

June 2018

Feminist Tweets to Trump: How to Find Commonality in Diversity

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Recommended Citation

Kitch, S. (2018). Feminist Tweets to Trump: How to Find Commonality in Diversity. *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education*, 17 (2). <https://doi.org/10.31390/taboo.17.2.05>

Feminist Tweets to Trump

How to Find Commonality in Diversity

Sally L. Kitch

Abstract

The 2016 U.S. presidential campaign and first year of the Trump presidency have defied conventional politics in multiple ways. Among the many shocking deviations from modern political normalcy has been Donald Trump's appeal to a sizeable minority of the American electorate, especially in rural and post-industrial areas, to hitch their hopes for American greatness on stressing racial, class, religious, ethnic, and gender differences among citizens and pitting the interests of immigrants and foreign powers against those of a genuine (white) America. At this moment, it seems crucial to strategize ways to mend America's shredded social fabric. "Feminist Tweets to Trump" offers models for pursuing that goal from an unexpected source: feminist theory and activism. There are few social movements or theoretical perspectives besides feminism that can offer so many robust examples of paradigms, frameworks, and mechanisms for conceptualizing and actualizing connections among groups and for seeking common purpose, both despite and through substantial differences in identities, experiences, and social locations. Feminist connection strategies include: (1) challenging rigid binary thinking about sexuality and gender difference; (2) recognizing how racial divides map onto hierarchies of power and status and undermining both through non-oppositional identity politics, intersectionality, and mestiza consciousness; and (3) finding commonality across nations and geographical regions by exposing shared structural relations and the invisible political histories that link people who otherwise share few life experiences, practices, identities, or cultural values.

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Introduction

Months after the 2016 election, it remains clear that the Trump campaign and presidency have defied political normalcy in multiple ways. Among the most shocking deviations from the practices that have defined American democracy in recent history are Trump's divisive approach to racial, class, religious, ethnic, and gender differences among U.S. citizens, his distrust of foreigners, including U.S. allies, and his insinuations about threats from immigrants. Equally shocking has been the willingness of a sizeable minority of the American electorate, especially working-class whites in rural and post-industrial areas, to hitch their hopes for American greatness to such divisiveness and xenophobia. For that minority, the Trump campaign ushered in political "incorrectness" as a new norm, motivating some supporters to celebrate hate speech and discriminatory, demeaning, even threatening acts against perceived enemies, within, beyond, and across U.S. borders.

In the wake of the nastiest, most divisive American presidential campaign ever conducted, many Americans of different classes, races, and regions felt they were "living like housemates 'no longer on speaking terms' in a house set afire by Trump, gaping at one another 'through the smoke.'"¹ That fire has been further stoked by the ongoing politics of the administration, which continue to emphasize (and exacerbate) stark divisions and threatening differences. The partisan divide, in which "the other side" is increasingly regarded not just as different but also as evil, is more solidly than ever a proxy for differing views of race, multiculturalism, gender equity, sexual diversity, and other issues related to rights and inclusion. Against such a backdrop, progressive ideas about seeking the common good and finding common ground seem DOA in America's new reality.

Our best hope may be that at least some Americans—perhaps even some elected officials—will eventually conclude that the country's drift toward misogyny, nativism, white supremacy, xenophobia, and hate speech and acts has gone too far. Perhaps it will become possible to deepen the nation's understanding of *difference* and to re-forge necessary connections to advance a long cherished ideal of America's greatness through its robust history as a nation of immigrants, as the most ethnically and racially diverse country on the planet (and one of the few in which citizenship is not a function of ethnicity), and as a society still struggling toward gender equity. It still means something that, as early as 1732, the British colonies housed the most diverse mix of European immigrants ever assembled in such close proximity. It is also significant that the Colonies presented those diverse Europeans (who did not yet consider themselves united by race) with opportunities to encounter American Indians and sub-Saharan Africans (not all of whom were enslaved) on a daily basis.² Whether the country retreats to racial neo-tribalism and hunkers behind dividing walls or embraces the benefits and richness of that history may determine America's legacy for some time to come.

In considering that prospect, it behooves us to recall history's cautionary tales

about the use of *difference* as an incendiary political tool with disastrous results. The ignominy of slavery and Jim Crow, which is yet in operation, are but two American examples. Nazi Germany in the 1930s and 1940s also springs immediately to mind, as does South Africa during the Apartheid era from 1948 to 1994, when strict divisions between whites, blacks, and “coloreds” were asserted, maintained, and enforced through state-sponsored violence, larceny, unequal treatment, and imprisonment for dissidents. And then there was Rwanda, where citizens turned against one another in 1994 and 1995, resulting in the slaughter of nearly a million people (including babies) and the displacement of an additional two million to neighboring countries. Seven out of ten non-Christian Tutsis were murdered by Christian Hutus pumped up by their leaders on the ideology of Hutu Power. Because physiology had nothing to do with the conflict, the killers had to check national IDs in order to know who was Tutsi and who was Hutu and, therefore, whom to kill.³

Equally dangerous, a citizenry convinced of insidious differences among themselves—by fiat, propaganda, lies, or officially stratified rights and benefits—is often easier to control than a united one. Focused primarily on disparities and competition among themselves, citizens may pay less heed to the machinations of the ruling class. This effect is evident in Trump supporters’ reported disinterest in investigating his possible financial conflicts of interest or collusion between the Trump campaign and Russian meddling in the 2016 election. Perhaps the current administration seeks to ease the burdens of governing by practicing a version of divide and conquer. Urging the populace to disparage and compete with one another across apparently unbreachable dividing lines for dwindling benefits may deflect attention from a government’s covert mission to serve the powerful through friendly policies and the unequal distribution of resources. That outcome is evident in the fact that 40 percent of Americans still don’t realize that Trump’s 2017 tax reform plan unequivocally favors the rich.⁴ Moreover, people disoriented by a barrage of unprincipled edicts about differences and an endless parade of stereotyped scapegoats to blame for their woes “are more inclined to seek saviors,” thereby keeping those in power powerful.⁵

If Trump’s political ambitions are built on such tactics, as it seems to date, it is entirely possible that his administration will make no sincere attempt to unite Americans across the political lines that increasingly reflect class, racial, ethnic, gender, and geographical differences, as well as attitudes about social inclusion. They may, in fact, do the opposite and continue to shred the nation’s social fabric and disrupt longstanding alliances around the world in order to bolster Trump’s popularity with his loyal cadre of disaffected white voters. But the majority of citizens who voted against Trump (and perhaps some disillusioned supporters) will see the nation’s future in a different way. They will want to resist further divisiveness and create counter-narratives that articulate America’s strengths through its internal gender, ethnic, and racial diversity, its incorporation of immigrants, and its strong international alliances with both Western and non-Western nations.

Those citizens will seek to stoke understanding rather than fear. They will want to construct bridges rather than walls.

