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Renegade Neoliberalism and Reactionary Politics: Donald Trump, Higher Education, and the Public Sphere

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Renegade Neoliberalism and Reactionary Politics: Donald Trump, Higher Education, and the Public Sphere

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Abstract: Neoliberalism is undoubtedly the hegemonic governing rationality of the early 21st century. However, despite its apparent infiltration into various spheres, such as education, scholars have often understood it as a monolithic phenomenon. Because of this, the rise of Donald Trump has been difficult to explain. While Trump certainly fits into the standard neoliberal definition in many regards, there are areas where his political ideology is less explicable—his positions on trade, and his authoritarianism, for example. This thesis argues that Trump represents a new trend in neoliberalism –renegade neoliberalism. Using higher education as a case study, it argues that renegade neoliberalism is characterized by anti-intellectualism, demagoguery, and authoritarianism, among other traits. In doing so, it maintains that neoliberalism’s theorizations thus far are limited, in that they conceptualize neoliberalism as a static rather than developing ideology. Finally, it compares and contrasts the respective higher education policies of the Trump and the Obama Administrations in order to analyze how two “neoliberal” figures can express neoliberalism in vastly different ways.

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INTRODUCTION

For decades, scholars have critiqued the infiltration of neoliberalism into the public realm. Rather than remaining an economic strategy, focused primarily on domestic and international political economy, they maintain, neoliberal rationality has come to dominate other policy domains as well: the environment and energy, healthcare, the criminal justice system, and, of course, education. Because of this, elements of neoliberal policy have received considerable criticism from the left end of the political spectrum: backlash in response to greater inequality, the dismantling of the welfare state, and the attack on impoverished and marginalized groups.

However, factions on the right have also condemned certain components of textbook neoliberal rationality. Brexit, for example, the United Kingdom's referendum to withdraw from the European Union, was clearly a rejection of the economic globalization that neoliberalism fosters. Here, the free movement of human capital, in the form of immigration, was scorned in favor of nationalism, racial and ethnic homogeneity, and economic protectionism. Europe at large has also seen a considerable increase in right-wing nationalistic fervor in recent years, rejecting cultural and racial diversity that results from increased economic globalization. Likewise, the "alt-right" movement in the United States criticizes certain components of neoliberal thought, such as the promotion of regional trade agreements. The most glaring example, however, is the election of Donald Trump.

Trump is an elusive figure politically. Authoritarian but populist in rhetoric, anti-intellectual but Ivy League educated, corporate but anti-elitist, Trump can be read as a series of contradictions. In many ways, he does express anti-neoliberal elements: his protectionist measures regarding trade, and his anti-immigration rhetoric and policies. Beginning with his speech announcing his candidacy for president, he has continuously portrayed himself as a

champion of the white working class, protecting the native population from dangerous outsiders and unscrupulous foreign enemies. However, Trump's affinity for corporate tax cuts, deregulation, and privatization reveal that we cannot categorize him merely as an "anti-neoliberal."

Neoliberalism is not a dichotomous variable, or even a continuous one. Like any political ideology, it develops throughout time, branches in different directions, and can be used to justify radically different conclusions when analyzed in different ways. However, despite its different variations, one thing is certain: neoliberalism is the dominant governing rationality of the early 21st century (Brown 2015, Bourdieu 1998, Giroux 2014, Harvey 2005). Therefore, it is also not productive to understand neoliberalism merely as a set of policy prescriptions. Steger and Roy's (2015) DLP model –deregulation, (trade) liberalization, and privatization –is necessary, but insufficient.

In this paper, I argue that Trump represents *renegade neoliberalism*, a new stage of neoliberal development characterized by anti-intellectualism, demagoguery, branding, and nationalism. Using the policy arena of higher education as a case study, I maintain that renegade neoliberalism, while consistent with traditional neoliberal values such as markets and efficiency, is also reliant on authoritarian tendencies and the rejection of facts. Throughout his campaign and into his presidency, Trump tapped into the disillusionment and the precarious position of the white working class. His message –reject the system, drain the swamp, ignore expert opinions, and return to an idealized time –continues to resonate with a large segment of the population. Armed with his forceful and tactless demeanor and with his wealth, he alone would "Make America Great Again."

However, Trump's ascent to office did not subvert the larger power structures, but often reinforced the status quo. Rather than "draining the swamp," for example, he appointed his wealthy comrades to state positions. While certain elements of his policy, such as tariffs, stray from the official GOP platform, they are clearly intended to please wealthy donors –such as steel corporations –rather than his populist base. Furthermore, he continues to subscribe to market values, equates wealth with virtue, and promotes traditional neoliberal policy through many methods. He does so in a way, however, that appeals to the disenchanting masses. Thus, Trump represents a neoliberal reaction to the unsustainability of neoliberalism. America is being cheated, he maintains, but the blame does not rest on any political, economic, or social system. Instead, it rests on the immigrants, the elitists, the terrorists, the ethnic and racial minorities, and PC culture. This allows Trump to appear as an "outsider," or a renegade, without actually subverting the system or altering its neoliberal political, economic, or cultural order.

Chapter One both 1) tracks the history of neoliberal thought and analyzes its different theorizations, and 2) examines the neoliberal impact on higher education specifically. I argue that Foucauldian, Bourdieuan, and Marxist interpretations of neoliberal ideology and development are each helpful in developing a conceptual framework through which to understand the emergence of renegade neoliberalism. However, they perceive neoliberalism as a static phenomenon, rather than a changing ideology. I also examine the theoretical approaches to the neoliberalization of higher education, particularly those of Wendy Brown in *Undoing the Demos* and Henry Giroux in *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education*. I argue that Wendy Brown continues the Foucauldian tradition in her conceptualization of neoliberal thought, and, likewise, that Giroux continues the Bourdieuan.

Although Trump’s ideology could be analyzed through other policy arenas, such as immigration, trade, or taxation, higher education presents a particularly interesting case. While historically culpable for excluding people of lower socioeconomic status, women, and racial and ethnic minorities, higher education has nonetheless been formerly understood as a quintessential public good, necessary in order to create a civically minded and critically thinking population. Therefore, theorists have already analyzed the impact of neoliberalism on higher education, and the resulting effect on the university as a democratic public sphere. Furthermore, higher education is interesting when considering the contrast between the Trump and the Obama Administrations, and between Trump and Obama themselves as political figures. For example, Obama, while neoliberal, was also an intellectual symbol. Trump, in juxtaposition, is famous for swindling low-income students out of money with Trump “University.”

Having established these theoretical models, Chapter Two explores the Obama Administration’s higher education policy. In doing so, it argues that Obama represents a continuation of neoliberal infiltration into higher education, characterized by market values, monetary language, and individualization. However, Obama represents what I will call progressive neoliberalism (Fraser 2017). While promoting increased opportunity for historically marginalized groups, Obama still justified higher education as an instrumental mechanism for economic growth, rather than as a democratic public good. This is exemplified in the administration’s measures to “rate” institutions of higher education based on the future earning potential of their students. Thus, when evaluating the Trump Administration, the Obama Administration is useful as both a comparison and as a way to provide historical context.

Finally, Chapter Three analyzes Trump’s higher education policy, and, in doing so, argues that he represents a new stage of neoliberal development: renegade neoliberalism. This is

reflected through Trump “University,” through his rhetoric, including Trump’s signature anti-intellectual style of speaking and his rejection of facts, and through the appointment of Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education. While higher education is a small aspect in the larger political arena, and thus presents a small lens, it is still a useful one in analyzing his ideology as a whole. Quintessential for renegade neoliberalism is the rejection of intellectual “elitists,” and, thus, college campuses and institutions of higher education. Under renegade neoliberalism, intellectualism is not only impractical and fruitless, but also dangerous and untrustworthy. While the Trump Administration has not prioritized their higher education policy, it still provides a useful window through which to understand his ideology as a whole.

CHAPTER 1—THEORIZING NEOLIBERALISM AND HIGHER EDUCATION

The term “neoliberalism” is often understood, both politically and economically, as a set of broad policy preferences –liberalization (of trade), deregulation, and privatization (Steger and Roy 2010). Proponents of neoliberal theory support the opening of markets, the free movement of capital (including human capital), and the destruction of barriers to foreign direct investment. They also frequently aim to dismantle invasive governmental intervention in economic affairs, citing the rationale that the market can more efficiently accomplish what the state bureaucracy cannot. Under neoliberal theory, the sole purpose of government is to protect private property and individual rights. Thus, governmental involvement in any other realm is not only superfluous and counterproductive, but also a tyrannical abuse of power. Furthermore, economic freedom equates to political freedom, and a deregulated capitalist economy is deemed necessary for a flourishing democratic society (Friedman 1962, 16). The ideal political sphere should be structured like a market, where individuals express citizenship through their economic decisions. In this realm, neoliberalism is often criticized for promoting aggregate economic growth above societal development, for fostering consumerism, and for permitting enormous global inequality and exploitation.

However, through its economic policy, scholars have also come to understand neoliberalism as a philosophy dictating other aspects of life. An extension of its classically liberal roots, neoliberalism emphasizes the individual over the community, thereby privatizing previously public concerns. Under neoliberal rationality “all spheres of existence are framed and measured by economic terms and metrics, even when those spheres are not directly monetized” (Brown 2015, 10). Finally, by promoting market exchange over community, a neoliberal economic system also ultimately affects politics and civic engagement. When individuals are

encouraged to continually act in their own self-interest, for example, societal responsibility is undermined –creating consequences for public life.

However, neoliberalism is not a monolithic concept, but a changing and evolving governing rationality. Therefore, it is important to examine the ways in which it has previously been theorized, but also to examine how these theorizations do not capture its dynamics. The first section of this chapter contextualizes neoliberalism as a hegemonic governing rationality. In doing so, it analyzes three broad categorizations through which to theorize neoliberalism: Foucauldian, Bourdieuan, and Marxist. While these conceptualizations are all useful in understanding the emergence of Trump, they are not sufficient alone. They provide lenses through which to comprehend neoliberalism as though it is one single thing, without describing its variants. Neoliberalism, instead, must be understood as a developing and changing ideology that does not exist in a political, economic, or cultural vacuum. The second part of the chapter uses these three broad categories to examine how the relationship between neoliberalism and higher education has been theorized thus far. Likewise, it examines the impact on the university as a democratic public sphere.

The History of Neoliberal Economic Policy and Neoliberal Thought

Neoliberalism developed as a reaction to prominent state interventionist policies –debt relief, inflation-curbing measures, and the promotion of full employment and the welfare state – in Europe and the United States. Intended to speed recovery from World War II and the Great Depression, these initiatives were purportedly necessary in order to avoid both economic collapse and great human suffering. This form of intervention, known as “embedded liberalism,” was expressed through Keynesian economics –the theory that economic growth occurs when the government uses economic and fiscal policy to stimulate demand (Harvey 2005, 9). From

FDR's New Deal to Johnson's War on Poverty, Keynesianism remained the hegemonic economic philosophy in the United States for decades. In fact, responding bitterly to Nixon's wage and price controls, and his creation of the Environmental Protection Agency, Milton Friedman famously declared "We are all Keynesians now" (Harvey 2005, 12).

