

**US VERSUS THEM: HOW TRUMP'S AND CONSERVATIVES'  
WAR ON JOURNALISM IMPACTED  
AMERICA'S SOCIAL & POLITICAL SPHERES**

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**ABSTRACT**

**CREATIVE PROJECT:** Trump's and Conservatives' war on journalism & its social-political impacts

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This essay profiles the tumultuous presidency of Donald Trump and how his influence on right-wing populist politics further polarized the modern American Republican party and deepened a war on "liberal media." I have found that former President Richard Nixon, former Vice President Spiro Agnew, and Barry Goldwater are primary influences on conservatives' disdain of mainstream media. I also found parallels between Trump's anti-media tirades and the emboldening of far-right extremist groups such as QAnon and the Proud Boys. This paper also analyzes the mysterious cult of personality behind the Trump administration and how this and the continued spread of election fraud lies could potentially be a few of the myriad reasons behind the extreme rightward shift of many conservative individuals/politicians alike. With qualitative research to analyze the significance of the conservative movement against news media, I argue and conclude that Trump and the MAGA extremist wing of the Republican Party have negatively impacted the social and political landscapes within American society.

*Keywords: Trump, Free Press, GOP, American Politics, Nixon*

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## **PT. I: WAR ON DEMOCRACY?**

### ***America's internal conflict "in plain sight"***

In America, the free press is often considered to be a crucial part of the foundation of a democratic society. Despite being one of the largest democracies in the world, the United States seems to be facing an internal conflict that is often overlooked - a war on a free press at the hands of many conservative politicians. The job of the news media press is to deliver various forms of information to viewers in an attempt to better inform and educate the viewing audience about any goings-on within the local, national, and international spheres. Anything deemed as a form of attack on the media, especially when politicians and government entities are involved, can be a warning sign that democracy is potentially under attack. It should come as no surprise that this "war" is renewed quite often, and conservatives, like former President Trump, use his barrage of attacks on the media to take down what he believes are the "elites in media and politics that want to keep a broken and rigged system (Alberta, 2018)."

### ***What is a "war on journalism?"***

In relevance to this essay, I simply define the phrase "war on journalism," as any form of scrutiny or mudslinging of journalists, in hopes to discredit and minimize the impact of mainstream news publications. The press is a major defense of all democratic institutions, in terms of releasing information and acts as a middle ground between the public and government officials, and also allows the public to hold their government accountable and work for all. Social and political institutions seem to intersect often with news media, so without a proper media function, many people would not be informed about the issues that matter most. This does not stop many politicians, however. According to the latest Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index (2022), a ranking system that monitors the overall press freedoms and conditions

in 180 countries, the United States, despite popular belief, shockingly ranks 42nd out of 180, bearing overall ‘satisfactory’ conditions. This ranking comes as the U.S. faces more media polarization as a direct result of the deepening socio-political divide, on top of the rise of far-right conspiracy theorist groups, like QAnon. Where did the divide worsen? Many tend to believe the brunt of responsibility falls onto former President Trump.

### ***The Rise of Trump: the witch hunt of journalists***

The election of 45th President Donald Trump created a lot of uncertainty for many people who did not support him, including many conservative Republicans themselves. Kizito (2021, p. 137) claims that Trump, from the very beginning, targeted news media, discrediting news outlets such as MSNBC, CNN, and even CBS News that were usually deemed as ‘biased liberal news propaganda,’ when these three news outlets often fact-check their information.

Stolee et al., (2018, p. 150) claim that Trump created a hostile feud between himself and the press and often shared his frustration about several news outlets like CNN and MSNBC through “trolling” on his Twitter account. One of the first telltale signs that foreshadowed Trump’s rocky relationship with the press came at a rally in 2016, just shortly before he was elected president. Jim Clarke (2019, pp. 62-63), shared a chilling recollection of a male Trump supporter wearing a shirt that shares the same phrase as the title of the article, which ended up making national news the very next day, and even went viral on social media and created controversy as many found that even a mere joke of lynching journalists was rather inappropriate and frightening. Clarke added that the person who wore the shirt believed that fake news was being propagated by the media, something that was continuously echoed by Trump himself. This now popular narrative foreshadows a dangerous presidency and a quick rightward shift by conservatives, socially and politically.