When that happens, it may come as a surprise to many—especially to Mr. Trump, whose misogyny seems unstoppable—that feminist thought and activism can be a key resource for mending America’s currently tattered social fabric. Too many politicians, pundits, and misogynist social critics have made damaging feminism’s reputation a favorite pastime over the past decades for most Americans to recognize what the feminist movement, which includes both social activism and theoretical analysis, has to offer. But the truth is that few social movements or theoretical perspectives besides feminism can offer so many robust examples of paradigms, frameworks, and mechanisms for conceptualizing and actualizing connections and for seeking common purpose, both despite and through substantial differences in identities, experiences, and social locations. That is so in part because the monumental task of conceptualizing and addressing the variety of challenges and oppressions faced by half the world’s population has inevitably sparked many conflicts, even fissures, over racial, class, ethnic, religious, sexual, and geographic differences, both within the U.S. and across the world. Indeed, those fissures have at times become chasms. As a result, feminist thinkers have through necessity devised and adopted a variety of tools and approaches for working across conventional divides. They have produced a raft of useful frameworks for addressing and understanding *difference* as distinct from divisiveness and for constructing *connections* without capitulation.

In this article, I will use the rhetoric of the Trump campaign and his administration’s early months as a touchstone as I offer various feminist views about and approaches to the divisions the election has exacerbated. I will use the conventions of Twitter as headings in that discussion in order to convey key messages I hope the new president can hear. As I construct this analysis, I will both reveal the fault lines over difference within feminism and highlight the contributions of feminist thinkers and activists, including myself, who have struggled for decades to bridge those chasms and find commonalities in difference.

Before I begin, I must offer a caveat. I use the terms *feminism* and *feminist* loosely and without any authorization to characterize a movement, set of perspectives, or worldview that really defies definitive characterization. I invite readers to think about feminism as a capacious and somewhat raucous tent, inclusive of a variety of perspectives and approaches related to (mostly) shared themes of social justice for all and the rights and full personhood of women. In the spirit of that diversity, I will select among myriad writings and other manifestations of contemporary feminism as a representative sample—rather than an exhaustive survey—of possibilities. The four million people who turned out around the U.S. and the world for the Women’s March on January 22, 2017, embodied the variety of women, men, and children who are still inspired by the (apparently endless) quest to achieve social justice and inclusion in the U.S. via a defense of women’s rights, agency, dignity, and talents. It is their spirit that I hope to capture in this discussion.

#Feminist Tweets (1):

“to counteract misogyny and truly understand the meaning of gender difference, bash binaries!”

Trump’s campaign bombast and continuing tweets, displaying both lust for and revulsion by women’s bodies, have revived unwelcome memories of the bad old days of rigid oppositional thinking about sexual difference and gender role binaries. Directly or indirectly, Trump has communicated the idea that women (besides Ivanka) are soft and weak, valuable primarily as sex objects for men to judge, use, and replace. In addition to bragging about groping women at will and taking on the disgraced sexual harasser, Fox News’ Roger Ailes, as an advisor, Trump has offered no apology for discarding wives, whose aging might remind people that he too is past his prime. He has also revealed that he never changed a diaper or took care of his own children. “It’s not my thing,” he said on “The Opie and Anthony Show” in 2005 and again during the 2016 campaign. Men who do that “act like the wife.” According to Trump, men are supposed to be hard. They are in charge; they supply the money; mothers are supposed to bear “the physical and emotional toll of raising a baby.”⁶ Some pundits have even suggested that Trump’s 2018 budget proposal to Congress reflected this testosterone-infused idea of maleness vs. femaleness, as he proposed slashing or eliminating anything remotely soft, such as the arts and diplomacy (through cuts to the State Department) and beefing up everything hard, such as the military.

From feminist perspectives, the bright line Trump imagines between male and female identities and roles says more about the gender delineator than about the realities of sex difference. An insistence on differences—even oppositions—between the sexes may be symptomatic of childish fears of the world of emotions and the messiness of life from which women are supposed to protect men. Flagrant displays of misogyny, sexual prowess, and male dominance of anything feminine may camouflage “a fear of pain, a fear of mortality, a fear of rejection and most of all a fear of inadequacy.”⁷ Confronted with a powerful female adult like Hillary Clinton, men stuck in that childlike (fetal?) position don’t want to be reminded of their emotional dependency on women. Instead of confronting the truth about themselves, such men attack, dominate, belittle, and deride women whose lives are not devoted to bolstering male egos or providing for men’s comfort. Clinton became (and for some is still) a lightning rod and surrogate for everything that threatens men’s tight control over their own lives, including the recession, unemployment, and baffling cultural changes. Even for women caught up in such men’s despair, Clinton seemed to embody the challenges of conventional gender-role disruption, possibly epitomized by public and legal support for gay marriage. Her candidacy triggered many detractors’ lingering nostalgia for obedient women who take a backseat to male power.

Equally important for politics today, feminists also understand how insistence on

gender dichotomy and opposition provides ammunition for other divisive strategies, especially when gender difference is linked to concepts of racial dichotomy and opposition. That is, the ideology of sex/gender difference can become the prototype for oppositional thinking in many realms, as either specific gender characteristics or the assumption of gender dichotomy itself becomes attached to other issues. Abortion politics provide a key example. Feminist theorists “have carefully mapped some of the ways that structural racial inequalities and cultural understandings of racial difference shaped American women’s reproductive choices and possibilities,” as well as ideas about female identity. In Boston in 1972 (just months before the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision), racialized fetal imagery in Republican campaign materials helped to transform anti-bussing activists into abortion foes. The same tactics were used in Michigan’s statewide referendum on abortion in November 1972. There, too, anti-abortion conservatives conflated anti-abortion sentiment with opposition to school integration and welfare.⁸ In such political campaigns, a white woman’s opposition to racial integration or civil rights became synonymous with her opposition to women’s control of their own reproduction.

So how should gender difference be understood? American feminism has historically included multiple perspectives on that question, some of which might be considered oppositional. What was once called *difference feminism* celebrates gender distinctions as the source of valuable identities and lifeways and embraces what *difference feminists* regard as markers of their sex: nurturing and caring labor, community-building, civic “housekeeping” and work for social justice.⁹ So-called *equity feminists* emphasize gender-neutral characteristics and observe that all the social prescriptions and sanctions that uphold conventional gender identities and roles would hardly be necessary if everything called “natural” about gendered behavior and proclivities were really so.¹⁰ Feminists in this camp further note that the gender binary itself, which supports conventional gender roles, does not fully capture the range of sexual identities and genitalia combinations possible among human beings. Despite maternity hospitals’ pink and blue blankets, the human world includes a mosaic of possible genitalia and gender identity combinations, fueled by physiological and hormonal variations, sexual orientation, and gender dysphoria. As Judith Butler explains, various “non-normative sexual practices call into question the stability of gender as a category of analysis” in this and other cultures.¹¹

Indeed, there are cultures that have historically eschewed gender binarism by recognizing three genders or other combinations of sexual identities and orientations. Among dozens of such cultures are the Muxes of Juchitán in Oaxaca, México, Scandinavian Valkyries, some shamans among the Inuit, the Hijras of South Asia, and the Two Spirit People among the Navajo and other Native American tribes.¹² Such cultures may also recognize gender fluidity that cannot be pigeon-holed into discreet categories.¹³ Recently, both Canada and Australia have decided to allow passport applicants to use an “X” to bypass the two-gender choice of sex on the application form. Even in the U.S., where mainstream culture is stubbornly organized

around gender binaries, contemporary experiences and representations of sexuality and gender often disrupt reductionist physiological ideas about gender difference. Even traditionalists may toss the concept of gender binarism out the window upon hearing about a transgender male who becomes pregnant by his gay male partner, for example.