According to David Harvey (2005), embedded liberalism can be understood as a "class compromise between labor and capital" (7). While still permitting the capitalist exploitation of wage labor, class division, and the accumulation of vast amounts of wealth, Keynesian economics and embedded liberalism managed to curtail some of capitalism's worst effects – environmental degradation, economic instability, poverty, etc. Thus, by preventing economic collapse and thus class rebellion, Harvey maintains, for a period of time Keynesianism was actually beneficial for the economic elite. But, as the middle class grew, and as the poor gained more rights and privileges, the compromise between capital and labor faltered.

Embedded liberalism quickly developed enemies both in the academic and political realms. With thinkers such as Friedrich Hayek in the Austrian School (ordoliberals), and Milton Friedman in the Chicago School, neoliberalism emerged as a reaction against government intervention more broadly, and against policies that promote collectivism more specifically. Keynesian economics, these institutions argued, had stifled economic growth for decades, fostered a sense of government-dependency among the impoverished, and created a lack of individual responsibility among the citizenry. If the market could be left alone, they maintained, then its "invisible hand," would yield the most optimal outcome for all parties. Equating economic freedom with political freedom, neoliberalism as an ideology promoted market competition, deregulation, and privatization above all else. In doing so, it perpetuated the notion that "underlying most arguments against the free market is a lack of belief in freedom itself"

(Friedman 1962, 21). The justification of individual freedom was especially appealing in the United States, where this kind of rhetoric had played a large part in the nation's history and culture. Harvey (2005) notes, "by 1990 or so, most economics departments of the major research universities as well as business schools were dominated by neoliberal modes of thought" (54).

Neoliberal ideology, while entrenched in academia's economics departments, also became popular politically. In 1981, President Ronald Reagan took office and immediately established himself as a defendant of "supply-side" economics. Pursuing an aggressive platform of "tax reform," and decreased spending, except in defense, Reagan announced that his central goal as President would be to eliminate deficit spending and to balance the budget (Steger 2010, 27). Simultaneously, through the Tax Reform Act of 1986, he "simplified" the progressive tax system (which entailed decreasing the number of tax brackets), thus decreasing income tax revenue for social spending (29). The combination of these two policies proved difficult to execute, resulting in the largest budget deficit in US history (29). Reagan also attempted to privatize federally owned land, and managed to eliminate various federal social programs, such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children, school lunch programs, and Medicaid, delegating them to states (34). Furthermore, his administration deregulated the Savings and Loans Industry, resulting in "a series of mergers, acquisitions, and leverage buyouts, involving some of the nation's largest corporations," and culminating in the Black Monday stock market crash of Oct. 1987 (32). Neoliberal policy often results in crashes, and "shocks," due to the financialization of the economy and its resulting instability.

In Great Britain, neoliberalism took a slightly unique turn, but with the same central tenets. In 1979, Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, promoting a platform that opposed the British Welfare State and demanded a dismantling of government

involvement in economic affairs. While she was Prime Minister, Thatcher succeeded in privatizing various national industries, including the National Freight Corporation, British Aerospace, British Rail and Associated British Ports, many cable and wireless services, and several water and power utilities (Steger 2010, 41). In the Housing Act of 1980, Thatcher also worked to dismantle public housing units, known as ‘council houses,’ forcing tenants that “could not purchase their rental units” to move, thus resulting in greater socioeconomic segregation (41). Finally, however, and potentially most controversially, Thatcher attacked labor unions, creating Training and Enterprise Councils that paved the way for “welfare to work” programs (43). She also attempted to cut various government programs, including benefits for needy children and working mothers, but was less successful in this regard (43). However, Thatcher differed from Reagan in her larger concern with inflation.

Thatcher and Reagan, while expressing European and American neoliberalism respectively, both illustrate key doctrines of universal classical neoliberal policy: privatization of previously public resources, deregulation of large economic players and of financial institutions, increased corporatization, and the promotion of market values. Since the 1980s, neoliberalism, however, has continued as a dominant policy prescription, both in the United States’ domestic policy and in its dealings abroad. Through the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (WTO), all institutions located in the United States and frequently led by American citizens, the United States pursues neoliberal measures across the globe (Harvey 2005). The IMF and the World Bank, under the guise of reducing poverty, lend money to the developing countries with particular strings attached, also known as structural adjustment programs (SAPS). SAPS require countries to accept deficit reduction strategies, open up their economies to trade, accept foreign direct investment, cut social spending, eliminate

environmental protections and worker regulations, etc.; this allows Western Governments to promote neoliberal reforms without having to engage in direct military or diplomatic action. Similarly, the WTO entails a series of trade rules that apply to member countries. Their “dispute settlement mechanism” frequently enforces neoliberal policies, such as environmental and labor deregulation (Harvey 2005).

The history of neoliberalism, and the economic globalization it entails, are essential when contextualizing the ascent of renegade neoliberalism. Renegade neoliberalism, in part, serves as a backlash to the unsustainability caused by increased financialization (causing unpredictable shocks in the economy), the dismantling of the welfare state, decreased worker regulations, and the privatization of previously public resources. These distinct policies certainly help explain the rise of the disenchanting working class to which Trump was able to appeal. However, neoliberalism is more than a set of policies, as will be shown through Foucauldian, Bourdieuan, and Marxist interpretations.

Different Theories of Neoliberalism: Foucault, Marx, and Bourdieu

Foucauldian Neoliberalism:

In *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Michel Foucault argues that neoliberalism inverts the liberal relationship between the market and the state. Under classical liberalism, he maintains, the market “could only ever be, and was in fact, only ever a tactical instrument or strategy for some countries to obtain an economically hegemonic and politically imperialist position over the rest of the world” (Foucault 1979, 107). In this way, classical liberalism is characterized by the subversion of the market to the state; the market is a mechanism through which the state gains more power. In contrast, neoliberalism is characterized by the subversion of the state to the market. Therefore, under neoliberalism, “one must govern for the market rather than because of

the market” (121). Government and law are instrumentalized for the purposes of increased market productivity. In contrast to classical liberalism, neoliberalism is also characterized by its emphasis on competition rather than exchange, resulting in significant inequalities among socioeconomic groups.

Foucault also distinguishes between different kinds of neoliberalism: European neoliberalism, associated with a greater role in governmental involvement in the free market, and American neoliberalism, consistent with the American libertarian tradition of noninterference. European neoliberalism was a reaction to the Fascism and Nazism of the 1930s and 40s, whereas American neoliberalism was a reaction to New Deal policies and Keynesian economics. Furthermore, because of its history, liberalism itself in the United States is “a whole way of being and thinking” (218). In American neoliberalism, he argues, the state should initially help facilitate the conditions under which the free market will operate, but the extent to which it should further involve itself economically is debated. Foucault writes, “American neoliberalism seeks to extend the rationality of the market, the schemes of analysis it proposes, and the decision-making criteria it suggests to areas that are not exclusively or not primarily economic” (207).¹

As the state is employed to promote the market, economic philosophy permeates everyday life. Thus, the infiltration of market rationality occurs in areas such as education, where public interests are reduced in the name of private preferences. Neoliberal rationality therefore also impacts the relationships between individuals. Under neoliberalism, humans, he argues,

¹ The distinction between American and European variants of neoliberal thought may have interesting implications for the concept of renegade neoliberalism. Brexit and Trump, I argue, arise out of the same phenomenon: a neoliberal reaction to the unsustainability of neoliberalism. However, European and American variants of renegade neoliberalism may also differ, due to the importance of “freedom” rhetoric in the United States, the differing historical and cultural contexts, and distinct neoliberal policies that result in a backlash or reaction.

become *homo economicus*, economic subjects, and rational actors using cost-benefit analysis to maximize individual capital. In this way, neoliberalism creates a culture of economization, in which everyday interactions are characterized and valued by their market-like properties.

Foucauldian neoliberalism is thereby distinguished through institutional factors –the relationship between the market and the state. In *Undoing the Demos*, Wendy Brown uses this conception of neoliberalism to argue that neoliberal rationality undermines democratic and participatory governance. When individuals are economized, she maintains, and when such vast inequalities persist, inevitability under neoliberal policy, politics itself is depoliticized. *Homo politicus* –individuals as political subjects, concerned with “deliberation, aspirational sovereignty, concern with the common and with one’s relation to justice in the common” – is reduced instead to the individual as *homo economicus* (Brown 94). *Homo economicus*, she argues, is also transformed from a subject of exchange to one of competition. Brown utilizes Foucault’s prediction of the economic subject further. As the financialization of the economy grows, human capital changes from “an ensemble of enterprises to a portfolio of investments... driven by (human) capital investments” (70). The importance of finance capital under neoliberal development, she maintains, is significant in our understanding of neoliberal rationality. Financialization not only renders the economy more precarious and subject to potential crisis, but also does so to other realms of life.

Marxist Neoliberalism

Marxist conceptions comprehend neoliberalism as a final stage of capitalism. With growing capital accumulation among the elite classes, neoliberalism is a late phase in the evolution, or dialectic, of economic structure. Thus, for Marxists, neoliberalism represents the imminent collapse of capitalism itself. While embedded liberalism and Keynesian economics

were defined by a compromise between capital and labor, thus averting some of the worst effects of capitalism, neoliberalism signifies a transition between earlier stages of capitalism and its impending end. This transition stage, initially articulated by Lenin (1939) (although he never heard the term “neoliberalism”, as it was coined approximately 10 years after his death), features increased financialization, a union between the State and this finance capitalism, imperialism, and globalization, including the exploitation of labor in the developing world.

In Marxist theory, neoliberalism is also understood through its contradictions; neoliberalism in theory and neoliberalism in practice have shown to be very distinct. For example, neoliberalism in its purest theoretical form promotes perfect market competition, but neoliberalism in practice frequently leads to monopolistic results, with few having access to the opportunity to compete economically (Harvey 2005). Furthermore, neoliberal theory is defined through the rights of the individual to make their own (particularly economic) decisions. Yet, neoliberalism in practice often results in extreme measures of state coercion, to ensure that citizens comply with free market reforms.

One of the most glaring examples highlighting neoliberalism’s contradictions, and thus consistent with Marxist interpretations of neoliberalism, is the 1973 coup in Chile. Backed by the United States, forces overthrew democratically elected Chilean President Salvador Allende, and imposed dictator Salvador Pinochet in order to secure a series of “free market” reforms (Harvey 2005). Inspired by Milton Friedman at the University of Chicago, the Chilean “Chicago Boys” advised Pinochet on economic matters, and thus developed a series of neoliberal economic transformations. In order to maintain compliance for these restructurings, the Pinochet regime engaged in a program of suppression of opposition, mass civilian torture and imprisonment, and other human rights violations. Although citizens are theoretically free to determine their

economic futures, when they choose “incorrectly,” (by deciding to form social movements that promote labor protections), “the neoliberal state is itself forced to intervene, sometimes repressively, thus denying the very freedoms it is supposed to uphold” (69). This reflects the distinction between pure neoliberal theory, which promotes individual rights, and neoliberalism in practice, which often requires strong authoritarian measures to counteract dissent.