Trump quickly began to openly criticize and discredit the media for any news coverage he believed did not portray him in the best light. In a Brookings Institution political analysis article, Marc Hetherington and Jonathan Ladd (2020) state that former President Trump repeatedly claimed that the American news press “is the enemy of the people,” and that journalists are “totally dishonest people” and “scum.” This is language Americans heard repeatedly during Trump’s tenure, and he and his supporters only equally vilified the media even more once he was elected, further instigating an “us versus them” rhetoric that is deepening the polarization on both the political left and right and forcing moderate individuals to pick a side. Hetherington and Ladd also infer that news outlets such as Fox News have grown increasingly into opinion-based news reporting, which tends to blend news and the commentator’s beliefs into one, which often allows for an alternate narrative of reality to be broadcasted to the viewing audience.

Flavia Roscini (2021), a researcher of Global Studies and International Communication at Boston University, claims that Fox News’ system of reporting opinion-based programming can be correlated with the negative impacts this programming style has on the American political system, and quite often is not based on the truth itself. It also allows the viewers to intermingle their political opinions and identities with their social identities, which can cause further polarization in both political and social circles, as well as create a bigger firestorm of spreading misinformation, which poses a serious risk to American democratic institutions. Additionally, Roscini also includes that opinion-about-news programming has a tendency to spin factual information to create its own version of reality for its viewers, often including radicalized propaganda. Unfortunately, Trump was not the first right-wing person to undermine and attack the press to their benefit. According to Nick Confessore (2022), Tucker Carlson is a primary

example, as he came to fame by often radicalizing his viewing audience and spreading misinformation, which he is often thought of as creating a worse polarizing impact than Trump himself.

## **PART II: HISTORY ON REWIND & A LOOP - NIXON, AGNEW, GOLDWATER, & THEIR LIB MEDIA PARANOIA**

### ***The nostalgia of the liberal media scare - Barry Goldwater***

In 1950s and 1960s America, one would believe that the political scene can be argued as quite different than that of today's politics - religious and social conservatism blended with political conservatism, which was seemingly dominant, as well as the politics, being extremely less inclusive than today, as Jim Crow laws were still present at this point. As previously stated, Trump was not the first right-wing politician to instigate an undermining of the American free press. Mark Major (2012, p. 457), claims that most Americans between the 1930s and the 1960s viewed news media as relatively fair, leaving everyone else who did not believe the media was fair to be labeled as "far right-wing Republicans." Unfortunately, as the decades progressed, there grew a common belief between the political left and right that the establishment media (mainstream media) was a common enemy (pp. 457-458). Most people would cite that there is a liberal media bias, which tends to be an unfounded, baseless claim created by right-wing propagandist politicians, and is still frequently cited by modern Republicans, and is often the hot topic of debates among controversial conservative figures like Candace Owens and the late Rush Limbaugh, who used to tout anti-Democratic and conservative conspiracies (p. 458).

Barry Goldwater, though not the very first politician to make war with the news, is probably one of the most notable Republican presidential contenders to step up to that challenge. Suzanne McGee (2020), states that Goldwater became the face of the brand of far-right

conservatism America is dangerously progressing into today, as he once ran an “anti-lib media” campaign during the 1960s. McGee also claims that Goldwater was a prominent conservative senator from Arizona that had run for President in 1964 against President Lyndon Johnson, who had only been in office for one year. Though known as relatively moderate, Goldwater was an extremely divisive figure within the Republican Party and known for his outspoken, somewhat extremist stances that lead to his controversial title. It seems that Goldwater, like many Republicans around this time, felt relatively isolated from mainstream media, thus criticizing the institution of media itself and blaming their possible marginalization on the liberal bias, especially with what many conservatives believed were heightened mainstream coverage of race-related issues and topics, leaving white conservative Republicans to feel relatively excluded from society. This eventually leads to these white conservatives creating their own political, social, and media spheres to combat it (Major, p. 458).