What's significant for the current political situation is that the apparently distinct threads of *difference* and *equity* feminism mesh on many points. First, both perspectives reject the idea that gender roles and characteristics are part of natural law. Second, they contest men's right to define women's capacities, life purposes, or roles. The differences women might celebrate are those they define themselves. Third, both strains understand that equality requires neither sameness among women nor between women and men. Rather, as Nancy Cott explains, "feminism asks for sexual equality that includes sexual difference. . . . It posits that women recognize their unity while it stands for diversity among women."¹⁴ Indeed, the whole notion of equality exists as a mechanism for grappling with the many human differences within societies and even genders.

Feminists of both camps and those in between also realize that polarization among women and between women and men is often an artifact of political manipulation, with political understood as a function of power structures and hierarchies. Catherine MacKinnon once asked, is gender simply a way to "sexualize [social] inequality between men and women?"¹⁵ She thereby highlighted the role of mandated gender difference in justifying patriarchal power, eliminating female competition with men's aspirations, obfuscating women's social and cultural importance, and pitting women against one another through their attachments to different groups of men.

Because feminists typically recognize the interconnection of gender difference with power, they also recognize that gendered social and political positions are not only historically and culturally constructed, but they can also be deconstructed. In a less polarized America, that position could connect varied groups of women across the political spectrum and world of experience in recognizing the benefits of deconstructing gender binaries in order to enhance women's economic and social rights and agency. Perhaps the current suffering of white working-class men—many of them Trump supporters—from economic displacement and opioid addiction could be a catalyst for such agreement, especially as many women in working class communities stricken by addiction face the challenges of supporting their families on their own. If the post-election smoke could be cleared, perhaps such women could see that the economic world we now live in needs less gender binarism and ridicule of women for "acting like men" and more social support for women who must shoulder unaccustomed responsibilities. Indeed, women across the political spectrum might also unite in helping men acknowledge that post-industrial societies like the U.S. may mean "the end of men," as conventionally defined by brawn and physical labor.¹⁶ Trapped as he is in gender binarism, however, Trump is probably the wrong leader to help his supporters accept and adapt to that new reality.

Adopting nuanced feminist approaches to gender distinctions means rejecting totalizing, oversimplified, and dichotomous views of men and women. It also means recognizing the diversity of female identities and lifeways that can co-exist on common ground. Evangelical Christians, Catholics, atheists, northerners, southerners, heiresses, and waitresses can all be (and are) feminists. Feminism also reveals the ways that many issues are deliberately constructed around stereotypes of gendered (and racialized) identities in order to polarize political perspectives. Reclaiming feminism is a step toward disrupting those stereotypes, freeing both men and women from habitual “party lines” about political issues, such as abortion and welfare policy. Disrupting those habitual connections would, in turn, deepen public engagement with democratic processes and disrupt ossified political alliances.

#Feminist Tweets (2):

**“Making America white (male) again will not make it great.
It never has. Those who believe in gendered racial
entitlement will be left behind. Please rethink!”**

While reinforcing masculine prerogatives and feminine insignificance, Trump’s presidential campaign also promoted dichotomous and stereotyped views about race (as we have seen, the two are related). As a candidate, Trump relied on outdated clichés about crime-ridden cities in the U.S. and exaggerated the prevalence of black-on-white crime, all of which fanned the flames of old racial grievances among his white supporters. He persistently obfuscated progress in race relations and insisted instead that they were at the boiling point in much of the U.S., even the “worst ever,” with no acknowledgement of facts to the contrary or his own role in promoting a racist frenzy. Candidate Trump also implied that Christian whites are society’s (God’s?) intended leaders and that making America great again meant making America white again. That notorious anti-Semites and white supremacists like David Duke, Steve Bannon and his Breitbart crew, and the Nazi-sympathizing alt-right cheerfully signed on to the Trump campaign made those equations crystal clear. When Trump participated on July 27, 2016, in an “Ask Me Anything” Forum on a highly politicized sub-Reddit site called “The-Donald,” he demonstrated that he welcomed racists’ support. A Stanford researcher has traced many connections between The-Donald and blatantly xenophobic, racist, misogynistic, and white nationalist sub-Reddit sites.¹⁷ Trump’s tepid condemnation of Nazis at the August 2017 Charlottesville demonstration and his insistence on the guilt of “both sides” reinforced such links.

Such open and blatant racial stereotyping and touting of white supremacy has not been seen in the U.S. since the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, which is not to say that racism ever died. Indeed, political analysts have argued that racism among some whites went underground until the 2008 election and subsequent eight-year term of a black president led closet white racists to reconnect with their

bigotry. Donald Trump was among the first to reveal himself as one of them, as he relentlessly questioned a black man's legitimacy as U.S. president by leading the so-called birther movement right after the election. Many argued at the time that the movement reeked "of racial profiling in which people of color face persistent questioning of their social belonging." Trump and his allies thereby asserted the stark otherness of people of color and, by implication, condoned a social order predicated on "asymmetrical relations between differently racialized groups [as] endemic to the very concept and practice of U.S. citizenship."¹⁸ Trump's continued commitment to undoing everything supported by President Obama, from the ACA to the Paris agreement on climate change to the Iran nuclear deal and DACA, provides further evidence of this view.

Such oppositional and antagonistic constructions of race cry out for feminist theories of racial difference and power. This is the logical next step from feminist analyses of the interconnection between gender dichotomies and racial dichotomies. Not only are racial differences often defined in terms of sexual and reproductive characteristics, but they also represent stratified sites of power and status that partake of gender inequities. Thus, a black female occupies a different social status than a white male, because of the interconnections of race and gender.¹⁹

Feminist theory and activism can be useful for contemporary racial politics in part because feminists have often been embroiled in the vexed history of racialized power in the U.S. Even in the suffrage movement, which was arguably the most unifying (and lengthiest) feminist cause of all time, racialized rifts developed as early as the 1860s. Elizabeth Cady Stanton played the race card when she objected to the Fifteenth Amendment's male-only suffrage guarantee by arguing that enfranchising 15 million educated white women would lessen the ill effects of empowering 2 million black men who "do not know the difference between a monarchy and a republic, who never read the Declaration of Independence or Webster's spelling book." In 1913, Alice Paul, founder of America's Congressional Union (later the National Women's Party), worried that the presence of black delegates at a key suffrage parade in Washington would reduce southern support for women's suffrage. So, she ordered black suffragists to stay home. (That racist order did not prevent black journalist Ida B. Wells from marching alongside white women in the Illinois delegation.)²⁰

At least since the 1980s, racial difference has resonated as an urgent alarm bell among U.S. feminists, warning of the hazards of assuming common interests, roles, values, experiences, needs, or identities among the vast group of human beings populating the problematic social category *women/female*. That rocky and racially hierarchical feminist terrain was dramatically exposed and charted in the late twentieth century via the essays, testimonials, dialogues, art works, and poems comprising *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, first published in the U.S. in 1981 and now in its fourth edition (2015).²¹ *This Bridge* focuses on the legacy of misunderstanding between white women and women of color as well as on emerging conflicts among women of color in the U.S. The vol-

ume brought stark attention to the racism inherent in white feminists' assumptions about themselves and perspectives on women of color, especially African American women, in their too-narrowly defined quest for women's rights and opportunities. Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, Merle Woo, Cheryl Clarke, Kate Rushin, Pat Parker, and two dozen other writers demonstrated how the middle-class white American ethos and lifestyle familiar to most white feminists has been lived, both in the U.S. and globally, "at the expense of people of colour."²² Even in the book's fourth edition, editor Cherríe Moraga—with a possible dig at Hillary Clinton—noted the continued myopia of "single-issue" white feminists who believe that breaking a "class-entitled glass ceiling" and "beating the boys at their own game" will "trickle down" to the lives of working class and poor women and children.²³