However, the most significant aspect of Marxist neoliberalism is its emphasis on class structure. A transnational and extremely powerful financial elite, according to Harvey, has orchestrated the growth of neoliberal policy over past decades, in order to benefit themselves and their cohorts. He writes, “Thirty years of neoliberal freedoms have, after all, not only restored power to a narrowly defined capitalist class. They have also produced immense concentrations of corporate power in energy, the media, pharmaceuticals, transportation, and even retailing” (38). Even progressive reforms, to Harvey and other Marxist theorists, are often used as a compromise between labor and capital, intended to curtail the worst effects of capitalism without actually subverting it.

Marxist conceptions of neoliberalism thus highlight its contradictions, which is certainly helpful when explaining the emergence of Trump. According to neoliberal ideology, all barriers to the movement of capital should be eliminated, free trade implemented, and national distinctions ignored, as all individuals are considered viable human capital regardless of their race or country of origin. However, in reality, neoliberal states often foster nationalist sentiment in order to control their citizenry. Trump, therefore, can be understood as a figure who promotes adherence to the neoliberal state by promoting xenophobia, racism, etc. However, the Marxist conception does not entirely explain Trump’s appeal to the working class, regardless of his obvious loyalties to the wealthy. Furthermore, to Marxist theorists, Trump may represent the

final stage of capitalism, thus signaling its demise. Therefore, allowing Trump to destroy himself, rather than actively attempting to resist the structures, will be more efficient in ending capitalism.

Bourdieuian Neoliberalism

Bourdieu (1998) conceptualizes neoliberalism as a hegemonic discourse. Under neoliberalism, he argues, the logic of markets, privatization, deregulation, and labor flexibility become “self-evident” –a “universalist message of liberation” that is taken for granted by the population. Like Foucault, Bourdieu is concerned with the infiltration of neoliberal rationality into all realms of life. However, Bourdieu analyzes neoliberalism as a cultural phenomena rather than an institutional one. To him, we fail to resist neoliberalism because we come to see the world through its lens. Thus, Bourdieu argues that the only path to resistance is through “denaturalizing” its discourse, and presenting alternative modes of thought.

Bourdieu further argues that intellectuals have perpetuated neoliberal rationality for decades. “The ground had been prepared over a long period by groups of intellectuals, most of whom wrote columns in the leading newspapers,” in order to inculcate neoliberalism into public discourse (30). Through academic channels, such as the “authority of science, especially economics,” neoliberal rationality “derives its conviction of its legitimacy” (25). Thus, the public eventually cannot imagine alternatives to this “technocratic orthodoxy,” and comes to perceive neoliberal thought as the only possible option. This generates consent among the citizenry, which further exacerbates political demobilization and prevents solidarity.

Henry Giroux (2014), influenced heavily by Bourdieu, argues that public intellectuals have the responsibility to reject the dissemination of neoliberal ideas. They can accomplish this feat, he maintains, through critical pedagogy, a philosophy that regards education as a primarily

political and democratic act (2014). Public intellectuals have a responsibility to question the political and economic system in which they live, and to encourage others to do the same, thus perpetuating a “democratic” or “civic” culture. “With the advance of a savage form of casino capitalism and its dream worlds of consumption, privatization, and deregulation,” he argues, “not only are democratic values and social protections at risk but also the civic and formative cultures that make such values and protections intelligible and consequential to a sustainable democratic society” (187).

Bourdieuian analysts of neoliberalism maintain that resistance to neoliberalism, through public intellectuals, is paramount. Trump then, can be understood as a cultural phenomenon—a neoliberal reaction to these public intellectuals.

Education as a Case Study: Milton Friedman’s Neoliberal Policy Prescriptions

Milton Friedman, one of the intellectual founders of neoliberal economic ideology, writes about education in *Capitalism and Freedom*. Thus, his work provides insight into a purely neoliberal perspective on education. If Trump can therefore be understood as a neoliberal, then his policies should fit somewhat into Friedman’s proposals.

Governmental intervention in education, Friedman (1962) argues, can be justified on two grounds: 1) neighborhood effects, which entail some kind of positive externality, and 2) “paternalistic concern for children and other irresponsible individuals” (75). Education provides young people with the knowledge and skills necessary in order to participate democratically and become productive and engaged citizens (75). However, Friedman draws a distinction between education and vocational training. Education, he maintains, produces these “neighborhood effects,” and thus government subsidy towards it is justified to a certain extent. However, subsidy towards “vocational training” only improves individual human capital, rather than

society as a whole, and thus should not be implemented. If one desires to increase their future earning potential, they should have to make the respective investment individually.

Friedman, therefore, is distinct in his perception of education. He acknowledges that a minimum level of education is essential for a “stable and democratic society,” and that the government therefore has an interest in subsidizing it (75). However, Friedman draws the line long before postsecondary education. In fact, while not explicitly stated, he implies that once children are literate and can do basic arithmetic, education ceases and training, or investment in individual capital, begins. While he does maintain that “liberal arts” degrees fall under the realm of education, rather than training, he questions whether subsidizing these degrees is appropriate at all (84). At the very least, he argues, governmental funding towards higher education should go to individuals, rather than towards institutions (85). These individuals can then make the decision of where to attend college, a policy that would operate in the same manner as the GI Bill after the Second World War.

Friedman also argues that vocational training should be subsidized privately. Human capital, he maintains, is no different from physical capital, and should not be treated in a distinct legal manner. While individuals cannot be bought and sold, “in a non-slave state,” he contends, they do have an earning potential that is increased with greater training (87). Thus, private individuals should be able to invest in the vocational training of other individuals, and as a result reap a percentage of their future earnings. While acknowledging that this is akin to “partial slavery,” Friedman argues that this system could be beneficial to both lender and borrower (87). However, “irrational public condemnation of such contracts, even if voluntarily entered into,” paired with high administrative costs has rendered this system unrealized (88). Despite the unnerving nature of his excusal, and even potentially support, of indentured servitude, Friedman

appears to sincerely believe that this system would result in a greater investment in human capital, resulting economic growth, and thus a decline in poverty.

Thus, Friedman represents “pure” and academic neoliberal ideology, and reveals its contradiction with neoliberalism in practice. For example, Friedman advocates for vouchers in primary and secondary education, as, he argues, this allows disadvantaged individuals, especially people of color, to escape poverty. However, in practice, vouchers and the privatization of public schooling has resulted in greater educational segregation along racial and socioeconomic lines. Friedman also advocates for individual freedom, while simultaneously promoting what is essentially indentured servitude (or what he calls investment in human capital).

Theories Regarding the Infiltration of Neoliberalism into Higher Education

Education is one of the most significant indicators of a society’s progress, as it both reflects the society’s values and reinforces them. For decades, neoliberalism has been criticized for privatizing public education, at the primary, secondary, and post-secondary levels. Frank Donoghue, in *The Last Professors*, argues that the tension between humanist higher education and corporatist higher education is not new. Beginning with Andrew Carnegie in the late 19th century, claims that the university, especially in the humanities and the liberal arts, is not “practical” enough and is inefficient and unproductive in the modern economy have long existed. However, under recent neoliberal policy prescriptions, this tension has been exacerbated, and the demands of market governance have largely won out.

Under neoliberal rationality, higher education exists to promote human capital. Thus, it is valuable in an instrumental sense –useful only as long as it increases economic output, expands the earning-potential for an individual, or creates knowledge and information that can be exploited for profit. The university as an institution is corporatized, and the degree is therefore

transformed into a product, marketed and sold according to the economic laws of supply and demand. Rather than concerning itself with lofty and idealistic goals such as “democracy” and “civic engagement,” education is simply another economic tool, an individual investment in human capital.

Decreased federal and state funding to higher education has resulted in skyrocketing tuition rates and a restructuring of university institutions (Slaughter 2004). In order to attract tuition money, and thus students, universities must corporatize --market themselves as a gateway for economic prosperity, a place where graduates are certain to be economically viable. Competition for both student enrollment and for federal and state dollars renders universities unable to act as independent pillars of society. Instead, they must display themselves as business-like institutions, devoted to efficiency and productivity. The “best” universities are those whose graduates have the greatest earning potential, rather than those that produce the most conscientious, critical, and compassionate citizens. Thus, universities as a public good transform into universities as a private benefit.

Furthermore, the student’s role changes as well. As tuition increases, young people have been shackled with enormous student debts that they often must carry well into their adult lives. Thus, the perception of higher education changes as well --rather than being an institution for individual growth, a place to explore and learn, higher education becomes a means to an eventual end --career potential and earning potential --rather than an end in itself. To many, the inherent value of a college education declines as it becomes more expensive to acquire, even though its economic value increases. Students themselves are “reduced to revenue-producing entities rather than seen as young people to whom it [the university] has the responsibility intellectually and ethically to shape and inspire” (Giroux 2014, 115). Access to higher education is also stratified,

and only the wealthy, or those willing to take out large loans (putting themselves in an extremely precarious position), have the ability to obtain a college education. The skyrocketing cost of tuition and the complexity of the student loan system further disincentives already marginalized segments of the population from attempting to obtain a degree.

However, the most significant consequence of the neoliberalization of the university is the dismantling of higher education as a democratic public sphere. Wendy Brown (2015), in her chapter “Educating Human Capital” documents this process. As higher education is instrumentalized and economized, she argues, the university as a promoter of democratic engagement, especially in the realm of liberal arts, declines. Outlining the history of higher education, and its democratic tendencies, Brown argues that, while the university has traditionally excluded historically disadvantaged groups --women, people of color, immigrants, and people of lower socioeconomic status --it still has been characterized as an institution necessary in a democracy. She writes: “No mere instrument for economic advancement, higher education in the liberal arts was the door through which descendants of workers, immigrants, and slaves entered onto the main stage of society to whose wings they were historically consigned” (180). The GI Bill, for example, allowed many previously excluded segments of the population into the realm of higher education. This, she argues, allowed young men returning from the war to obtain an education not just for economic advancement and social mobility, but also to enter the world civically. By obtaining a liberal arts education, young people could grasp the necessary skills to become competent participants in the democratic system.

Influenced by Foucault, Brown argues that neoliberal rationality changes the individual from a political subject, *homo politicus*, into an economic subject, *homo economicus*. However, Brown is also concerned with the subversion of the state to the market. Using Foucault’s analysis

of the role of government in a neoliberal order, she argues that the state becomes a means, or a vehicle, toward an end –perfect market competition. In this view, the state should encourage privatization, deregulation, and competition within higher education. Thus, higher education policy over the last thirty years is consistent with Foucauldian theory. In the 1970s, federal funding of higher education changed from institution-centered, funding going directly towards the public university, toward student-centered, funding going towards the individual student on an independent basis (Slaughter 2004, 42). Furthermore, this facilitated the decline from federal student financial aid in grant form to federal student financial aid in loan form (42). The Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997 benefitted students and families with money to spare for higher education, rather than those that needed assistance the most, and the 1998 Higher Education Act aided for-profit institutions by relaxing accreditation requirements (43-44).