Goldwater solidified his conservative credentials and views in his book, *The Conscience of a Conservative* (2011), which was originally published in 1960 but republished in 2011. This book was quite the success among conservatives, as Goldwater blatantly and repeatedly criticized the New Deal that Democrat Franklin Delano Roosevelt (F.D.R.) established during his presidency less than thirty years prior, believing the public is still under a “guise of liberalism,” (p. 3). Goldwater implies that America, at its heart, is truly a conservative nation and that he believes younger people (on whom he places great emphasis), as well as the United States as a whole, realize now that radically liberal values have not nor have ever worked in the country, and that primarily young people want to return to more conservative ways in American society. With this being said, it could be safely inferred that Goldwater envisioned a fully conservative approach to not only the government but also society. So what would this potentially mean for



the news media apparatus? One hypothesis would be that mainstream media would move more to the right, possibly to the caliber of Fox News. Based on the stature of American conservative media today, my second hypothesis would be that fully conservative media outlets may potentially have implemented a goal to skew audiences to the right, and of course, hold the potential to even radicalize a larger percentage of the population.

Additionally, Goldwater also believes that conservatism is the “key to national salvation,” and that there is an “over-sensitivity” to judgments of people who own and operate mass media (pp. 4-5). Though he believes that conservatism is the way to save the country, the question that is not answered is, “At what cost will conservatism be the salvation of a divided nation?” These statements seem to echo into the future, to the present day, in which many right-wing news outlets claim conservative Republicans will “save America...” But at what cost? Does this claim further polarize Republicans deeper to the right? To address the point of over-sensitivity - this term is rather commonplace across both television media and social media. This political thought and criticism of news media seem to have permeated the layers of the social sphere, as many people believe sensitivity follows an opposite view or critique of something, which can be seen as dangerous to a democratic society, especially because of the fact that it creates a deeper polarization effect. In Goldwater’s case, it seems that he could not bear the thought of a progressive society, which seems to contradict his often moderate position in the political and social spectrums.

There was always some publication vilifying liberalism and “liberal” media, and a publication called *Human Events* was no exception. This was an ultra-conservative publication that was similar to a weekly newsletter that created heavily propagandized, anti-liberal articles. This publication came into the spotlight around the time of the modern conservative movement

in the United States between 1957 and 1965, and many conservatives, including former President Ronald Reagan, praised this publication (Major, p. 460). The columns also attacked liberals for what they believed was that liberals showed favoritism towards communism and were anti-American and against American interests (pp. 460-461). This is yet another example of how conservatives managed to further divide the left and right, establishing a deeper “us versus them” narrative in the minds of the American public.

Conservatives also seemed to throw out unchecked, baseless claims, especially about Democrats being biased towards communism, when, in reality, liberalism and communism are completely different in terms of social, political, and economic belief structures. Another example of the divide is the fact that conservatives claimed liberalism was Anti-American. Sounds familiar? A true correlation can be made between the rhetoric of 1950s - 1960s conservatism and the modern Republican Party. What makes them think conservatism is in the best interest of Americans? What makes liberalism and progressivism “anti-American?” It seems that based on these statements, any societal and political changes to progress and keep up with the times majorly contradict what seemingly is an “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” mentality that survives within the Republican Party base. The values of the conservative Republican Party, according to them, are relatively synonymous with American values and interests, and disagreeing with those ideals places individuals against America itself (p. 462). These statements to single out and target liberal Democrats alone are proof that modern conservatism in this day in age is a bigger threat to American democracy than one may think, and has a major impact on the political landscapes in this country.

***Nixon’s and Agnew’s Smoke and Mirrors:***

The conservative war on the media did not stop there, unfortunately, as another politician chose to carry the torch to continue the mudslinging: Richard Nixon.

One of the most prominent yet controversial Republican political figures of the mid-twentieth century is 37th President Richard Nixon. Nixon rose to notoriety for his presidential campaign in 1960 against Democratic nominee John F. Kennedy, in which Nixon lost his election bid. Nixon, like President Trump, had many problems with the news media himself and often found himself squabbling with the press through his scathing rebukes. So what made Nixon have a deep animosity towards journalists?