Even when feminists tried to combat racism within their own movement and to counteract persistent white bias in conceptualizing and addressing racism in U.S. society, their efforts sometimes foundered. For example, the concept of *identity politics* was introduced as a feminist theory and practice by women of color, who intended both to identify and to counteract historical links between white racial identity and social power and to expand white American feminists' understanding of their own racist assumptions about women of color. The phrase first appeared in the 1977 Combahee River Collective Manifesto, whose black lesbian feminist authors argued "that the most profound and potentially radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression."²⁴

Identity politics came with a significant downside, however. As AnaLouise Keating observes, it eventually produced definitions of gendered ethnic/racial groups as monoliths focused on fixed issues or concerns and adhering to strict party lines. Such "mono-thinking" promoted competition and antagonism between groups, however defined, and bred "new margins within margins . . . an ever-renewed process of differentiation, even fragmentation." It also inadvertently reinforced conventional understandings of social power in terms of static binaries, such as 'margin/center,' 'oppressed/oppressor,' 'colonized/colonizer.'²⁵ Those unintended consequences suggested additional hazards that have assumed new importance in the current political climate. That is, identity politics can also become a refuge for the protection of racial supremacy (e.g., for whites) and provide mechanisms for objectifying and demonizing marginalized groups (e.g., black welfare mothers) in what Laura Gillman calls whites' vivid "cultural imaginaries."²⁶

Conservative pundits Alan Bloom, Roger Kimball, Dinesh D'Souza, and Lynne Cheney were quick to exploit such counterproductive possibilities of identity politics in the late 1980s and early 1990s. They pounced on what they termed *political correctness*. In books and essays and, in the case of Cheney, NEH policies, they mocked affirmative action and derided the celebration of multiculturalism and feminism in the U.S. In the process, they defamed the concept of "liberty and justice for all" as a leftist proposition rather than a value schoolchildren pledge allegiance to every morning.²⁷ In shifting the focus from combatting actual racism

in the U.S. to demeaning those who work for social justice, such attacks on political correctness and accompanying calls for color-blindness sidestepped the ontological implications of race—of black, white, and brown gendered and class-differentiated lives—and erased the complex realities of race-defined power struggles in the U.S. By politicizing the concept of social justice, those attacks also widened the rift between American political parties on the subject of race.

Candidate Trump seemed happy to revive the culture wars over political correctness, just as they seemed to be waning. His “Make American Great Again” slogan, which echoed the white supremacist and anti-immigrant rhetoric of the Ku Klux Klan, built on and celebrated the nation’s history of racialized power hierarchies. Instead of proposing to reduce the inequities suffered by racial minorities, however, as many prior politicians of both parties once did, Trump’s slogan promised to amplify racial inequity in favor of whites. It preyed on white nostalgia for a utopian “past America that is specifically not racialized,” that is unburdened by political correctness, and that privileges “the overwhelmingly white, heavily blue-collar coalition now drawn to him” with intense loyalty.²⁸

Trump’s call to fight political correctness during the election also freed racists from feeling shame about their views, argues Lauren Berlant. Working class voters were “sold an ideology that hides the truth of structural inequality in an Oz-like image of capitalist democracy and individual sovereignty.” They didn’t realize “that their freedom was bought on the backs of other people’s exploitation and exile from protection by the law.” So, they took out their feelings of helplessness in a zero-sum approach. Their resentments led them to ask “why should group x matter more, or first, or get more attention” than people like me?²⁹

Because of feminism’s own struggles with racial difference and power, the movement has much to offer in today’s heightened struggles around race. Feminist theorists are revisiting the idea of identity politics and talking instead about a “non-oppositional identity politics” that strives for “a metaphysics of interconnectedness.” This form of identity politics, outlined by Keating, focuses on differences but does not encourage differences to become binaries, us-against-them or narrow identity niches that exist apart from all others. Rather the new identity politics celebrates differences but also embraces insights about shared traits and goals among differently raced people. This form of identity politics emphasizes how we are all simultaneously oppressor and oppressed, margin and center.³⁰ Through our own fragmented identities emerge possibilities for crossing conventional identity dividing lines and challenging assumptions about difference.

Mestiza consciousness does some of the same work as non-oppositional identity politics by expanding the potential benefits of fragmented identities. The concept emerged in the 1980s and 1990s from the experiences of racially mixed citizens and cross-border cultures in the U.S. over centuries. Gloria Anzaldúa has been a prominent explicator of the social and personal struggles and benefits of a mixed or *mestiza* life and consciousness. She explains that those who live in categories that muddy

distinctions of geography, gender, race, class, or sexuality—i.e., in the “cracks in the world”—must negotiate both physical and cultural borders. They become *mestizaje*, the new hybrid, the new *mestiza*, a new category of identity.” Although *mestizaje* may suffer in the “shadow aspects and . . . liminal spaces” they inhabit, those spaces can promote growth. Through the contradictions and fissures in a hybrid existence can come light and insight. Because so many Americans share this situation through their hybrid heritages, a significant number can identify as *mestizaje* and “create new ‘stories’ of identity and culture, to envision diverse futures,” according to Anzaldúa. “It’s about rethinking our narratives of history, ancestry, and even of reality itself.” *Mestizajes* should strive to banish the slash between “nos” and “otras” and “carry differences without succumbing to binaries.” “Through knowledge we question the limitations of a single culture/nationalistic identity.”³¹

In this way, *mestiza* consciousness enters the political realm by confronting the myths and limitations of identity- or race-based American nationalism. If making America great again means making America a white (male)-entitled domain again, the sentiment is not only regressive, racist, and exclusionary, it is also ignorant and self-defeating. “I really think that ‘whiteness’ is a state of mind” rather than a matter of skin color,” Anzaldúa writes. It is “dualistic, supremacist, separatist, hierarchical.” She asserts that “the future belongs to those who cultivate cultural sensitivities to others” and to those who abandon rigid racial characteristics and embrace “the nos/otras imperative (of removing the slash).”³² She thereby suggests that those who remain attached to racial and ethnic binaries and deaf to the world views of people unlike themselves will be left behind. They will fail to take part in the pools of knowledge, resources, struggles, and histories that can enlarge their visions and enhance their survival.

Mestiza conocimiento provides an important opportunity for those who have suffered from hardship and exclusion. “Wounds cause you to shift consciousness,” explains Anzaldúa. “They either open you to the greater reality normally blocked by your habitual point of view or else shut you down, pushing you out of your body and into *desconocimiento*. . . . Using wounds as openings to become vulnerable and available (present) to others means staying in your body. Excessive dwelling on your wounds means leaving your body to live in your thoughts where you reenact your past hurts, a form of *desconocimiento* that gives energy to the past where it’s held ransom.”³³ (Listen up, all white former coal miners!)