Henry Giroux (2014), influenced highly by Bourdieu, takes a slightly different approach to the relationship between neoliberalism, higher education, and democracy. Rather than emphasizing the institutional factors that cause the university to foster democratic engagement, Giroux looks at cultural factors. While he maintains that institutional processes, such as policy changes, do certainly alter higher education, his main concern is with the cultural changes that occur *within* the university, and, by extension, through all of society. For example, he argues that commercialized and marketized universities fail to promote the same civic culture, and thus render students unable to think critically about their world. Like Bourdieu, Giroux conceptualizes neoliberalism as a hegemonic discourse, and, in this way, critiques the infiltration of this discourse into academia. We come to view higher education as a business or a market, because we have been socially conditioned to perceive the world through a neoliberal lens. Giroux is primarily concerned with pedagogy itself, and as a result the consequences for the

university as a democratic public sphere (what he believes should be a place of questioning and critical thinking). Under the neoliberal model, “ignorance is no longer a liability in neoliberal societies but a political asset endlessly mediated through a capitalist imaginary that thrives on the interrelated registers of consumption, privatization, and de-politicization” (135)

As mentioned, Giroux therefore also emphasizes the role of public intellectuals in curtailing neoliberal rationality. Resistance, he argues, requires the advancement of alternative ideologies to neoliberalism, which must be articulated by those willing to question the governing philosophy. Thus, public intellectuals have a distinct obligation -- “to argue for forms of pedagogy that close the gap between the university and everyday life” (145). According to this method of critical pedagogy, education, as opposed to merely training, as is inherently a political, cultural, and historical act (143). Thus, the resistance of public intellectuals is paramount to challenging neoliberal discourse and creating a democratic society.

However, Giroux argues that this conception of the public intellectual is entirely at odds with the current faculty situation at institutions of higher education. Rather than being agents of social change, faculty are “regarded simply another cheap army of reserve labor, a powerless group that universities are eager to exploit in order to increase the bottom line while disregarding the needs and rights of academic laborers and the quality of education that students deserve” (137). They are hired to engage in research that benefits the institution, and to train students as future human capital.

Brown and Giroux highlight the significance of the neoliberal infiltration into higher education. They also, however, provide useful context when considering both the Obama and the Trump Administrations’ higher education policies. While this thesis does not examine neoliberalism’s consequences for the university internally, these changes are nonetheless

significant. The university has formerly been understood as a public democratic good, rather than as a training ground for human capital, which Trump's ascent to power certainly undermines.

Conclusion

Foucauldian, Marxist, and Bourdieuan conceptions of neoliberalism all contain components that help explain Trump. However, while neoliberalism has been theorized through different lenses, it has nonetheless formerly been considered as a monolithic phenomenon rather than as a changing and continuously branching ideology. Renegade neoliberalism is one of these branches, which I argue is represented by Trump and his administration. Furthermore, renegade neoliberalism has a uniquely significant relationship with higher education due to its emphasis on anti-intellectualism and anti-elitism.

In the following chapter, I analyze the Obama administration's higher education policy. In doing so, I argue that Obama clearly illustrates a neoliberal turn in higher education, and thus reflects the dominant ideology of the time. However, I also maintain that the Obama Administration's particular brand of neoliberalism is vastly different than Trump's. Analyzing Obama provides both useful historical context through which to understand Trump, but also an interesting point of comparison.

CHAPTER 2: OBAMA’S PROGRESSIVE NEOLIBERALISM: EDUCATING HUMAN CAPITAL

In many ways, the Obama Administration, and its relationship with higher education, exemplifies neoliberalism as it is classically understood. In other words, to the Obama Administration, higher education is a mechanism through which to increase economic growth and to lift individuals out of poverty, rather than as an institution with inherent democratic value. By emphasizing choice, competition, and economic advancement, Obama signaled to the academic community that their role was to prepare students for employment. This is exemplified in his appointment of Arne Duncan as Secretary of Education, in his rhetoric at his State of the Union Addresses, and in his policy, such as his promotion of the College Scorecard initiative.

However, the Obama Administration was also clearly concerned with expanding access to higher education to historically disadvantaged groups, such as racial and ethnic minorities. This is exemplified in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, and in his initiatives to increase enrollment in community colleges. The Obama Administration also worked to protect students from fraud by strengthening regulations on for-profit colleges, and worked to decrease sexual abuse on college campuses with Title IX. While these initiatives are certainly admirable, they still fit into the neoliberal paradigm. The for-profit college regulations, for example, were explicitly intended to increase job training, and therefore employment. This relegates education to instrumental training, and knowledge to a commodity. Furthermore, the actions against for-profit colleges closely resemble “consumer protection” regulations, again implying that students are consumers, and that higher education is a product to be bought and sold in a marketplace.

This is not to condemn any initiatives to protect students at for-profit colleges, or to downplay attempts to increase enrollment in community college. Instead, it is to argue that,

while Obama had progressive goals, these goals still fit into the neoliberal model –increase economic output through competition. Therefore, Obama is what I will call a progressive neoliberal, to which Trump’s renegade neoliberalism is a reaction (Fraser 2017).

Obama’s Background and Education Secretaries

In contrast to Trump, whose background entails a “university” scam, real estate, and reality TV, Obama was a public servant for decades before pursuing the presidency. His published books, his Columbia and Harvard education, and his witty remarks all signified an intellectual persona (Mattson 2016, Sept. 25). Furthermore, as law professor at the University of Chicago from 1992-2004, Obama has actual experience working in academia (Holan 2008). Thus, from the beginning, he was perceived as a “professor president,” or, to many, an elitist. This image was further reinforced by his speeches, eloquent and articulate, which contrasted greatly with the casual speaking-style of his predecessor, who “admitted not reading books and called himself the ‘decider’” (Mattson 2016). Bush, at the time, was “the quintessential anti-intellectual presidency,” which Obama would, hopefully, reverse (Mattson 2016).

However, while clearly valuing intelligence, the Obama Administration is complex in its views of higher education. Arne Duncan, Obama’s Secretary of Education from 2009 to 2015, for example, spurred outrage among many public education advocates. Duncan was particularly famous for his Renaissance 2010 plan, underwent while he was CEO of Chicago Public Schools, which championed a market approach to public education in the city (Giroux 2008, Dec. 17). The plan resulted in increased charter schools, an expansion of standardized testing, and the dismantling of teacher’s unions (Giroux 2008, Dec. 17). Duncan’s approach to education before being appointed by Obama, therefore, was notably neoliberal.

Obama's second choice for Secretary of Education faced similar backlash from many educators. John King, who served during the last two years of Obama's second term, was known for his strong support of charter schools (Field 2015, Oct. 5). As New York's education commissioner, he also clashed with teachers unions regarding teacher's evaluations (Field 2015, Oct. 5).

Obama's Rhetoric: Instrumentalism and Individualism

Throughout his two terms, Obama frequently justified higher education by means of an instrumental logic. Examining his eight State of the Union speeches, for example, reveals an agenda that perceives education, and particularly higher education, through a neoliberal lens. In his 2009 address, he states: "In a global economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity, it is a prerequisite" (Obama 2009). Here, Obama describes knowledge not only as a skill, rather than an inherent value or as a public good, but also as a skill that can be bought and sold in the marketplace. His rhetoric celebrating the commodification of knowledge continues throughout his eight years.

Obama also, however, references education as a means for the economic mobility of marginalized groups. In his second State of the Union address, he states: "In the 21st century, the best antipoverty program around is a world-class education. And in this country, the success of our children cannot depend more on where they live than on their potential" (Obama 2010). To his credit, Obama acknowledges the disparities in access to education, and especially higher education. However, he claims that these disparities can be overcome through the initiative of individuals, and a little bit of help of math and science programs, rather than through larger structural transformation.

In doing so, Obama also continually emphasizes that it is up to the individual family, especially the parents, to encourage children to pursue education. In his third State of the Union Address, he claims that the responsibility to “instill the love of learning in a child” comes first and foremost from “our homes” (Obama 2011). He says, “Only parents can make sure the TV is turned off and homework gets done. We need to teach our kids that it's not just the winner of the Super Bowl who deserves to be celebrated, but the winner of the science fair. We need to teach them that success is not a function of fame or PR, but of hard work and discipline” (Obama 2011). If the family fails to “instill the love of learning” then this is an individual failure, rather than an institutional pattern. These themes also emerge in his 2009 State of the Union address (Obama 2009).

It is important to note that, despite his discussion of primary education rather than higher education, his emphasis is still on the individual, or the individual unit: the family. Again, rather than highlighting structural disparities that lead to inequalities in education, he maintains that individuals, through hard work, should have the ultimate responsibility to overcome these inequalities. As with Trump, this perspective therefore has neoliberal undertones. Unlike Trump, however, Obama values intelligence and facts, rather than dismissing them as elitist. He states that we should value intelligence more in society, but again, this intelligence is only valuable insofar as it generates concrete economic benefits.

When discussing higher education specifically, as he does in his 2012 State of the Union address, Obama also justifies its existence through instrumentalist, primarily economic, means. He states: “Higher education can't be a luxury. It is an economic imperative that every family in America should be able to afford” (Obama 2012). Unlike Trump, Obama does not see higher education as a useless elitist enterprise. He clearly desires to expand access to postsecondary

education, whether that is a four-year traditional education or a vocational or community college. Thus, his stance on college affordability is not classed in the same way that Trump and DeVos's are. However, higher education is an "economic imperative," rather than a human imperative, or a public imperative.

Obama's early speeches can be viewed through the lens of the Great Recession and its aftermath. Emphasizing higher education as a means to increase employment and decrease poverty, therefore, made sense in this context. However, in Obama's 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2016 SOTU speeches, these themes emerge again and again, without mention of any inherent value higher education. In 2013, when discussing his college scorecard initiative, he even promotes higher education as getting "the most bang for your educational buck" (Obama 2013). Thus, Obama's justifications of higher education are textbook neoliberal; they all fall into the realm of economic prosperity, individual success, and generating the largest return on an "investment". While he frequently mentions closing class barriers through education, this is again promoted as an individual initiative that we can all support because it will increase economic growth overall. Perhaps, however, his rhetoric is simply a mechanism through which to appeal to an increasingly neoliberal public. If he justified education initiatives with appeals to education's inherent value, for example, perhaps he would gain little support from both his political cohorts and his constituents. It is therefore important to examine his policy as well as his rhetoric.

Protecting Consumers: Obama and For-Profit Colleges

Between 1990 and 2010, enrollments at for-profit universities increased by 600% (Beaver 2017). However, default rates on student loans at for-profit universities consistently remained higher than those at public or private institutions (Beaver 2017). By 2011, total default rates on student loans had reached 10%, and approximately half of these occurred at for-profits, despite

only enrolling 12% of all postsecondary students (Beaver 2017). Furthermore, corruption in these institutions was rampant. After investigating a random sample of for-profit institutions, the Government Accountability Office found that many were encouraging students to falsify their data so that they could be eligible for federal loans or grants (Beaver 2017).

Thus, in 2010, the Department of Education established new rules outlining reporting and disclosure requirements for “information on completion rates, placement rates, median student loan debt, and program costs for gainful employment programs” (Smole 2013). Using Title IV of the Higher Education Act, which states that institutions of higher education must prepare students for gainful employment in a recognized occupation in order to be eligible for federal funding, the Department of Education, for the first time, established metrics to determine what “gainful employment” actually entails. These metrics, the loan repayment rate, the earnings rate, and the discretionary earnings rate, were designed to determine the rate at which students were repaying their loans and how much they were earning after graduating (Smole 2013). If it could be shown that an institution of higher education was not meeting the established guidelines to prepare their students for gainful employment, then federal student loans could no longer be used to pay for an education at that particular institution.