Spiro Agnew, former vice president under Richard Nixon, also had an issue with what he believed was media impartiality against not just Nixon but conservatives in general. He was the leading voice piece for Nixon during his tumultuous presidency. He made a speech at an Iowa Republican Party meeting in 1969 that harshly rebuked all non-conservative news outlets. Agnew also attacked and demeaned broadcast journalism's overall credibility, citing that network journalism involved an elite and biased “small band” (Cressman, 2021, p. 27). As with statements such as Agnew’s, there was not much shock in the reactions following the broadcasted speech, given that the media already knew that Nixon and his administration already had a strong opposition and relatively irrational disdain for the news media. President Nixon’s administration was the first to outwardly criticize and attack the news media, treating the institution as more of a political rival (p. 28). This inaugural attack on the American press will eventually become realized as the foundational building block for when Trump campaigns and wins the presidency against Hillary Clinton in 2016. These approaches to discredit the media eventually became known as ‘Agnewism,’ in which Nixon, Vice President Agnew, and even White House aides openly attacked media credibility and even threatened journalists and media

outlets (pp. 28-29). Though, Agnew had his own troubles with news media prior to his 1968 run, in which a news broadcast shone a spotlight on troublesome and racist comments Agnew made towards black and East Asian people. Instead of taking account of his actions and words, Agnew brewed his fight with the news media. Even before his scandalous presidency, Nixon seemed relatively paranoid of the press.

The ironic part is that David Brock (2004, pp. 15-16) California's press strongly advocated for the Nixon administration. Brock also claims that Nixon always believed that the media "had it out" for him, especially in one case in 1950 of his accusing Alger Hiss of having some ties to communists and instigating slanderous accusations against the California Democratic Senate Candidate Helen Gahagan Douglas (p. 16). This unsettling yet irrational paranoia of the media Nixon also shows in his 1960 run for President. Brock states that when Nixon lost to Democrat John F. Kennedy, Nixon further pushed this narrative that the "liberal media" was strongly biased against him and further reinforced his paranoid views and behavior. After a failed run for California governor in 1962, Nixon's hatred for the media peaks, and he quits politics until 1968 (pp. 16-17).

During the stretch of Nixon's presidency, his political troubles grew and loomed more extensively than imagined. Nixon seemed to have blended his fear and hatred of the media with religion by recruiting the help of the infamous Pastor Billy Graham who was an evangelist that aided Nixon with his reelection campaign in 1972. Graham was a staunch critic of the press himself, a strong conservative who had a deep hatred for communism. He became a significant supporter of the anti-communism movement and even stated his belief that Jewish people dominated the media - which was a significant problem in his eyes, and pushed the false narrative that the root cause of Jews having complete control of the media refers back to the

Bible. Graham believes the Bible claims that there were 'satanic Jews (pp.17-19).' This seems to be a classic case of antisemitism used by conservatives like Billy Graham to further push the "us versus them" narrative and pin the public against Jewish media executives. This is another frightening example of using "us versus them" in fragile political and overlapping social settings. Brock warns that this rhetoric by religious leaders such as Graham could have led to senseless antisemitic violence against these media executives (p. 19).

Nixon made the basis of his reelection to virtually raise hell for the press and go attack the media in their most vulnerable spots, which the main spot was what he believed was their unwavering support for "ultra-liberal" causes, as well as his claim to place major emphasis on discredited the press his primary objective (p. 17). Nixon and his White House Staff went to great lengths to provoke and intimidate the media, and an "Enemies List" was made: journalists virtually were the overwhelming majority of individuals and institutions on the list, and several journalists even had a diminished sense of safety, when it was revealed that their phones were tapped, which was part of what became known as the infamous Watergate Scandal in the 1970s (pp. 17-19).

Nixon's paranoia of the media began to come full circle: he and Agnew were involved in corrupt government activities, and diminishing the overall validity and effectiveness of the press would seemingly distract the American public from what was going on behind closed doors. This shows that Nixon's war on the press was willing to go forward and take out anyone by any means necessary, as long as the media looked as villainous as possible, even if he looked like a complete authoritarian. His days of tormenting the free press ended in 1974 once it was revealed he was a co-conspirator of the Watergate Hotel Scandal and resigned to avoid impeachment and removal from the Oval Office. Though Nixon resigned from office, he may have unknowingly

helped lay out the blueprint of the Republican war on news media for future presidents like Donald Trump.