The feminist theory of *intersectionality* addresses the myth of racial distinction and purity from a slightly different angle. Whereas *mestiza conocimiento* focuses on the awareness and experience of mixed cultures and heritages within individuals and groups, *intersectionality* focuses on the social and cultural structures that create and stratify bundled identities of race, class, sexuality, and other factors. That social scaffolding can impede or enhance individual and group advancement and agency. Thus, intersections of identity characteristics—white, middle-class male or working-class Latina—create hierarchies among Americans in many social domains.

As a case in point, Michelle Alexander demonstrates that the new form of Jim Crow—mass incarceration of young, poor African American males in the U.S.—is more about white expectations of that intersectional demographic than it is about the crimes they commit. Alexander argues that much of the increase in incarceration rates can be attributed to preconceptions about the social dangers implicit in the actions of young black men (think Trayvon Martin) as opposed to the innocent indiscretions of white youth. Thus, young black men are imprisoned for crimes that would likely be ignored or downplayed in the white parts of town. Coupled with the fallout from decades of residential segregation, “denizens of the ghetto” do not have the good choices that suburban, white boys enjoy. The U.S. has a choice, explains historian Lerone Bennett Jr. The white majority could seek the same opportunities for black youth that they seek for their own children. “Or we can choose to be a nation that shames and blames its most vulnerable and . . . relegates them to a permanent second-class status for life. That is the path we have chosen.”³⁴

The concept of intersectionality would tilt the U.S. toward another path. The contemporary origins of intersectionality theory are usually traced to Kimberlé Crenshaw’s 1989 law review essay, which argued that intersecting racial, class, and gender identities create politically salient social meaning that “cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately.”³⁵ Crenshaw demonstrated that black women were invisible in anti-discrimination law because their experience and treatment could not be articulated as either racial discrimination or gender discrimination. An intersectional approach to such a problem would require examination of everything that structures the social positioning of individuals and groups, including both progress and victimization narratives, and interrogation of expectations about who plays what roles in society. Intersectional analyses also examine the ways in which various groups are characterized in the media, social policies, and academic research.³⁶ Intersectional perspectives further require an active politics of inclusion and offer a tool for deep political coalitions, as chinks in the armor of single-axis identities become opportunities to unite across conventional lines of identity and power.³⁷

The message for Trump and his supporters from these feminist perspectives is that the racial divides and racism that the campaign and first year of Trump’s administration have fomented is an edifice built on sand. A stable foundation for the contemporary U.S. would be the granite of social diversity and inclusion. Intersectionality, non-oppositional identity politics, and mestiza consciousness suggest ways to actualize the goal of inclusion by forging linkages among people of ostensibly distinct racial, gender, class and other social identities. Instead of exacerbating divisions, these concepts provide guidance for combatting structural divisiveness. These theories and practices further suggest that U.S. politics and policies should build upon rather than deny Americans’ intersecting interests that transcend racial and other identity categories.

Feminist history illustrates how such transcendent politics has functioned,

even during the country's most racially-divided eras. In the nineteen-teens, for example, some black and white women found intersecting interests, despite their oppositional understanding of race. They worked together in civic leagues, such as one promoting better housing in Baltimore, and sometimes in the suffrage movement, even in the South. In Tennessee, for example, a mixed-race group of women realized the importance of the franchise for promoting their shared concerns about social services and civic housekeeping. There were also women who worked for social justice across racial boundaries outside of any specifically feminist cause or organization during the 1950s and 60s.³⁸ In the 1970s, the National Congress of Neighborhood Women in Brooklyn, New York, was established to bridge the gap between black and white women by introducing them to issues they didn't yet recognize they shared.³⁹

Instead of just staring at one another through the smoke across racial and class divides, diverse Americans could pursue such coalitions today. Feminist history even suggests that whites stand to benefit the most from building coalitions with minorities, because minority group members are more likely than majority whites to understand the impact of structural inequities on individual choices.⁴⁰ Minorities also recognize the potency of representations of racial groups by the media and politicians—the political creation of the black “welfare queen” of the 1980s is a prime example. Indeed, such representations have contributed to whites' opposition to government spending on poor people because they erroneously believe that the poor are “substantially more black than is really the case,” according to a 2016 study. That misperception actually works against whites' own interests, since non-Hispanic whites receive 69 percent of entitlement benefits, although they are only 42 percent of the poor.⁴¹ Thus, those coal-country whites who support Trump may be among the 45 percent of Republicans, or 25 percent of Democrats, who oppose their own safety net because they believe that blacks make up the majority of welfare recipients. (Maybe Trump believes that too. Could his mistaken perception that most food stamp recipients are black and, therefore, unlikely to vote for him be behind his proposed cuts in food stamps in his FY 2018 budget?)

Cross-racial coalitions could help dispel such misperceptions and guide whites away from knee-jerk support for gendered racial entitlement and toward political positions that actually serve their interests. In West Virginia, for example, white maleness cannot protect anyone from the realities of the state's aging population and dependence on Medicare and the Affordable Care Act, which reduced the proportion of West Virginians without health insurance from 14 to 6 percent in two years. Added to the state's dependence on federal programs and funding, which whites might once have associated with indolent minorities, working-class white West Virginians might want to rethink their apparent support for shrinking the federal government and overturning the ACA, especially as one in six workers in West Virginia is employed in the heavily federally-funded health care and social assistance sectors.⁴²

Cross-racial coalitions could also help Trump's working-class white female supporters see how the racial chauvinism promoted by Trump and his administration will not protect them from the effects of misogyny and sexism, even or especially within their own communities. Indeed, race and class solidarity has never saved women from the vagaries and injustices of gendered power hierarchies. Minority women know this phenomenon well, as Beverly Guy Sheftall, Johnetta Cole, and Andrea Smith have explained for African American and Native American communities.⁴³ That Trump doesn't hesitate to savage elite white women with his crude misogyny is further evidence of the same hazard.

The anti-racist feminist theories and models discussed in this section deliver a knock-out punch to Trump's racially divided vision for America. Evidence suggests that the new president knows little about American history, yet he seems to encourage his supporters to dwell on an allegedly hurtful recent past and to choose nostalgia for a bygone (mythical) Golden Age, rather than to engage in constructive change in themselves and their circumstances. In so doing, Trump will not discover or restore America's greatness. Rather, he will hold America's greatness hostage. And even if the entire nation is forced to pay the ransom, the biggest losers will be the economically stressed, racially isolated white voters who supported him.

#Feminist Tweets (3):

“Putting America first is a tired idea, based in racism and historical misunderstanding. It will not serve America's best interests. Shame on all chauvinism!”

Donald Trump's presidential campaign and early months in office have also challenged many of the norms historically shaping U. S. relationships with the rest of the world. During the campaign, Trump lashed out at existing allies, declaring NATO obsolete and promising to build a wall between the U.S. and Mexico that Mexico would pay for. He also threatened to upend precarious balances between the U.S. and its adversaries, by undoing the nuclear deal President Obama struck with Iran, on the one hand, and promoting closer relationships with Russia and its autocratic leader, Vladimir Putin, on the other. He also condemned an entire religion by calling for a “complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States” and proposing that American Muslims be required to register and carry IDs “just like the Nazis did with Jews.” (Apparently, he didn't mind terrorizing Jews with that analogy.) Trump also demanded that terrorism be called by its rightful name, “radical Islamic terrorism,” with no euphemisms to hide its deep origins. He was further heard to say, “Islam hates us.”