In 2016, the Department of Education also announced regulations that outlined a system of loan-forgiveness for students that had been defrauded by for-profit schools. The Defense to Repayment statutes defined how students could file a claim stating that they were misled by an institution of higher education, and how those claims would be processed by the DOE (Smole 2013). According to the Department’s website, these were designed to both remedy the harms that for-profit colleges had brought upon students, but also to deter institutions from defrauding students in the first place (Smole 2013).

Meanwhile, Congress began holding hearings to assess the level of fraud within for-profit universities, and also to analyze ways to reduce default rates as a whole. In these hearings, for-profit lobbyists and advocates maintained that their institutions were the only viable option for many low-income, non-traditional students (U.S. Congress 2013). Students of color, in particular, they argued, rely heavily on for-profit institutions. Therefore, they argued, increased regulation would impair the functioning of for-profit schools, and, by extension, harm vulnerable students. Furthermore, they argued, the regulations would deny students the opportunity to decide for themselves. The “choice” rationale is defended by then Representative from Minnesota, John Kline: “At its heart, the issue is about student choice. We all support transparency and accountability, and we should have more of it. We realize there are some bad actors that should be rooted out. But we should not deny students the opportunity to attend the college of their choice and gain the valuable skills they need to compete in the workforce” (U.S. Congress 2013).

Likewise, for-profit lobbying organizations did not appreciate the regulations either. In 2012, the Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities filed a suit against the Department of Education to challenge the new gainful employment requirements (Smole 2013). In 2014, the Association of Proprietary Colleges, a trade association representing for-profit colleges, filed its own lawsuit (Fain 2014, Nov. 7). Both argued that the rules were arbitrary and would unfairly impact for-profit schools. Furthermore, the lawsuit by the Association of Proprietary Colleges maintains that the regulations violate schools’ due process rights, as they base federal aid decisions on the earning results of students (something the school, they maintain, has no control over).

The Obama Administration's attack on for-profit colleges indicates a commitment to protecting students from fraud. The for-profit educational industry clearly represents corporate ownership over education, and the exploitation and abuse that this engenders. For decades, they have preyed on vulnerable students, typically low-income, in order to make a profit through federal loans. In contrast to traditional four-year public institutions, conversely, for-profit colleges do not pretend that they are anything other than a business. However, by manipulating data and encouraging students to take out more loans (knowing that they will default), they appear almost less like a business and more like a criminal enterprise.

Thus, it may appear that the Obama-era regulations against for-profit colleges exemplify a counterexample to the administration's neoliberal agenda. The Department of Education, evidently, weakened a corporate sector that had infiltrated education. The regulations deprive unscrupulous for-profit schools of what they need most in order to thrive: access to federal financial aid. Furthermore, the Obama Administration set up a system to compensate some of the defrauded students that had already been misled by the institutions. And, despite continuous lobbying efforts, the administration continued with their initiatives to punish an abusive corporate entity.

The regulations, then, can be seen as a form of consumer protection. However, this still falls into the same neoliberal metaphor: that students are consumers and that education is a product provided. By investing in education, whether through a for-profit university or a traditional four-year, a student is investing in their human capital. The Obama-era regulations made it so that this investment would, in fact, be worth it, and so that producers could not as easily exploit consumers. However, the regulations do not challenge the overarching discourse – that education is a product. Furthermore, the approach does not address the structural reasons

why certain demographics and income groups are forced into for-profit education, rather than having access to a college degree. Instead, it accepts that these students will receive education from a for-profit school, while making the education slightly more palatable and less predatory.

Obama: Community Colleges

At his first State of the Union Address, Obama declared: “Tonight I ask every American to commit to at least 1 year or more of higher education or career training. This can be community college or a 4-year school, vocational training or an apprenticeship. But whatever the training may be, every American will need to get more than a high school diploma” (Obama 2009). This statement both foreshadowed the administration’s community college initiative, but also downplayed the president’s “elitist” persona. Realistically, many citizens cannot afford to attend a four-year school, and, by emphasizing other forms of higher education, such as community colleges, Obama signaled that his approach to higher education would be targeted at all socioeconomic classes. It also signaled that the administration was interested in expanding access to higher education to historically excluded groups: low-income people, racial and ethnic minorities, and women.

This message was soon realized with the American Graduation Initiative, announced in July of 2009, where Obama called for an additional five million graduates by 2020. He justified this immediately by maintaining that it would cause the United States to “lead in the global economy” (Obama 2009, July 14). In the initiative, Obama also called for \$12 billion to invest in community colleges and expand access to them. Furthermore, as a continuation of the AGI, the Department of Education announced America’s College Promise in 2015 –a proposal to offer two years of free community colleges to all deserving students (The White House 2015, Jan. 9). America’s College Promise was geared specifically at community colleges, which serve an

attractive alternative to many non-traditional students. While the proposal never materialized, it did shed light on the administration's early goals regarding higher education. Furthermore, it is important to contrast this optimistic initiative with other Obama-era higher education policy. While America's College Promise attempted to expand access to higher education to marginalized groups, his attack of for-profit colleges and his college rating system attempted to hold schools themselves accountable for properly training students to function in a capitalist economy.

While Obama encouraged greater access to community colleges among different groups, Trump has recently suggested that they be transformed into vocational schools (Smith 2018, Feb. 2). In February of 2018, he stated: "Today you have community colleges and you have all of the –when I was growing up we had vocational schools ... we should have vocational schools... and I think the word 'vocational' is a much better word than in many cases a community college. A lot of people don't know what a community college means or represents" (Smith 2018, Feb. 2). Obama certainly justified greater enrollment through instrumental means, such as economic growth and increased social mobility. However, Trump's disregard for community colleges, which function differently from the for-profit institutions he endorses, indicates a level of disrespect for public schooling in general. Community college credits can be transferred to a four-year institution, a feature that makes them especially attractive to low-income or non-traditional students who may want to pursue a four-year degree eventually.

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

In February 2009, President Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), a notably Keynesian economic stimulus package intended to respond to the "Great Recession" of 2008. By investing in education, public infrastructure, health, energy, and job

opportunities, the ARRA was proposed as a mechanism to promote overall economic growth by stimulating demand. Thus, the ARRA provided \$97.558 billion in discretionary and mandatory appropriations for education in general, \$16 billion of which went directly towards higher education in the form of the Federal Pell Grant Program, the Federal Work-Study program, the Teacher Quality Partnership Grant program, and for the administration of federal student aid programs (Skinner 2009).

However, the ARRA notably did not include significant returns for states themselves. While it provided \$53.6 billion in education aid for states, \$39.5 of this was for “backfilling” of recent state budget cuts for primary, secondary, and postsecondary education (Lederman 2009, Feb. 13). Thus, under the ARRA, the vast majority of direct educational funding towards states entailed supplementing their recent budget cuts, thus leaving their institutions of higher education in essentially the same position. Furthermore, while the original legislation maintained that this money should be used for financial aid and operating costs, a last-minute change allowed it instead to be used for facilities (Lederman 2009, Feb. 13). \$8.8 billion went to governors for what they deemed “critical services,” and the remaining \$5 billion was distributed to states through the discretion of Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (Skinner 2009). Because most states had already made significant cuts to their higher education budgets, and were in the process of continuing this trend, the ARRA, while curtailing the largest effects, did not address the root issue.

The ARRA also provided 15.64 billion in supplemental discretionary appropriations for the Federal Pell Grant Program in the Fiscal Year of 2009, and increased the maximum amount of Pell Grant from \$4,850 to \$5,350 (Skinner 2009). Federal Pell Grants, provided to individual students to spend at the institution of their choosing, have been a staple of student financial aid

since the Higher Education Act of 1965. However, in the past decade they have grown considerably –by nearly a third –while state spending on higher education has declined by approximately 37% (Greenblat 2016, June 27). The ARRA thus reflects the recent trend: the shift from expenditures towards institutions of higher education, to expenditures towards individual students.

“Because we know America can’t outcompete the world tomorrow if our children are being out-educated today,” President Obama remarked at the signing ceremony, “we are making the largest investment in education in our nation’s history” (Obama 2009, Feb. 17).

College Ranking System

In 2013, the Obama administration toyed with the idea of creating a college ranking system that would ultimately be tied to federal funding (Shear 2014, May 25). A response to the skyrocketing cost of college, and the increasing issue of student debt, the ranking proposal was intended to hold colleges accountable in their receiving of federal aid. The ranking system, his administration hoped, would accomplish this by “grading” schools based on factors such as graduation rate, average debt accrued by students, and future earnings of graduates (Shear 2014, May 25). The proposal received much backlash from advocates of higher education, who claimed that the plan ignores the distinctions between higher education programs, treating them as homogenous units with uniform goals. Furthermore, they maintained, the proposal would unfairly punish schools that train students for less lucrative careers, such as art, education, and theatre. Ultimately, due partly to the backlash from universities and partly to feasibility concerns, the administration abandoned the idea (Shear 2015, May 25).

However, in the spirit of the initial proposal, the administration continued with their agenda of increasing transparency for prospective students. In 2015, the administration released a

website, the “College Scorecard,” that provided information and statistics, including future employment prospects, earnings, and debt ratios, of major universities (Shear 2015, May 25). According to the administration, this would give students and their families accurate information about various schools, so that they could make an informed decision regarding higher education. However, critics, primarily universities themselves, again argued that the metrics were suspect. One of the largest concerns was the data itself was oversimplified and misleading. For example, when obtaining and publishing data on graduation rates, the federal government is only tracking first-time, full-time students over six years (Mangan 2014, Dec. 19). According to schools, this neglects the increasingly large number of non-traditional students that will likely take a different pathway through higher education. Many, however, contended that the solution to this issue was better data, rather than rejecting the scorecard as a whole.

As with the gainful employment regulations, Obama’s College Scorecard system reveals a mission to protect students from increasing debt and limited career prospects. However, again, this falls into the realm of consumer protection, which does nothing to reject the metaphor that students are consumers of a product, or that institutions of higher education are businesses. As mentioned, at his 2013 State of the Union Address, Obama famously described the initiative as helping students get “the most bang for your educational buck.”

Thus, according to Obama, higher education is a means through which to achieve greater economic prosperity. While this economic prosperity should be open to historically disadvantaged groups as well (a step better than many conservatives), it still emphasizes the economic over the political. The college scorecard was not intended to determine which colleges were sufficiently serving their role as a democratic public sphere, or where students were most likely to receive an education that prepared them to become civically conscious and critically-

thinking individuals. Instead, it shows students, economic subjects and future human capital, which investment will be the most beneficial for them economically. The College Scorecard thus represents what Wendy Brown calls “neoliberal rationality.” Even while attempting to lessen class distinctions, the proposal reinforces the individual as *homo economicus*.

Conclusion

Obama, a former academic, presented hope for the higher education community in his election in 2008. However, his higher education policy, while progressive, was in fact neoliberal. Through both policy and rhetoric, Obama justified higher education as a means for economic growth and employment. While he did attempt to expand access to higher education to historically marginalized groups, he still did so with an economic, rather than a political, rationalization. Under this perspective, higher education is an economic investment, designed to train individuals as future human capital.

