

**Advanced Institute, Winter 2018**  
**UNDERSTANDING POPULISM**  
**Instructor: Matthew Continetti**  
**Washington, DC**

The conservative movement is divided over the question of Donald Trump. At issue is the philosophy of nation-state populism that drove his insurgent campaign and led to his presidency. This philosophy, which differs in emphasis and approach from that of other post-Cold War presidents, is both enduring and undefined. Reaching as far back as Andrew Jackson, and carrying through, in different ways, Ronald Reagan, Ross Perot, Patrick Buchanan, and Sarah Palin, the nation-state populist tradition diverges from conservatism on trade, immigration, entitlements, and infrastructure, and from liberalism on sovereignty, nationalism, identity politics, and political correctness. In this weekend seminar, students will explore the phenomenon of populism, its causes, and its potential consequences for American politics.

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**Friday, March 9, 2018**

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**6 pm to 8 pm**

**Introductions and Dinner**

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**Saturday, March 10, 2018**

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**8:30 am to 9 am**

**Group Breakfast**

**9 am to Noon**

**Session 1: The Populist Insurgency**

Readings:

- “Populism: A Three-Part Essay,” Francis Fukuyama, *The American Interest*, November/December 2017
- “The Jacksonian Tradition” Walter Russell Mead, *The National Interest*, Winter 1995

Discussion Questions:

1. Compare Fukuyama and Mead’s essays: What is populism? What is its key characteristics? From what does it arise?
2. What is the relationship of populism to nationalism?
3. Is it important to distinguish between left- and right-wing populism?
4. Is American populism distinctive from populism abroad (Latin America, Europe)?
5. Is populism best understood as a threat or corrective to democracy?

**12:00 pm to 1:30 pm**

**Lunch and Discussion**  
**Guest Speaker: Yuval Levin, EPPC**

**1:30 pm to 3 pm**

## **Session 2: Populism and the Right**

### Readings:

- Presidential Campaign Announcement, Pat Buchanan, March 20, 1995
- Republican National Convention Speech, Sarah Palin, September 3, 2008
- Inaugural Address, Donald Trump, January 20, 2017
- Remarks to the People of Poland, Donald Trump, July 6, 2017
- Remarks at “The Spirit of Liberty: At Home, In The World” Conference, George W. Bush, October 19, 2017
- “Populism, I: American Conservatism and the Problem of Populism,” George Nash, *The New Criterion*, September 2016
- “What’s the Deal with Trump?” Christopher Caldwell, *The Weekly Standard*, September 7, 2015

### Discussion Questions:

1. How does populism express itself on the right? Compare the speeches of Buchanan, Palin, and Trump. What similarities and differences do you see in their rhetoric?
2. Looking at the George W. Bush speech, where does the “populist” wing diverge from the “establishment wing” of the Republican Party?
3. Does populism reflect a development of, or a departure from, the conservative tradition in America? What argument does Nash make? Caldwell?

**6 pm to 8 pm**

## **Dinner and Discussion**

**Guest Speaker: Christopher Caldwell,  
*The Weekly Standard***

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**Sunday, March 11, 2018**

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**8:30 am to 9 am**

## **Group Breakfast**

**9 am to Noon**

## **Session 3: Populism and the Left**

### Readings:

- Presidential Campaign Announcement, Bernie Sanders, March 20, 2015
- A Future to Believe In Rally in Eugene, Oregon, Bernie Sanders, April 28, 2016
- U.S. Air Force Academy Commencement Address, Barack Obama, June 2, 2016
- “The Populist Prophet,” Margaret Talbot, *The New Yorker*, October 12, 2015
- “How Democrats Killed Their Populist Soul,” Matt Stoller, *The Atlantic*, October 24, 2016

### Discussion Questions:

1. How does populism express itself on the left? Compare Sanders’ speech to those of Buchanan, Palin, and Trump. What similarities and differences do you find?

2. Looking at the Obama speech, where does the “populist wing” diverge from the “establishment wing” of the Democratic Party?
3. Does populism reflect a development of, or a departure from, modern liberalism? What argument does Talbot make? Stoller?

**Noon to 2 pm**

**Lunch and Closing Conversation**