Since the inauguration, Trump's actual interactions with the rest of the world have been equally unconventional, if not entirely consistent with his campaign rhetoric. On his first international trip, he abandoned the “radical Islamic terrorism” phrase and declared Islam “one of the world's great faiths.” He cozied up to

his Saudi hosts, despite the fact that the Wahhabism that underlies many terrorist sects, including Al Qaeda, originated in their country. (So much for fighting terrorism.) He touted a prospective arms sales deal with the Saudis to the somewhat inflated tune of \$110 billion. (Was this his answer to replacing lost manufacturing jobs in the U.S.?) On his next stops in Europe, where he was ostensibly prepared to reassure America's NATO allies about the U.S. commitment to the pact, he (intentionally?) omitted mentioning the keystone Article V, which states that an attack on one member is an attack on all. The omission rattled European allies. Back at the White House, Trump continued trying to craft a ban on Muslim immigrants that could better pass Constitutional muster, after his stream of tweets and lingering campaign rhetoric reinforced an "unmistakable and impermissible message that the United States Government disapproves of Islam and Muslims," as Federal Judge Victoria A. Roberts concluded from the wording of his first ban. (The Supreme Court has already reinstated parts of the ban and might further bend the Constitution to Trump's political will.)

Trump's preference for inconsistencies and erratic behavior with friends and enemies may be symptoms of a weak memory, a love of chaos, or a shallow understanding of international politics, or all three. But they are also emblematic of his promise to make America great again by putting America first. Like the "trickle-down economics" Trump favors, putting America first in the foreign relations arena is a retreat, however refreshing Trump supporters may find it. Indeed, Trump may simply be an unfiltered, unmoored, and self-aggrandizing version of an historical approach to building transnational alliances and on-again, off-again immigration policies on the basis of America's short-term convenience.

Putting America first recalls early twentieth century views that cloaked an abhorrence for the foreign-born in the rhetoric of recovering national greatness, which could only be achieved by distrusting foreigners and foreign influence and by scapegoating immigrant "others" for any decline in the nation's prosperity and security.⁴⁴ America-first-ness also channels the concept of American exceptionalism and Orientalist thinking that informed much U.S. foreign policy starting in the nineteenth century. Especially with regard to non-Western nations, such policies have often come with an unhealthy dose of cultural and political ignorance, stereotyping, and naïveté. Often the narrative about non-Western "others" went something like this: "We have reason; they do not. We are located in modernity; they are not. Significantly, because they have not advanced as we have, it is our moral obligation to correct, discipline, and keep them in line."⁴⁵ Women's alleged status has played an important role in justifying ideas about Western superiority, as adherents to that view identified women's advancement and equality as the cornerstone of Western democracy. As alleged evidence, politicians sometimes staged encounters between ideas about rights-bearing (us) vs. abject (them) women to justify political or military action. In such encounters, Muslim women were particularly pitied as victims of their cultures' "savagery" and stagnation.⁴⁶ Laura Bush demonstrated

that tactic in a 2001 speech that justified the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan as a way to use American influence to liberate Afghan women.⁴⁷ (A goal that never really determined U.S. actions.)

Trump exhibited that familiar Orientalist proclivity on the campaign trail, when he belittled the appearance of Muslim Gold Star parents-- Ghazala and Khizr Khan—at the Democratic convention by focusing on Mrs. Khan. “[L]ook at his wife,” Trump intoned. “She was standing there. She had nothing to say. She probably, maybe she wasn’t allowed to have anything to say.” While overlooking the possibility that Mrs. Khan’s silence was an expression of her grief, Trump implicitly contrasted women’s rights and behavior across cultures as emblematic of a clash of worldviews. He thereby implied that Mrs. Khan was, by superior Western standards, stuck in a backwards culture and, thus, possibly not a real American, despite her U.S. citizenship and the sacrifice of her American soldier son, Captain Humayun Khan. (In this comparison, Trump conveniently overlooked the silence and low public profile of his own wife.)

U.S. feminist activists and theorists know a lot about the toxic effects of such Orientalist attitudes because they have also internalized those ideas as byproducts of American identities and national pride. An example of this feminist Orientalism was on stunning public display in February 2001, as Oprah Winfrey and Eve Ensler dramatically removed an Afghan woman’s burqa in Madison Square Garden. Through poetry and music, they celebrated the exposed woman as a triumph of Western values over those of a repressive patriarchal, tribal culture. But feminist offenses have also run deeper, as theorists and activists unwittingly imposed unexamined assumptions about women’s rights, values, desires, and responsibilities from Western culture(s) on the women of the world, thereby avowing that women’s liberation “was based on ‘an expanded sense of ‘us.’”⁴⁸

Countering that Orientalism became the task of critics like Chandra Mohanty, who chided Western feminists in the 1980s and 90s about seeing all cultures through Western eyes. Others explained that a productive route to female solidarity across cultures and histories is not natural; rather, it “has had to be invented.”⁴⁹ Over time, such critiques evolved into important caveats for future transnational feminist engagement: differences of geographical location and culture may constitute different constructions of reality; there is no objective place from which to view women’s status cross-culturally; global feminism is suspect as a possible cover for spreading dominant Western conceptions of feminism around the world; feminists operating in the transnational NGO arena may be “femocrats” steeped in Western capitalism.⁵⁰

If only Donald Trump could avail himself of these caveats and insights. Instead of reviving the habits of “arrogant perceiving,” stereotyping, willful ignorance, and us-vs.-them judgments of “others” characteristic of the imperial West, he might adopt a more curious and open-minded perspective. Instead of positioning himself as a world conqueror, he might instead reinvent himself as a world traveler, as Maria Lugones recommends. As a world traveler, Trump would be inspired to

see himself through the eyes of others, even U.S. allies, as he seeks to understand what it is like to be those others. As a world traveler, he might also try to “inhabit multiple liberatory trajectories” rather than to impose preconceived ideas about the shape of freedom from Western or American perspectives.⁵¹ Most importantly from a feminist perspective, instead of presuming to know anything about women’s status or desires, world-traveler Trump would refrain from characterizing groups of women at home or abroad without consulting them.

As a world traveler, Trump would also reflect on the current and historical challenges and conflicts plaguing his home country and hesitate to impose those problems onto the rest of the world. Because he is not and may never be a world traveler, however, Trump has no such hesitation. Quite the opposite. For example, in the early days of his presidency, he reimposed George W. Bush’s “gag order” (originally framed by Ronald Reagan), which forbade funding to any agency that provided or even discussed abortion with women, regardless of the agency’s overall mission. Among other consequences, that order halted U.S. support for the U.N. Population Fund’s program to fight cervical cancer, thereby inflicting America’s low survival rate from a very treatable disease across the continents. Such actions made America-first rhetoric into cold hard realities for the world’s women. Nicholas Kristof estimates that Trump’s decision “will kill two or three women” worldwide every few minutes. Such America-centered policies are even worse than Trumps’ misogynistic campaign rhetoric and “may cost more lives than in any other area of his governance.”⁵²

Adopting the world traveler perspective might also enable the president to understand how issues and crises that appear as isolated dots within faraway cultures or countries are not only interconnected but also involve America’s self-interest on deeper levels than first glances might suggest. He could further see that international politics actually play themselves out every day within the U.S., as immigration, environmental threats, economic trends, and the repercussions of distant warfare inevitably cross boundaries—even oceans.⁵³ The increasingly futile wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, for example, have forever marked the health and well-being of returning soldiers and their families and upended America’s moral stature in the world. The drought that led to the rising bread prices that provoked the Arab Spring in 2011, is a cautionary tale for U.S. food production in a changing climate. The refugees fleeing war-torn areas in the Middle East and South Asia, including from Syria and Afghanistan, not only challenge the refugee-welcoming history and conscience of the U.S., but they are also sobering reminders of the unintended consequences of U.S. actions on the world stage.