Thus, Obama presents an interesting case through which to compare Trump. While both administrations can be understood as “neoliberal,” especially in their respective education policies, each is vastly different in their implementation. This shows that neoliberalism is a dynamic philosophy, rather than a single and fixed set of policy proposals. The next chapter examines Trump’s higher education policy, and, in doing so, argues that he presents a shift in neoliberal rationality –renegade neoliberalism. Renegade neoliberalism, I argue, is a reaction partly to Obama’s progressive neoliberalism, but also to the existing and unsustainable neoliberal order. While Obama views higher education as an individual investment, rather than a public good, Trump merely perceives it as useless –a critical burden to be dismantled in favor of job training. This is further reflected in Trump’s anti-intellectualism and his rejection of facts and information.

CHAPTER 4: THEORIZING RENEGADE NEOLIBERALISM: DONALD TRUMP AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Throughout his campaign, Trump repeatedly presented himself as an outsider –a businessman rather than a politician, practical rather than intellectual, and willing to “tell it like it is.” In contrast to an articulate predecessor, Trump constantly maintained that, despite his wealth, he stood for the uneducated white working class. Thus, higher education was not a particularly strong policy arena in his campaign. However, his past regarding the for-profit institution, Trump “University,” and his rapid appointment of Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education once he was inaugurated, signaled to the academic community that his actions regarding higher education would match his persona.

This chapter examines Trump’s higher education record, including his anti-intellectualism, his rejection of facts, and the appointment of Betsy DeVos. It also looks at specific policies that the Trump administration, in collusion with the GOP-dominated Congress, has undertaken regarding higher education, including altering regulations regarding for-profit colleges, reexamining Title IX, and the revamping of the Higher Education Act. In doing so, it further describes the concept of renegade neoliberalism, and argues that Trump indeed fits into this model.

We Don’t Need No Education: Trump’s Anti-Intellectualism and the War Against Facts

While the Obama Administration’s higher education policy was neoliberal in many areas, the administration still respected intellectualism, and the university as an institution. Obama, a former student at Harvard and a former law professor at the University of Chicago, was an eloquent speaker and a prolific writer, thus representing the pinnacle of cosmopolitan intellectualism. From radio hosts like Rush Limbaugh, to respected politicians like Mike

Huckabee, Obama was quickly labeled as “elitist” and thus implicitly out of touch with the concerns of everyday Americans. Conservative pundits criticized his disparaging comments about rural Americans “clinging to their guns and their religion,” dismissing his words as those of an inaccessible and uppity academic, rather than a man “of the people” (Alexovitch 2008, April 14).

Trump may represent a backlash against this perceived snobbery. Neoliberal economic policy has rendered many Americans without access to basic healthcare, decent wages, or stable employment. It has created unending precarity for countless citizens, and has left many feeling behind and abandoned. Trump, however, purports to understand the needs of the masses –he himself is vastly wealthy, he maintains, and therefore knows what is required for success. Furthermore, it is possible that white Americans felt a racial backlash against the former President; not only did a black man obtain a prestigious law degree and teaching position –he became President of the United States. As an African American, Obama successfully achieved the American Dream --the ultimate American Dream -- while so many white Americans did not come close. To many, this was clearly a slap in the face; hence the “birther movement,” the racist political cartoons and editorials, and the disparaging remarks against Michelle Obama. While rural white Americans had struggled under previous administrations, at least they had always fared better than their black counterparts, and thus had a reason to feel superior in some regard.

However, when Trump announced his candidacy in 2015, he immediately appealed to this demographic. The founder of the “birther movement,” Trump represented a different side of America --wealth, extravagance, and drama (Parker 2016, July 2). A linguistic analysis of the Trump Campaign by the Boston Globe (2015, Oct. 20), reveals that Trump speaks at a fourth-

grade reading level on the Flesch-Kincaid readability test, a common algorithm that examines world choice world sentence structure (Viser).

Marta Degani, an Italian linguist, examines in more detail Trump's speaking style. In doing so, she describes Trump as the penultimate anti-intellectual, which she defines as "the promotion of a voyeuristic and unquestioning cultural orientation, which is attracted by spectacle without substance and allured by entertainment that diverts attention away from the real issues" (Degani 2016,131). Through his comments, tweets, and rallies, Trump has secured the nation's focus, and especially media attention since the election.

An analogous analysis of Hillary Clinton's speeches reveals that she spoke, on average, at an 8th grade reading-level (Degani 2016, 131). Furthermore, the Flesch-Kincaid "Reading Ease" test gives Trump a score of 82.4 ("easy to read"), to Clinton's score of 65.6 ("plain English"). Finally, the study places Trump at a 5-6th grade reading-level with the "New Dale-Chall" index, and places Clinton at a 9-10th grade reading-level (Degani).

However, one does not have to use linguistic analysis to understand that Trump is attempting to appeal to a less educated demographic. His supporters frequently cite his "telling it like it is" as a primary reason for their admiration (Smith 2017, Aug. 23). While he is not tactful and certainly not diplomatic, they contend, he expresses what they are thinking in a manner that they can understand and to which they can relate. Famous for his extemporaneous speaking style, Trump also frequently uses "power" words to that indicate action. According to Degani, Trump's top three most frequent nouns used during the campaign were "China," "money," and "billion," and his most frequently used adjectives were "great," "big," and "nice."

Trump's rhetoric also clearly demonstrates his disdain for higher education. At a campaign rally in 2016, he openly mocked the educated, declaring: "You know, I've always

wanted to say this --I've never said this before with all the talking we all do --all of these experts, 'Oh we need an expert --' The experts are terrible. Look at the mess we're in with all these experts that we have. Look at the mess" (Gass 2016, April 4). Trump's contempt for experts is also exemplified in his exceptionally unqualified cabinet nominees. Steve Bannon, former Chief Strategist and head of Trump's campaign, headed Breitbart News, a conspiratorial right-wing website (Waldron 2016, Nov. 24). Ben Carson, head of Housing and Urban Development, has no experience in housing policy, and, of course Betsy DeVos has no teaching experience or experience in education policy (Waldron 2016, Nov. 24).

However, Trump's anti-intellectualism is most prevalent, and arguably most egregious, in his contempt for the media and contempt for facts themselves. Labeling critical sources as "fake news," Trump has managed to alienate much of the press. In July of 2017, he tweeted a photo-shopped GIF of himself wrestling CNN logo to the ground, and has made several disparaging comments about the network (Grybaum 2017, July 2). Furthermore, Trump discounts media reports that place him in a negative light, despite their truth. For months after he took office he repeatedly maintained that his inauguration crowd was historically large, despite copious amounts of blatant and public evidence to the contrary (Wallace 2017, Jan. 22). By building distrust for the media outlets that criticize him, Trump has advocated for, and perpetuated a culture where critical thought is discouraged and where differing viewpoints can merely be dismissed as "fake."

Trump has consistently rejected facts and evidence, including the scientific consensus that climate change is occurring and is caused by humans. Instead, he prefers to perpetuate the claim that climate change is a hoax created by the Chinese government in order to slow economic growth in the United States (Schwartz 2017, Aug. 3). In 2017, he tweeted that cold

weather indicated that climate change was not real, revealing a deep lack of understanding about weather and climate (Pierre-Louis 2017, Dec. 28). Furthermore, by defunding the EPA and by preventing research into climate change, the Trump administration, and the Republican party, has carefully constructed a dialogue where scientific voices are undermined, and where scientific truth is subjective and can change from day to day. The Trump administration does not only condone ignorance, but actively encourages it.

Renegade neoliberalism rests on a rejection of education, learning, and facts. By discrediting opponents and by disregarding information, renegade neoliberals make truth itself completely subjective. Furthermore, this encourages a culture where entertainment and wealth are prioritized above expertise and intelligence. For Trump, the more convoluted and sensational the story, the more successful it is.

Dismantling the Public Sphere: Trump “University”

While Obama attacked for-profit universities through gainful employment regulations, Trump created one. In 2005, Trump, along with associates Michael Sexton and Johnathan Spitalny, founded Trump “University,” a non-accredited, for-profit academic institution promising to teach students the art of business and finance. Under Trump’s curriculum, former students paid as much as \$35,000 to learn business “secrets,” advertised to teach any individual to become wealthy and successful through Real Estate investment. “I can turn anyone into a successful real estate investor, including you” Trump stated in a 2009 advertisement (Cohan 2014). The courses, ranging from “free seminars,” to the \$35,000 “Gold Elite” program, became increasingly expensive as students moved through the program (Cohan 2014).

Quickly, students began accusing the institution of fraud. According to the testimony in the class action lawsuit *Low v. Trump*, the entire enterprise was a large infomercial, “pushing

additional Seminars or workshops they were told they would need to take to succeed” (Low v. Trump 2012). During these seminars, students were instructed to raise their credit card limits, and were encouraged to spend this on Trump’s \$34,995 “Gold Elite” program. While Trump “University,” they argued, was represented as providing a year long real-estate course and mentorship, the program was in actuality a three-day long seminar, “designed to confuse, rather than educate, its students, and to persuade them to purchase even more Seminars” (Low v. Trump 2012).

A series of documents released in the summer of 2016, including a “playbook” for employees and instructors at Trump “University,” reveal marketing strategies that the institution underwent in order to attract students to courses. One section of the “playbook” contains suggestions for responding to likely objections given by prospective students when signing up for seminars. A particular anticipated objection states: “I just paid my credit cards off.” To this, the manual advises employees to respond, “I see, do you like living paycheck to paycheck? Do you like just getting by in life? Do you enjoy seeing everyone else but yourself in their dream houses and driving their dreams cars with huge checking accounts? Those people saw an opportunity, and didn’t make excuses, like what you’re doing now” (Trump 2010). This kind of manipulation is highly premeditated, written with the specific intent of defrauding a likely already economically marginalized individual. In *Low v. Trump*, Trump “University” was also accused of targeting seniors in a predatory manner. According to the official complaint, seniors and retirees were pressured to pay for additional workshops, under the threat of becoming “Walmart employees” in the future (Low v. Trump 2012).

As early as 2005, the New York State Department of Education notified the institution that they were violating New York Education Law by 1) fraudulently using the term “university”

(when they were not actually an accredited institution), and 2) lacking a New York state license for student instruction (Halperin 2016, March 01). In response, Trump “University” announced that they would no longer be operating directly in the state of New York. However, it was ultimately revealed, through continued newspaper advertisements and through the testimony of students, that Trump “University” never ceased operations, and continued to providing instruction in the state without a license (Halperin 2016). When the New York State Department of Education contacted the institution again in 2010, it was notified that Trump “University” had ceased operations that year. Ultimately, in the five years that Trump “University” existed as an institution, it misled over an estimated 5,000 students nationwide (Cohen 2014).

In 2013, the State of New York filed a lawsuit against Trump “University,” alleging it was a fraudulent institution that intentionally misled students. New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman described the Trump “University” as a “bait-and-switch” scheme (Feuer 2013, Aug. 24). Using its advertisements as evidence, Schneiderman argued that the institution lied to prospective students in order to solicit their money. For example, advertisements stated that Trump himself “hand-picked” instructors, when in fact many employees of Trump “University,” hired to teach students, had not even met Trump in person. Furthermore, Trump never engaged with, let alone wrote, the curriculum, as was purported by advertisements (Feuer 2013).