### **PART III: A FALSE SENSE OF SALVATION: POLITICAL VIOLENCE & THE CHURCH OF TRUMP**

#### ***What made Trump appeal to voters?***

One thing that many people have said over the past few years both before and during the presidency of Donald Trump is that Trump is an honest man and his political outsider status, as well as his straightforward demeanor, is what has drawn many conservatives towards him. However, there are also more radicalized evangelical individuals that believe far deeper things about the former President that may leave many others scratching their heads and raising an eyebrow. Many people tend to believe that Trump is an individual who “does not stick to a script” or is “honest.” However, Trump is best known as a political outsider - someone with little to no political experience prior to his candidacy and eventual presidency. Though Trump was not much of an agreeable leader, he had the charisma and strong, defiant, in-your-face personality that won many Republicans over. Trump was relatively caustic and mimicked the personalities of the very voters that would elect him into office, which allowed him to win so many people over, as well as his blatant disregard and contempt for the news media, which many voters also shared the same contempt (Fortunato et al., 2018, p. 793).

#### **The Occultic Behavior of Trump’s Base + The Big Lie**

A cult of personality refers to unwavering praise and support for a leader by either a government entity or its supporters. Cults of personality usually also involve an unquestionable idolization of a figurehead and often exalts said leader as a ‘hero’ of some sort. A primary example of this would be when Trump-loving conservatives made a golden statue of Donald

Trump and wheeled it around the 2020 CPAC (Conservative Political Action Conference) Conference. This would hit media airwaves, and instead of rebukes from many evangelicals, their support for Donald Trump was relatively unphased by the golden statue ‘worship’ of the President.

Trump is clearly a person who truly believes that rules simply do not apply to him (Koch, 2022, p. 198).

Another disturbing thing is using God and Christianity to defend and justify Trump’s election to the Oval Office. Somehow, many believe that Trump was oddly on a different level than humans as if he were almost this supernatural being. One of the most infamous theories by the evangelical right is the belief that God sent Donald Trump to save America from “the radical left,” or that God wanted Trump to be president. Especially high-profile Republicans touted these, including Sarah Huckabee Sanders, who was Trump’s former White House press secretary (p. 198).

Though the belief that God wanted Trump in the office seemed to have fallen flat when he lost his 2020 reelection campaign bid to current President Joe Biden. This upset election angered a vast majority of Trump's support base, and this became the perfect opportunity for Trump to begin yet another attack against the news media and the election system for his loss. He blamed the “liberal” media for calling the election for President Biden, citing that he was the true winner and he was re-elected by a “landslide.” Using his election loss to spread lies about the media being biased in favor of Democrats, one of his many baseless accusations about the 2020 election.

Another example of Trump’s occult leader behavior is from a rally in Fort Wayne, Indiana, just a few days before the 2018 midterm elections. One thing that sets Trump apart from

many other presidents is that he knows how to radicalize and manipulate his supporters with false accusations and propaganda. He stated how the “radical Democrats” would destroy America by undoing everything he had claimed to build up in just two years (Hassan, 2019, pp. 192). With media broadcasts of Trump’s speech at the Fort Wayne rally, his fear-mongering rhetoric to attack news media managed to persuade and terrify older white people, which proved his campaign was based on implementing an ideology of fear and us versus them techniques (pp. 193-194).

The Proud Boys is a far-right, white nationalist group that made numerous headlines during the Summer 2020 George Floyd protests. This group wreaked much havoc and drove further division by arriving at peaceful protests and inciting violence alongside police against the protestors. Many were armed with guns, and mace, which were used to attack protestors. This organization of only men benefited and thrived under the presidency of Donald Trump, whom they were staunch supporters of. The Proud Boys group often cited Trump as their Commander-in-chief, taking anything he may infer in the news as an order to their group. An infamous example comes from the second presidential debate with current President Joe Biden, where Trump tells the domestic terrorist group to “stand back and stand by (Ronayne & Kunzelman, 2020).” Once this hit the media airwaves, many far-right extremists, like the Proud Boys, interpreted this message as a standby call for more violence in the name of Trump. This is solid evidence that Trump, whether directly or indirectly, used the media to influence and spread messages to dangerous groups, and this was no exception.

