Most Americans surveying the wreckage of the national political landscape amid the 2016 presidential election are startled, most of all, by the ugliness and violence that has suddenly returned to our electoral politics thanks to the prominence of racist Far Right ideology in the Republican contest. And they shudder at the prospect of what that might mean for the nation’s politics long after de facto Republican nominee Donald Trump departs the scene—whenever that may be.

Almost as suddenly as Trump himself emerged as a major player in the race, so too did an array of White Nationalists and supremacists, conspiracists and xenophobes, and even Klansmen and skinheads. For decades these figures had been relegated to the outskirts of right-wing politics, and many mainstream observers seemed to think they’d gone extinct.  

The brashly offensive statements made by Trump about any number of minority groups or other individuals have likewise confounded observers. “He is defying the laws of political gravity right now,” exclaimed mainstream political consultant Michael Bronstein in January. “Inside the presidential race, any one of these lines, if they were associated [with] another candidate, it would’ve ended the candidacy.”

But the normal rules simply do not apply with Trump. Although he presents himself as a truth-talking business conservative—having emerged largely from these ranks—Trump has transformed himself into a creature of the populist Hard Right, the movement to which he owes his electoral success. The ideology that is identifiable through the candidate’s braggadocious and at times incoherent speaking style is the “producerist” narrative, which pits ordinary White working people against both liberals—who are cast as an oppressive class of elites—and the poor and immigrants, who are denigrated as parasites.

Producerism has historically been tied to far-right movements, whether the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s or the Patriot/militia movement of the 1990s and today. The rhetoric of the militia movement, which arose during the Bill Clinton administration, served to help mainstream the Radical Right. Most of these militias initially presented themselves as ordinary civic organizations devoted to protecting people’s rights and property, even as they gathered a large number of violent militants within their ranks. But any positive spin on the movement was derailed by acts of terrorism associated with the movement, like the Oklahoma City bombing. Marginalized, the Patriots largely went into hiatus in the early part of the new century, during the conservative Republican administration of George W. Bush, but the motivations that fueled their movement remained very much alive.

During the same years that militias were first organizing, right-wing media simultaneously arose as a separate propaganda organ that demonized liberals and presented conservatives as the only true American patriots. The following decade, during the Iraq War, conventional right-wing rhetoric on outlets like Fox News became vociferous and eliminationist: liberals were derided as “soft on terror,” and any criticism of Bush and his administration was denounced as “treasonous.” Meanwhile, conspiracist elements of the Far Right found fuel in the aftermath of September 11th, which produced an entire cottage industry devoted to proving the terror attacks part

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Hand-in-hand with these beliefs about the Constitution came a panoply of conspiracy theories: that a nefarious New World Order is plotting to enslave all of mankind; that President Obama was born overseas and plans to institute Sharia law; that climate change is a scam dreamed up by land-planning environmentalists and leftists seeking to control every facet of our lives.

This is a universe in which facts, logic, reason, and the laws of political gravity do not apply. And early on, Donald Trump identified its politics with his own.

“I think the people of the Tea Party like me,” he told a Fox News interviewer in 2011, “because I represent a lot of the ingredients of the Tea Party. What I represent very much, I think, represents the Tea Party.”

Trump in action has certainly delivered on that. The opening salvo of his campaign, in which he castigated Mexican immigrants as criminals and rapists and promised to erect a border wall, was straight out of the Tea Party's hardcore nativist playbook. And his subsequent positions and rhetoric—attacking “the Establishment,” Black Lives Matter and “political correctness,” vowing to out-smart China on trade, promising to protect the Second Amendment, promising to overturn Roe v. Wade and suggesting that women who get abortions could be jailed—were similarly straight out of the far-right populist milieu.

Most of all, his claim that his personal wealth would make him, as president, immune to the demands of the wealthy and other special interests, formed the foundation for his populist appeal, as someone who would look out for the interests of “ordinary Americans.” That appeal was bolstered by his promises to get the nation’s economic engine into high gear, voiced in common terms: “We’re going to get greedy for the United States,” he told a crowd in Las Vegas. “We’re gonna grab and grab and grab. We’re gonna bring in so much money and so much everything. We’re going to make America great again, I’m telling you folks.”

Trump has cannily tapped a large voting bloc that was already created by conservative movement activists, and made large by the very rhetoric and ideology that nearly all of the movement’s media organs embraced to some degree before his arrival on the scene. Before the Trump campaign, these true believers of the Hard Right were thought to comprise the margins of the Republican Party, a tiny subset that had no voice and even less power. What the Trump campaign reveals, unquestionably, is that they are no longer so tiny, nor so powerless.

Even if Trump were to fade away after 2016—something that is becoming an

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