During the 2016 election, the Trump “University” scandal reemerged. In fact, despite initially maintaining that he would fight the lawsuits “out of principle”, Donald Trump agreed to pay \$25 million to settle the three cases several days after winning the election in November (Lovett 2016, Nov. 18). This was likely a result of pressure from Trump’s campaign team, after both Republic primary opponents and Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton criticized Trump for his fraudulent activity regarding the “university.”

While “Trump University” was in operation before his ascendance to the presidency, it is still an important component to consider when analyzing his ideology. The existence of “Trump University” reveals many things about Trump as a brand, as an individual, and as a political figure. Furthermore, for-profit institutions, while severely weakened by the Obama administration, are still in operation. Betsy DeVos has already expressed her desire to dismantle many Obama-era regulations regarding accreditation. Furthermore, while highly fraudulent and precarious, for many marginalized demographics for-profit institutions are seen as the only legitimate alternative to a four-year liberal arts education.

In many ways, Trump “University” parallels the Trump presidency and thus renegade neoliberalism. Promising success, achievement, and “winning,” both enterprises relied on desperation and disillusionment of thousands of marginalized individuals. While coated in grandiose ostentatiousness, the two are nothing more than empty shells –nothing but a brand stamped onto a worthless product. In *No is Not Enough: Resisting Trump’s Shock Politics and Winning the World We Need*, Naomi Klein (2017) discusses the Trump administration as the first “reality TV” presidency. Trump’s ascent, she argues, reveals “a profound emptiness at the very culture” that created him (59). She writes: “that hollowness is intimately connected to the rise of lifestyle brands... selling everything, owning next to nothing” (59). Like Giroux, Klein implies that this “empty culture” stems from the rise of neoliberalism and the corresponding depolitization that it engenders. Trump’s visits to Mar-a-Lago, rather than remaining at the White House for example, represent a deep shift –from the public to the private, from the political to the economic.

Trump University, a “for-profit” institution is evidently neoliberal in its very name. Trump and his associates created the institution for financial gain, treating “education,” or at

least training, as a product to be bought and sold in a marketplace, free from the hassles of government intervention (such as license requirements and accreditation). The explicit purpose of a Trump “University” education, authentic or not, is to create wealthy individuals, made in the Real Estate Mogul’s image. Economic success is the ultimate goal. However, unlike the average public institution of higher education, Trump “University” did not pretend to have any other agenda. In fact, it is almost theatrical in its anti-academic ways, and proudly so. In a televised advertisement, Trump himself states: “We’re going to teach you about business. We’re going to teach you better than the business schools are gonna teach you, and I went to the best business school. We’re gonna teach you better. It’s going to be a shorter process. It’s not going to involve years and years of your life. It’s going to be less expensive. And I think it’s going to be a better education, and it’s going to be what you need to know. So we’re going to teach you business” (Trump 2010). Trump does not pretend that the education he provides is political, humanistic, or even intellectual. Having gone to “the best business school,” he purports to know that they are insufficient in providing training for becoming wealthy.

Thus, Trump “University,” and Trump’s presidency, represents a trend in neoliberalism, but one that goes beyond privatization, deregulation, and trade liberalization, and in turn, goes beyond institutional factors. This is a cultural shift towards anti-intellectualism and the authoritarianism that it engenders. Economic success is prioritized over intelligence or civic-mindedness, and entertainment over substance. Politics itself is de-politicized through Trump’s endless reality-TV-show style drama. In parallel with this anti-intellectualism are nationalistic tendencies, reflected through racism and xenophobia. Higher education, and education in general, cannot remain public democratic institutions under a neoliberal state, and are either

hollowed out (public universities) or abandoned altogether in favor of training (for-profit universities).

However, Trump “University” also represents the contradictions in neoliberalism, as articulated by David Harvey and other Marxist thinkers. While espousing market values, in order to strengthen products and provide the most efficient division of resources, Trump “University” is itself a fraud. Despite its distribution through market mechanisms –paying for courses –the enterprise is still empty and fake. Here, the market fails to provide the best outcome, and instead helps concentrate wealth in the hands of a few.

Betsy DeVos: An Archetypical Classical Neoliberal

Betsy DeVos was one of Trump’s most controversial cabinet nominations. Accused of lacking in experience and understanding of both education policy and education itself, DeVos’s confirmation hearing was long and contentious. The billionaire investor and education activist had never taught school and had no experience with student loans or with public education (Zernike 2017, Jan. 18). Thus, critics argued, she was not prepared to oversee the largest financial aid program in the country. During the hearing, DeVos showed ignorance about the difference between growth and proficiency, and did not appear to understand the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Zernike 2017, Jan. 18). Furthermore, when asked by Senator Elizabeth Warren about her ideas for eliminating “waste, fraud, and abuse,” DeVos refused to commit to enforcing already existing regulations regarding for-profit universities. These gainful employment regulations, created by the Obama administration, were designed to prevent fraud and abuse in for-profit institutions of higher education. Instead, DeVos maintained that she would “review that rule and see that it is actually achieving what the intentions are” (Zernike 2017, Jan. 18).

DeVos is an archetypal neoliberal in terms of her education policy. This is evident in her support of school vouchers, the deregulation of federal oversight, and the privatization of education. In fact, most of her policy positions fall in line with Milton Friedman’s proposals for education policy. However, DeVos also represents a cultural shift that is neoconservative. For example, she has been accused of funding educational programs that promote “gay conversion therapy,” and religious education in schools. While she dismisses many accusations, maintaining that they are distorted representations, her record of supporting ultra-right programs reveals a political ideology to which she certainly subscribes.

In the April of 2016, Donald Trump issued an executive order directing the Office of Management and Budget to produce a report outlining any excessive federal regulations in education that and evaluate whether they “comply with Federal laws that prohibit the Department from exercising any direction, supervision, or control over areas subject to State and local control” (Executive Order 13791). In response to this, the Department of Education formed a committee in order to “study how it should reorganize and cut the agency’s workforce” (Stratford 2018, Feb. 15). Most notably, the proposal calls for the merging of the Office of Postsecondary Education and the Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education into “A Single Office of Postsecondary and Lifelong Learning” (Stratford 2018, Feb. 15). The committee is also co-chaired by Robert Eitel, the senior counselor to Betsy DeVos and a former for-profit college executive (Stratford 2018, Feb. 15).

Weakening Title IX: Protecting Universities as Corporations

In 2011, the Department of Education released guidance clarifying that sexual violence constituted sexual harassment, which is prohibited under Title IX, a federal civil rights law that prevents discrimination on the basis of sex. The guidance further argues that a single incidence

of sexual violence creates a “hostile environment” –a form of sexual harassment that is also a violation of Title IX (Feder 2014). Thus, institutions of higher education can violate Title IX if they know about instances of sexual harassment or violence, but fail to take action to eliminate them and alleviate the situation. The Obama Administration also set up a website informing students about their rights under existing law regarding Title IX, and to remind institutions of their legal obligations. In 2014, the administration published a further report detailing more specifically how institutions of higher education should comply with Title IX in addressing sexual assault cases on campus, including disclosure and reporting requirements. In doing so, the report detailed that federal aid can be pulled from institutions that fail to comply with guidelines (Feder 2014).

While the 2011 and 2014 Obama Administration guidelines were primarily used to enforce already existing law, and to reinterpret it to include sexual violence, they received much criticism from both conservative and “men’s rights” organizations. These groups maintained that the Obama-era regulations discriminated against the accused and violated their civil liberties. Among the most common complaints, critics argued that, in complying with federal guidelines, universities have violated the accused’s rights to due process (Brown 2017, Sept. 22). Critics also argued that the guidelines, and the corresponding campus policies implemented, contain a “powerful bias against” men (Young 2017, July 21). They also maintain that the guidelines’ standard, a preponderance of evidence is an unfair threshold, placing the burden of proof on the accused rather than on the accuser (Young 2017, July 21).

In September of 2017, the Department of Education, under Betsy DeVos, announced that they rescind the 2011 and 2014 Obama-era guidelines. In lieu of these regulations, the department issued new interim guidelines that, they maintain, will eventually be crafted into

formal rules. Among these new guidelines is the dismantling of the preponderance of evidence threshold, instead replacing it with a “clear and convincing evidence” standard (Mangan 2017, Sept. 22). Advocates of sexual assault victims have expressed worry that this new standard will discourage victims from coming forward. Among the Obama-era guidance measures was also the resolution that campus “mediation” was not sufficient in campus sexual assault cases. They also entailed the statement that the accuser should not have to informally resolve the issue with the accused in a campus setting. The new guidance measures further dismantle this part, allowing universities to decide on their own if informal mediation considered a sufficient action (Mangan 2017, Sept. 22).

In the summer of 2017, several months before the Department of Education rescinded the Obama-era guidance measures, DeVos met publicly with several men’s rights groups, including the National Coalition for Men, Families Advocating for Campus Equality, and Stop Abusive and Violent Environments. These various organizations advocate for what they claim is the prevention of false rape accusations and for the rights of the accused. These meetings, which stirred considerable controversy, occurred in light of the Education Department’s civil rights chief, Candice Jackson’s controversial comments. Jackson told the New York Times that 90% of sexual assault allegations “fall into the category of ‘we were both drunk,’ ‘we broke up, and six months later I found myself under a Title IX investigation because she just decided that our last sleeping together was not quite right” (Young 2017, July 21). Jackson later apologized for the remarks.

In *Neoliberalism’s War on Higher Education* Giroux (2014) writes that the Penn State scandal reveals the decline of the university from a democratic public sphere. The scandal, which came to light in 2011, entailed the dramatic revelation that top university administrators at Penn

State University allegedly took an active role in covering up the systematic sexual abuse of football coach Jerry Sandusky. Sandusky, it is estimated, abused over 50 boys over a 15 year period, as young as 12 years old. For Giroux, the scandal can be read in light of the neoliberalization of higher education: the imposition of financial and corporate culture into the university, the destruction of public trust, and the devaluing of young people and students as “revenue producing entities” (115). While sexual abuse in institutions of higher education are likely not new, Giroux attributes the ineffectuality of universities to combat these issues to an increasingly marketized culture. He argues that the Penn State scandal represents the willingness of university presidents to “align themselves with big money, big sports, and the instrumentalist values of finance capital” (199).

Betsy DeVos’s dismantling of Obama-era sexual abuse guidelines can be read in this light as well. While there are potentially legitimate critiques of some Obama-era guidelines, such as the preponderance of evidence standard, DeVos’s reliance on misogynistic organizations such as the National Coalition for Men, labeled a “male supremacist hate group” by the Southern Poverty Law Center, renders her approach clumsy at best. The meetings with these groups reveal a strong bias against accusers, reflected further in Jackson’s comments. DeVos’s new guidelines essentially remove pressure on universities to investigate and report incidences of sexual violence.