One of the most infamous conspiracy theory groups to emerge into the mainstream media in recent years is the far-right group QAnon. They rose to mainstream infamy during Trump’s presidency, sharing myriad baseless theories about left-wing politicians and anyone who openly



contested Trump and his actions. This group consisted overwhelmingly of people who were Trump Republicans and was also responsible for touting many racist, antisemitic, misogynistic, and xenophobic rhetoric among their network (McLaren, 2022). This group seemed to be emboldened by Trump's influence as President and also his constant defamation of the media, as he would usually cite that he does not think the press "likes our country," further calling the media a "stain on America (Kalb, pp. 2-3)." After repeated allegations as such and posing the media as "anti-American," QAnon theorists began to question the overall validity of the news media, further mimicking Trump's rhetoric.

The infamous conspiracy group started originally as 4Chan in 2017 and played more of an underground role on social media platforms such as Twitter and it was rather challenging to decipher QAnon accounts from accounts that pushed Trumpian logic, considering both ideologies complemented one another (Zihiri et al., p. 2). Trump pushed that Democrats needed to "stop the steal" of what he believed that the election was stolen from him. His most unwavering supporters started movements like #stopthesteal, and QAnon conspiracy theories included baseless claims that anywhere ranging from thousands to millions of ballots that were supposedly for Trump were being thrown out at voting facilities and discarded in order for Biden to win the presidency (Šipka et al., pp. 411-412). Trump knowingly retweeted content that would link back to QAnon, would never condemn the baseless allegations made by the group, and further emboldened members of this dangerous group (Tollefson, 2021). In reality, numerous states conducted investigations, and even states like Georgia counted their votes twice to ensure conciseness. When it became more evident that Biden won, mass protests from Trump loyalists erupted nationwide, most notably the January 6, 2021 Insurrection attack against the United States government. Trump made a "Stop the Steal" speech on the morning of January 6 and

made a rallying cry to his followers to march to the Capitol building and protest the election, claiming he would march with them (Duignan, 2022).

With five people dead and many others injured, Trump was overwhelmingly accused of inciting violence against the government, and with good reason. Trump's hatred of the mainstream media played a massive role in this insurrection, with many Trump loyalists believing that news outlets, including Fox News, lied about President Biden winning the election. Even Trump bashed Fox News at his Stop the Steal rally on January 6, claiming that they were 'traitors' for calling the election for Biden.

Trump was an individual that can be described as a self-defined savior. He claimed that he was the only person that could save America from what he believed was the "radical left" that was destroying the country and making our nation great again (Reyes, 2020, pp. 4-5). Trump would also take his disdain and scrutiny to social media: Twitter. Here, he would disparage politicians, journalists, and even his own Vice President, Mike Pence, when he would not challenge the election results. Trump's echo chamber of pushing conspiracy theories to the forefront of the media airwaves permeated the Republican Party, as nearly 150 Republican House members voted against certifying the 2020 election results the day after the insurrection (Tollefson, 2021). In reality, Trump only endangered the democracy of the United States and the news institutions due to his tirades of corruption and misinformation.

#### **Part IV: A NATION DIVIDED CANNOT STAND - A WARNING ON FAR-RIGHT EXTREMISM**

##### ***Concluding thoughts and advice to the American people and government:***

In this capstone essay, with the assistance of qualitative research of scholarly articles and political science research, there have been parallels drawn between the conservative rhetoric of

the 1950s and 1960s to the current modern Republican Party, drawing parallels between the beliefs of then and now conservative Republicans towards the press. I have also delved into the cause of the political divide between the left and right wings and why this divide is deepening and permeating through the cracks into the social fabric of American society. I have also shone a light on some of the most democracy-threatening propaganda that has a mainstream presence through conservative news media outlets such as Fox News and how their neo-fascistic approach to opinion news further allows for more disinformation and right-wing conspiracism to spread throughout media airwaves.

