is the new currency by which nations maintain economic competitiveness and global prosperity. Education today is inseparable from the development of human capital.”⁸

In his report on US reforms, he rejects the notion that improving economic competitiveness is a zero-sum game and, in effect, loads education with even more responsibility for “achieving America,” as Rorty puts it. Improving education is important to “winning the future,” Duncan suggests, quoting President Obama. He also quotes with approval Thomas Friedman, Nelson Mandela (“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world”) and Ben Bernanke (“The best solution to income inequality is producing a high-quality education for everyone”). And he puts the point in graphic terms:

6 See the report from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities on state budget cuts at <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=1214>. Gov. Jerry Brown in California aims to cut half a billion dollars from state education funding in 2011; Arizona, \$83.7 million; Georgia, \$187 million from higher education; Texas, \$5 billion from public schools, and so on. In a much publicized episode, Gov. Scott Walker of Wisconsin, in the largest cut in modern state history, has cut \$900 million in aid to school districts (also preventing any rise in property taxes) and eliminated collective bargaining rights of state employees, leading to historic protests against him. See the full text of his budget speech at http://walker.wi.gov/journal_media_detail.asp?prid=5668&locid=177 and the Senate bill at <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/2011/data/JR1SB-11.pdf>.

7 See Bill Gates’ (2011) Ted Talk on “How State Budgets are breaking US schools” at http://www.ted.com/talks/bill_gates_how_state_budgets_are_breaking_us_schools.html.

8 See his “Improving Human Capital in a Competitive World - Education Reform in the United States,” Remarks of US Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, World Bank, Human Development Network Forum, March 2, 2011.

We have more than 2 million children enrolled in preschool programs, 100,000 public schools, 49 million K-12 students, more than 3 million teachers, and 15,000 school districts – all of it largely administered and funded by local governments. I am convinced that the US education system now has an unprecedented opportunity to get dramatically better. Nothing – nothing – is more important in the long-run to American prosperity than boosting the skills and attainment of the nation's students. In the United States, we feel an economic and moral imperative to challenge the status quo. Closing the achievement gap and closing the opportunity gap is the civil rights issue of our generation. One quarter – 25 percent – of US high school students drop out or fail to graduate on time. Almost 1 million students leave our schools for the streets each year. That is economically unsustainable and morally unacceptable.

If “the economic future of the United States rests on its ability to strengthen our education system,” then in the current situation, with state-led budget cuts and the general recession, the American Dream is severely at risk. The authors of “The Global Auction” (Brown, Lauder and Ashton, 2011) suggest that in a more integrated and networked world, the market value of American workers is no longer a national matter, but rather is part of a global auction for jobs. They challenge the conventional wisdom that more education will lead to greater individual and national prosperity, which has been a cornerstone of developed economies – arguing that globalization has led to a new, global, high-skill, low-wage workforce. Their work not only questions the easy adoption of education as human capital development, but calls for a radical questioning of education as the principal mechanism for the achievement of the American Dream.

Of course, the goal of education is not simply about a form of economic instrumentalism that helps the United States “win the future,” to quote from Obama’s education rhetoric. Now, more than any time in the past, and especially at this very moment of capitalist crisis in the West, the old truisms about education as the central part of the “knowledge economy” and as the ticket to economic health no longer wash: even graduates can’t get jobs. Youth unemployment in the Eurozone and the United States is spiraling upward, and the relationship between education and jobs is no longer a comfortable mantra of “education equals jobs.” One might argue that what is urgently needed is a critical democratic education that leads to the development of cosmopolitan citizens able to scrutinize and monitor the workings of capital to help protect the public sector against the ravages of the monopolization of knowledge and the privatization of education.