Feminism can also provide the new president models for transnational engagement that could help him and his administration see beyond today’s challenges or crises. Feminists have over a century of experience in trying to address truly urgent issues that millions of women continue to face across national borders—such as sexual violence, economic and educational discrimination, limited nutrition and

health care, exclusion from governance and civil rights, sexual trafficking and slavery. And they have learned the importance of understanding the history and larger social, economic, and cultural contexts—including the role of U.S. policy—that shape those issues. That experience has motivated feminists—perhaps more than other groups—to focus on ways to redefine *interconnections* and *commonalities*, while also respecting “multiplicative and concrete” differences in oppressions and circumstances.⁵⁴

For example, some indigenous women activists in the U.S., Australia, and Canada have joined together, despite dramatic differences in the particulars of indigenous peoples’ experiences across nations. They can find common cause across those differences because of one overarching status they share—their victimization by the cruelty and disdain of colonial settler nation-states. By the same token, the Third World Women’s Alliance, founded by the black women’s liberation caucus of the 1970s radical Black Power organization, SNCC, now includes Puerto Rican women in New York. Alliance members unite around their understanding that they are “interconnected through histories of imperialism and global capitalism.”⁵⁵

As with cross-racial coalitions in the U.S., such alliances need not depend on shared characteristics, identities, or life experiences. Rather they can focus on shared *material-ideological facts* and *structured relations* characterizing a particular situation or social milieu. Those relations both underlie and transcend people’s differences. Iris Marion Young calls her model for building coalitions around such structured relations *seriality*, based on Jean Paul Sartre’s definition of a *series* as a form of commonality created not by shared characteristics but by shared proximity and/or shared entrapment within the structured relations of a particular situation or social milieu. Young illustrates a *series* with the example of people stranded by a broken-down bus. They can bond to arrange alternative transportation without having to reveal or overcome possible differences in their identities and life experiences. Being an indigenous woman in an historical settler nation-state is an example of a structured relation shared across national and even continental borders. Maya Goldenberg points out that individuals have interests across many such structured relations. Thus, they may find themselves in multiple coalitions across many issues and groups.⁵⁶

Feminist research suggests that there are many more shared structural relations that could connect the dots across nations yet to be explored. In my work with Afghan women leaders over the past decade, which resulted in my 2014 book, *Contested Terrain: Reflections with Afghan Women*, I caught glimpses of such relations throughout Afghan history. For example, America’s Cold War policy knowingly sacrificed Afghan women’s expanded political rights and access to education and work opportunities achieved during the Soviet period. Anyone consulting Afghan women leaders at the time would have learned that even those who opposed Communism still valued those freedoms. But no consultations were made—either then or before the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, which was ostensibly designed to liberate Afghan women. Nor was any U.S. support ever offered for Afghan lead-

ers' own work for women's rights. Such support would be the best demonstration that Western powers consider those rights a cornerstone of democracy. Instead, American officials made common cause with misogynistic Islamic fundamentalists and other enemies of women's rights in their anti-Communist zeal to expel the Soviets from Afghanistan.⁵⁷

Many theorists have excoriated this hypocrisy of U.S. leaders, but few have noted a possible parallel in the U.S. itself. That is, while U.S. policies were throwing Afghan women to the sharks, a major backlash to the feminist advances of the 1960s and 1970s was brewing at home. As documented by Susan Faludi in 1991, fallacious claims about the negative effects of women's (exaggerated) social and political gains began dominating popular culture and political dialogue. *Roe v. Wade* became a focal point for that backlash as early as 1977. During the 1980s, weak or bogus studies alleged that depression was rampant among single career women and that discontent among married career women was making them abandon the workforce in droves to stay home with their children. Most damagingly, pundits declared that a woman had virtually no chance of finding a husband after age 30. Faludi demonstrated the inaccuracies of such claims and revealed that the real cause of women's unhappiness, if it existed, was the on-going difficulty of achieving even a semblance of gender equity at work or at home.⁵⁸

Future research should probe these parallels between U.S. and Afghan women's declining social status and agency during the last decade of the Cold War: Did U.S. officials discuss the impact on the precarious status of Afghan women of their anti-Soviet campaign and support for the *mujahedeen*? Was the anti-feminist backlash infecting the U.S. a factor in American officials' rationales for sacrificing Afghan women's rights? Or did U.S. dignitaries maintain the illusion of American women's unfettered freedom in their own minds as they callously undermined Afghan women's opportunities and rights? Or was women's status even a topic of conversation? Whatever the answers to such questions might be, two apparently distant groups of women have reason to explore the possibilities that they shared structured relations during an especially volatile geopolitical historical period and probably still do.

Such suspicious interconnections strongly suggest that, instead of rallying around the idea of America-first, contemporary American voters should demand that their leaders understand and connect events and trends that need connecting between the United States and the rest of the world. For example, as voters think about America's responsibility for stemming the tide of immigrants and refugees confronting developed nations today, we should remember what feminists can teach about our country's historical role in inflaming trouble spots around the world. That would help us understand the possible role the U.S. has played in producing the displaced persons from those spots who are now knocking on Western doors, including Afghan women who are in mortal danger from their associations with U.S. interests. We should be especially cognizant of the history of immigrants from

our southern border, many of whom were victimized by American policies that first admitted them as needed workers and then deported or disinvented them when the need subsided. Actions toward those immigrants in the present should reflect that history and not just pander to the biases and short-term memories of ill-informed politicians and citizens.

#Feminist Tweets (4):

“The 2016 election wasn’t won so much as wrested from the jaws of defeat. But just wait. Changing fortunes are inevitable!”

This analysis would not be complete without an acknowledgement that feminists and others hoping to find common cause in difference and social justice for marginalized groups have something to learn from Trump’s election as president. It is certainly true that the election would not have gone Trump’s way if it weren’t for the disproportionate power of Midwestern states to tilt the Electoral College in his direction. It is also true that Trump lost the popular vote by approximately three million votes, virtually none of which were cast by illegal immigrant voters, as he has claimed. And it is probably true that the Russians were successful in helping Trump win through their cyber-meddling, although exactly how that worked is not yet clear.