It is believed that this allows conservatives to isolate themselves from the remainder of the political spectrum to paint that “us versus them” narrative they continue to portray recklessly. Room is now created for the cancerous growth of right-wing extremist and conspiracy theory groups, such as QAnon and The Proud Boys alike, pushing violence to the forefront of the Republican Party and blinding the public with a new image of conservative Republicans and erasing what the core values of this party are actually supposed to be about. This is the impact Trump and many conservatives have had from erroneously and continuously bombarding the American free press. These attacks on the media do not just have a detrimental impact on the political sphere but also on the intersecting social fabric of our nation, which I believe can and will affect generations to come.

Understanding the significance of the divisive rhetoric and tactics conservative politicians and leaders have played in the spread of disinformation to discredit news media outlets whom they disagree with deeply is purely a call to action for the American people to educate themselves on media literacy. McCarthyism may have played in both Trump’s and Nixon’s spread of misinformation and anti-communist propaganda and paranoia, as well as seeing this

ideology play a significant role in further polarizing political and social systems in the United States. It can be inferred that Donald Trump has adopted the McCarthy-era tactic of accusing Democrats, without merit, of being or associating with communists, allowing conservatives to adopt this ideology to target progressives. What could this potentially mean from a social standpoint?

One hypothesis is that white conservatives, in particular, could use this McCarthyist approach to label and target non-white individuals, as one may imply that many people tend to use is that all non-white individuals are Democrats and, therefore, could be affiliated as “socialists.” Additionally, at the peak of protests and riots following the murder of George Floyd by police in May of 2020, Trump and many conservatives used this as a means to label all protesters as Democratic anti-fascists, or ANTIFA, for short. They falsely pushed that Antifa was a terrorist organization when it was an ideological movement after the Unite the Right rally in Virginia in 2017 (Anti-Defamation League, 2017).

Trump and Fox News seemed to have used the argument of Antifa as a part of his base for his reelection campaign. They cited that Antifa was responsible for the violence at Black Lives Matter protests nationwide, when about 95 percent of all BLM protests were peaceful, as a report from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED, 2020, pp. 2-3). This move by Trump and his allies further erodes America’s social fabric, as this brought more division between white and non-white communities, on top of the divide between Democrats and Republicans. Many even believed the thought of a second Civil War was within eyesight.

Daniel Dale et al. (2020), infer that many conservatives, as well as Fox News Network, used these protests to weaponize and solidify their disdain for progress and change in terms of violence at the hands of police officers. The police, which, in many cases based upon my

observations of studying each news outlet to analyze the responses of reporters, instigated violence against not only the protestors but also the journalists that covered the events and even falsely arrested them on live television, like one CNN reporter and camera person during a 2020 protest in Minneapolis (Hanna & Vera, 2020).

I passionately and firmly believe that Americans must learn how to be news and media literate for the sake of our democracy. It is crucial to understand when someone or something is telling factual information in comparison with fallacious propaganda in order to spread misinformation and anti-democratic sentiment to create and eventually cause the collapse of the social and political structures in the United States. With the current climate of conservative media and politics implementing fear tactics and brutal propaganda-filled rhetoric against mainstream “liberal” media, it can be difficult for some to determine what news is actually trustworthy.

Sean O’Reilly (2019, pp. 155-157), makes comparisons of how Trump’s and conservative’s manipulation of the public to discredit any media that does not cover them in a positive manner, especially with coverage of the Big Lie, is relatively similar to tactics used in World War II Japan. Wartime Japan used the media to promote lies and propaganda about the actual happenings in the war and manipulated the population to push lies of Americans and Allied Powers being the enemies.

The point I am attempting to make is simple: using propaganda-filled media to promote lies to the public and having news-illiterate individuals who cannot evaluate whether the received information is accurate is a threat to democracy in America. America’s democracy seems more fragile than one may imagine, and the verbal dismantlement of the American free

press at the hand of conservative media and politicians like Donald Trump only helps crumble the democratic foundation until it cannot be repaired.

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