“Make America Great Again”: Donald Trump and the Rise of Authoritarian Populism

Neoliberal globalisation—the target of so much Left critique over the Reagan-Thatcher, Bush-Blair, and some would say, Obama-Cameron, years—seems now on the back foot, both in the US under Trump, and also in Europe with the emergence of the Alt-right and the likes of Marie Le Pen, leader of the National Front in France, Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, the UK Independence Party, Heinz-Christian Strache in Austria and the Vlaams Belang Party in Belgium, to name a few. Right-wing populism is on the rise. It is fiercely anti-immigration and anti-integration, often associated with neo-Nazis and white supremacist groups. It commonly assumes a kind of authoritarianism and anti-liberal stance towards rights, and while it appeals to the ‘common man’ (*sic*)—sometimes explicitly anti-women and anti-feminist—it paradoxically nevertheless does not subscribe to the notion and practice of equality. The far-right is anti-pluralist and anti-democratic believing in the strong state and an authoritarian populism. Right-wing populism has strong links with elements of the far-right not only in terms of ethnocentrism, xenophobia and anti-immigration stance but also over traditional and social conservative values concerning heterosexuality, the patriarchal family, the subordination of women and cultural minorities, often combined with fundamentalist Christian values. Economically, as is evidence in the raft of Trump’s executive orders, there is a strong tendency toward protectionism and an isolationism in foreign policy (Peters, 2017).

“Make America Great Again” (MAGA) was Trump’s 2016 campaign slogan, a phrase used also by Ronald Reagan in his 1980 campaign. It is dominated in Trump’s policy thinking as he tries to undo all of Obama’s policies, in health care, taxation, trade and foreign policy – capped recently by a stubborn defense of his withdrawal from the Paris climate accord at the 2016 G20 meeting. MAGA is a different narrative of the American Dream from liberal internationalism that is based on a mixed or blended discourse derived from “America First”, withdrawal from international agreement in trade and climate change, a resentful attitude to traditional allies, strong alignment with far-right ideas both within the closed circle of his advisors (e.g. Steve Bannon) and allegiances to deindustrialized voting constituencies in the Rust Belt, who suffered from economic globalization when jobs went East. Trump’s narrative of the American Dream is directed against all outsiders—Mexicans, undocumented folk, Blacks, women, Muslims—and functions by casting aspersions and tapping into existing prejudices and disaffection. Trump said in his inaugural address:

“Rusted out factories are scattered like tombstones across the landscape of our nation. The wealth of our middle class has been ripped from our homes and redistributed all across the world.” But if the narrative is essentially directly inward it is also “America closed” as against “America open” – an attitude which is refracted in the recoil from global moral leadership and from “leader of the free world” (Peters & Chiang, 2017).

At the domestic level Trump has also unleashed “a new offensive against academia.”⁹ He is not a friend of education and science as a means of achieving the American Dream. Trump’s ascendancy is bad news for US and world science with the disappearance of governmental science websites such as the White House pages on climate change and the likely curtailment for alternative energy science funding.¹⁰ Various publications have complained that the president’s view on science are shockingly ignorant.¹¹ At the level of schooling Trump is on record saying he may cut the Department of Education.¹² His appointment of Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education did little to impress teachers.¹³ All this indicates an education agenda that will boost Charter schools, defend the ideology of school choice, support the radical Christian orthodoxy to advance private religious schools, and rethink the necessity of the Common Core. Other elements on the privatization and conservative agenda include vouchers, greater teacher accountability, more student debt, and an attack on America’s public schooling system with a commensurate downsizing of the Department of Education. Many educators are worried about the future of liberal arts colleges and STEM education, and the undermining of teaching about evolution and climate change.¹⁴ CBS reports Trump as saying: ‘As your president, I will be the biggest cheerleader for school choice you’ve ever seen,’ promising that in his White House term ‘parents

9 See <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20170113164552838>. universities are already feeling the effects of Trump’s travel ban on their application numbers. Even with a new policy on travel ban placed on six countries, mostly Muslim, it seems clear that international students in US universities will be severely curtailed. Many US universities and universities around the world have been outspoken against the discrimination of Trump’s immigration and travel-ban policies.

10 See <https://arstechnica.com/science/2017/01/have-politics-trumped-science/>.

11 E.g. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/trump-comments-on-science-are-shockingly-ignorant/>

12 <https://qz.com/898330/in-just-one-week-as-president-donald-trump-has-wreaked-unparalleled-havoc-on-american-education/>

13 See DeVos at 2017 Conservative Political Action Conference, C-Span <https://www.c-span.org/video/?424394-101/betsy-devos-delivers-remarks-cpac>

14 <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/trumps-first-100-days-science-education-and-schools/>

can home school their children.”¹⁵ Under Trump the US faces the end of the liberal era of schooling—the end of educational equality—and a reassertion, especially as Trump’s presidency unfolds, of less government involvement and the endorsement of socially conservative values. This is the “Make American Great Again” narrative of the American Dream under Trump but not through meritocracy and not through education and the traditional liberal notion of equality of educational opportunity.

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