But putting all that aside, there are lessons that those appalled by Trump’s election need to explore. The Introduction to this article offers a few, such as recognizing how dividing the electorate and pitting social sectors against one another empowers an autocrat. There is also much to be learned from predictions that someone like Trump could rise to power. Philosopher Richard Rorty penned one such prediction in a series of essays almost twenty years ago. In a volume entitled *Achieving Our Country*, Rorty argued in 1998 that a focus by social justice advocates on cultural politics would eventually supplant the focus on real politics that had served the political Left so well. That shift would de-emphasize the needs of the non-urban working class, who were losing out economically and socially through static wages, vanishing manufacturing jobs, and increasing economic inequality. As a result, suburban white-collar workers, who would resist letting “themselves be taxed to provide social benefits for anyone else,” would abandon “the non-suburban electorate.” They would “decide that the system has failed [them] and start looking for a strongman to vote for—someone willing to assure them that, once he is elected, the smug bureaucrats, tricky lawyers, overpaid bond salesmen, and postmodernist professors will no longer be calling the shots.”⁵⁹

Many elements of Rorty’s analysis seem right on target, although he did not foresee 9/11, the deepening racism that would accompany disaffected white working-class resentment, the degree of automation that would transform the economy across employment sectors, today’s ballooning wealth gap, or the financial crash of 2008. Many of those trends and events have complicated the causes of today’s

political spectacle. Nor did Rorty acknowledge feminist analyses of working class women's activism, including feminist activism in labor unions, as well as the anti-feminism of fundamentalist Christian women, all of which occurred well before his essays were written.

Still, Rorty's prescient depiction of the threat of "real political" discontent, not only to the Left but also to the foundations of American democracy, is a chilling reminder of what may be at stake in Trump's divisive and isolationist vision for the U.S. Rorty further predicted that "the gains made in the past forty years by black and brown Americans, and by homosexuals, will very likely be wiped out. . . . Jocular contempt for women will come back into fashion. The words 'nigger' and 'kike' will once again be heard in the workplace. . . . All the resentment which badly educated Americans feel about having their manners dictated to them by college graduates will find an outlet." Trump's election means that today's outlet for such resentment is a man who admires autocrats and demagogues and seeds and feeds on resentment, xenophobia, conspiracy theories, revenge, and white male supremacy. We have reason to fear that American democracy has a dark road ahead, unless more humane and non-discriminatory outlets and resolutions for class and racial resentments can be found.

Yet Rorty's predictions harbor another, possibly more heartening lesson: politics in the U.S. ebb and flow. Neither losses nor wins are necessarily permanent. What gets suppressed today is likely to reemerge in a new form in a year or a decade. The jubilation of 2008 and 2012 for Obama supporters became their despair in 2016; just as the earlier (possibly racist) despair of some Trump supporters became jubilation in 2016. The swing of the political pendulum is not necessarily flattering to our system or to our electorate, but it is as predictable and discouraging as it is inevitable and encouraging.

If Trump is paying attention, he will realize that current support for his policies, edicts, and tweets, wherever he may find it, is unlikely to be the final word on the success of his presidency, even among his most ardent fans. And for those who oppose everything Trump, there is hope that forceful and persuasive counter-narratives and policy mitigations that advance their vision for American democracy might yet prevail—even endure, if right and true enough. Until that time, history suggests that both good and bad visions for the U.S. tend to meet the same end. They will be displaced, but they will not die. That's both America's tragedy and its best hope.

#Feminist Tweets (5):

"Fake news: Racism, sexism, and nationalism are America's future. Real news: The future belongs to those who see opportunity in connection, change, and engagement with 'the other.' It's the American Way!"

Notes

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² Sally L. Kitch (2009), *The Specter of Sex: Gendered Foundations of Racial Formation in the United States* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press), 65.

³ "Kibeho 1995: A Massacre Forgotten in Rwanda's 20-year History," *Jambonews.net*, 27 April 2015, accessed 20 May 2017, <http://www.jambonews.net/en/news/20150427-4848/>; Philip Gourevitch, "After the Genocide," *The New Yorker*, 18 December 1995, accessed 20 May 2017, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1995/12/18/after-the-genocide>.

⁴ Paul Krugman, "Coal Country Is a State of Mind," *New York Times*, 31 March 2017, A23.

⁵ Roger Cohen, "Pax Americana is Over," *The New York Times*, 16 December 2016, accessed 20 April 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/16/opinion/trumps-chinese-foreign-policy.html?rref=collection%2Fcolumn%2Froger-cohen&action=click&contentCollection=opinion®ion=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=17&pgtype=collection&_r=0.

⁶ Melissa Jeltsen, "Trump's Backwards Views on Parenting Could Have Disastrous Implications," *The Huffington Post*, 29 June 2016, accessed 20 April 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/trumps-backwards-views-on-parenting-are-dangerous-af_us_57717819e4b017b379f6d602.

⁷ Jared Yates Sexton, "Donald Trump's Toxic Masculinity," *The New York Times*, 13 October 2016, accessed 20 May 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/13/opinion/donald-trumps-toxic-masculinity.html?_r=0.

⁸ Gillian Frank (2014) "The Colour of the Unborn: Anti-Abortion and Anti-Bussing Politics in Michigan, United States, 1967–1973," *Gender and History*, 26 No. 2: 351–52.

⁹ See, for example, Sara Ruddick (1989; 2002), *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press). See also Melvin Konner (2015), *Women After All: Sex, Evolution, and the End of Male Supremacy* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company), and Carol Gilligan's discussion of women's ethic of care in (1982) *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press). Ruddick's and Gilligan's books spawned a wide array of applications, reactions, and interpretations as recently as 2013.

¹⁰ Judith Butler (1990), *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge), 32–33.

¹¹ Judith Butler (1999), *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 10th anniversary ed. (New York, NY: Routledge), xii.

¹² See Kathleen M. Self (2014), "The Valkyrie's Gender: Old Norse Shield-Maidens and Valkyries as a Third Gender," *Feminist Formations*, 26, No. 1: 143–172; Ayesha Åmon (2015), "Refiguring the South Asian American Tradition Bearer: Performing the 'Third Gender' in yoni ki baat," *Journal of American Folklore*, 128, Issue 510: 412–495; Alfredo Mirandé (2016), "Hombres Mujeres: An Indigenous Third Gender," *Men and Masculinities*, 19, No. 4: 384–409; Bernard Saladin (2005), "The 'Third Gender' of the Inuit," *Diogenes*, 52,

No. 4: 134-144; Zuleyka Zevallos (2013), "Rethinking Gender and Sexuality: Case Study of the Native American 'Two Spirit' People," <https://othersociologist.com/2013/09/09/two-spirit-people/>, accessed 22 July 2017.

¹³ Enrique Moral (2016), Qu(e)rying Sex and Gender in Archaeology: A Critique of the "Third" and Other Sexual Categories, *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory*, 23, No. 3: 788-809.

¹⁴ Nancy Cott (1987), *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), 5-6.

¹⁵ Catharine MacKinnon (1987), *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 6–7.

¹⁶ Alana Semuels (2017), "All the Men Here Are Either on Drugs or Unemployed," *The Atlantic*, 9 (May), accessed 22 June 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/05/men-women-rust-belt/525888/>.

¹⁷ Trevor Martin (2017), "r/The Donald + r/conspiracy," *FiveThirtyEight.com*, March 23, accessed 9 July 2017. "<https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/dissecting-trumps-most-rabid-online-following/>."

¹⁸ Matthew W. Hughey (2012), "Show Me Your Papers! Obama's Birth and the Whiteness of Belonging," *Qualitative Sociology*, 35, No. 2: 164-165.

¹⁹ See Kitch (2009).

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