The apparent neglect of sexual abuse and assault victims in institutions of higher education reflects the desire to cover up issues that may place the university in a poor light. It also reflects a system of branding –protecting universities as corporations. They also indicate a lack of care for the welfare and agency of young people, especially already marginalized communities, such as LGBT students. However, the dismantling of these guidelines is most

significant in their dismantling of the university as a democratic public sphere. By framing sexual violence as a personal issue (one that can be “mediated” between the relevant parties within the university), the guidelines both depoliticize the issue and privatize it. Therefore, the Trump Administration acts to protect universities, or what they perceive as corporations, from lawsuits.

For-Profit colleges

Under the Obama Administration, it appeared briefly as though for-profit colleges were declining in power and profits. With the implementation of two new regulations, gainful employment and borrower defense to repayment, the Obama Administration signaled to for-profit institutions that the exploitation and defrauding of students would no longer be tolerated. The former of the two provisions holds that students may be eligible for forgiveness of federal student loans that were used at an institution that intentionally misled them or violated certain laws. The former requires vocational institutions to show that their graduate’s future incomes will be sufficient to pay back their student debt.

As early as her confirmation hearing, DeVos expressed interest in cutting back these regulations. When asked about enforcing the gainful employment measures, she replied: “I will review that rule and see that it is actually achieving what the intentions are. The last thing any of us want is to unnecessarily close down important programs” (Cohen 2017, Feb. 20). Critics have also raised concerns about DeVos’s appointment of Robert Eitel, a former for-profit college executive and a staunch advocate for accreditation deregulation, as a senior council member (Cohen 2017, March 17).

In March of 2017, the Department of Education extended a deadline, from July 1, 2017 to July 1, 2018, for for-profit institutions to comply with what the department deems the

“burdensome gainful employment regulations” (DeVos 2017). Since then, DeVos has expressed interest in overturning these regulations altogether, calling them “a muddled process that’s unfair to students and schools” (Cowley 2017, July 6). The Education Department has further proposed that students must provide “clear and convincing evidence” that for-profit schools misled them, a contrast to the Obama Administration’s “preponderance of evidence” standard. Similarly to the Title IX requirements, the Trump Administration is increasing the burden of proof for the accuser –whether those are students accusing others of sexual assault, or students accusing for-profit colleges of fraud.

Proponents of the rollbacks of the Obama-era regulations cite the lack of access to a traditional higher education among historically marginalized groups. The regulations, they claim, may intend to protect students from predatory institutions, but in fact block students from attending the only school available to them. In fact, a number of Historically Black Colleges have been unlikely bedfellows with the proponents of for-profit institutions (Green 2018, Jan. 12). While the Obama-era regulations are specifically targeted at for-profit colleges, they apply to all institutions of higher education. The United Negro College Fund, while certainly not supportive of many of DeVos’s policies, has long been an opponent of the Obama Administration’s rules. They claim that the regulations leave them vulnerable to legal claims, when they have already been historically underfunded, catering to marginalized populations (Green 2018, Jan. 12). The schools in the United Negro College Fund currently educate 60,000 students, the majority of which receive federal Pell grants. Historically Black Colleges also claim that they would be penalized for having a higher percentage of their students default on their student loans (Green 2018, Jan. 12).

In December of 2017, the Department of Education announced that it had approved 12,900 borrower-defense claims, and had denied another 8,600 (Harris 2017, Dec. 20). The Department announced that, in contrast to the Obama-era guidelines that provided immediate and full relief once a student was found to be the victim of fraud, it would explore avenues for granting partial relief to students. To fully relieve all students, DeVos stated, would be to give away “free money” (Harris 2017, Dec. 20). The majority of these claims were against Corinthian, a chain of for-profit colleges that collapsed in 2010 after the Obama-era regulations were imposed. Furthermore, the Trump Administration set up new percentage levels of relief based on the success of the person filing the claim (their future earnings). Critics, however, argue that these new guidelines give debt relief only to students that have low earnings, neglecting those that were also misled and defrauded (and thus equally deserving of compensation), but managed to find gainful employment elsewhere.

For-profit colleges rely on students as consumers of training, provided by instructors that likely have not taught in a traditional school. However, shareholders and executives facilitate the exchange between these two actors. In this way, the for-profit university entails the exploitation of the surplus labor of the instructors, who provide the labor in the exchange but do not reap significant benefits. For-profit colleges also rely primarily on the federal government to provide students with loans with which to pay tuition. While private institutions, their dependence on these loans requires them to comply with federal accreditation standards. While neoliberal ideology espouses the values of market exchange without federal involvement, for-profit colleges require taxpayer money in order to continuing functioning. Thus, they represent Foucauldian neoliberalism, or the subservience of the state to the market. While for-profit

institutions discourage governmental intervention in the form of regulation or protection for students, they relish it in the form of student loans through which they profit.

The neoliberal market economy requires the buying and selling of abstract concepts, such as “knowledge,” in its functioning. Thus, it is also important to note the blurring of the lines between for-profit and private, and even nonprofit, universities. A recent trend in for-profit education has been a legal transition from “for-profit” to “non-profit” status. While the legal status shifts, many facets of the colleges do not. Thus, the institutions can create an image of having a “public good” in their mission, while simultaneously continuing the same business practices. This reveals the shifting mission of higher education as a whole –from educating to training.

Higher Education Act

In the summer of 2016, Betsy DeVos expressed interest in repealing the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965. According to DeVos, the law was outdated and constraining, limiting her abilities to accomplish what she wanted in higher education. “For me, and I suspect for most Americans, it doesn’t make a lot of sense to simply amend a 50-year-old law,” she remarked in a speech on Public and Land Grant Universities in June. “Adding to a half-century patchwork will not lead to meaningful reform. Real change is needed” (Harris 2017, June 21).

The Higher Education Act, signed in 1965 by President Johnson, was aimed at decreasing disparities in access to higher education (Field 2015, Nov. 8). Since then, the HEA has been reauthorized eight times, most recently in 2008. The HEA governs federal aid programs that provide financial support to both individuals and institutions of higher education (Hegji 2017, Feb. 1). Title IV of the act authorizes student assistance directly, including federal grants, student loans, and the federal work-study programs (Hegji 2017, Feb. 1).

In late 2017, Congress introduced a bill, the Promoting Real Opportunity, Success, and Prosperity (PROSPER) in order to reauthorize the HEA yet again, and to rewrite many of its key provisions. One of the most significant proposals in the bill is the “streamlining” of the federal service loan programs into one single program (Cowley 2017, May 19). Notably, a similar proposal was suggested by the Obama Administration, which hoped to simplify the loan process and thus make it more accessible to low-income students. However, the new bill removes some Obama-era protections, for the purposes of simplicity. For example, the current Department of Education removes the provision that would allow current vendors to bid for a share of the new system, instead substituting this with a single vendor that can service all loans if it desires (Cowley 2017, May 19). Consumer advocates have raised concerns about this divergence from the Obama-era proposal, claiming that it will make the system too reliant on a single vendor.

Currently, the federal government contracts out federal student loan servicing to private companies, such as Navient. Because there are over 40 of these companies, the loan process is difficult and arduous for many students. Therefore, it is assumed that simplifying it will incentivize more students to apply for financial aid, and therefore to be able to attend college. The PROSPER proposal, however, entails the monopolizing of the student loan servicing industry to a single bidder. The creation of an artificial, government-sponsored monopoly contradicts the neoliberal ideal of competition. However, as articulated by Marxist scholars such as David Harvey, these are internal contradictions in neoliberalism –requiring a state for the advancement of the economy, while simultaneously rejecting the state in its regulatory position.

Furthermore, the legislation contains provisions that would create a new website for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FASFA) that would reportedly make the process easier and faster, thus encouraging more students to apply (Harris 2017, Dec. 1).

The new bill also contains provisions that will entirely eliminate the Obama-era regulations to protect students from fraudulent for-profit colleges (Green 2017, Dec. 12). This is a step more significant than DeVos's failure to enforce these rules, as it actually changes the laws themselves. While DeVos's extensions of deadlines and neglect of regulations is certainly substantial, it does not carry the same weight as an entire overhaul of the system itself.

The legislation would also expand access to vocational and training programs, which the Trump Administration has repeatedly emphasized as an alternative to traditional, four-year colleges. The bill contains a provision that would expand Pell grants for "certificate and apprenticeship programs," thus encouraging students to consider other forms of education (Harris 2017, Dec. 1). This illustrates the instrumentalist view of higher education that the Trump Administration shares with the Obama administration. Both promoted education for economic growth and personal financial advancement –Obama through his campaign for increased STEM education, and Trump through his encouragement of vocational training.

The initially proposed PROSPER bill, however, also contains both religious and social elements. The bill would prohibit the federal government from taking action against a university, for promoting religious policies or having a religious statement or mission (Hartocollis 2018, Feb. 1). For example, the federal government could not revoke a school's tax-exempt status or accreditation as punishment for the school discriminating against same-sex couples. Another provision of the bill would require schools to publicize their free speech policies, leaving them open to lawsuits (Hartocollis 2018, Feb. 1). This measure was likely a result of recent controversy over provocative speakers on college campuses and the protections that they hold. Conservatives often argue that their viewpoints and opinions are marginalized and censored on college campuses. This has resulted in the formation of groups like Turning Point USA, which,

although claiming to not share the viewpoints of all their speakers, has famously invited neo Nazis and white supremacists to colleges to speak.

Finally, the reauthorization could adversely affect minority-serving institutions. Title III of the HEA provides competitive grants to minority-serving institutions, such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Native-American Institutions, etc. (Hegji 2017, Feb. 1). Title V also provides funds specifically to these institutions, and is intended to assist minority-servicing institutions in resources. However, the bill would increase requirements to receive these funds, including increasing the graduation or transfer requirement to 25 of students. According to a *Chronicle* analysis, this would impact at least 61 institutions that currently have a graduate rate lower than 30% (Green 2018, Jan. 12).

It is important to note that the new bill increases requirements for HBCU and other minority-serving institutions while simultaneously neglecting accreditation requirements for for-profit institutions. As mentioned, some HBCUs oppose the Obama-era regulations, including gainful employment and defense to borrower provisions, due to their impact on smaller, minority-serving schools. Historically disadvantaged and underfunded, these institutions fail to meet federal standards for systematic reasons and are thus concerned that the regulations can harm them inadvertently.

Tax Bill

In Nov. of 2017, the House GOP proposed a tax bill that, at least in its initial form, received much backlash from both students and the higher education lobby. The bill would tax tuition free wavers for graduate students, deeming those wavers “taxable income.” As is easy to predict, this would make graduate school more expensive and less accessible for low-income individuals, as this “income” is not actually in the pockets of graduate students themselves. On

the same day that the bill was introduced, the National Association of Graduate-Professional Students (NAGPS) began strategizing to push for the provision's removal (Kreighbaum 2017, Dec. 18). The association organized call-in days to both the House and the Senate, and even hand-delivered letters to each member of Congress (Kreighbaum 2018, Jan. 10). A few weeks later, when the Senate released their version of the bill, the provision was not included (Kreighbaum 2018, Jan. 10).

This is significant in both the proposal itself and in the political backlash from graduate students. The tax on tuition wavers represents a disregard for graduate education and for promoting its accessibility. Graduate students, especially PhD students, receive tuition free wavers in exchange for work such as assistant teaching and research. The provision on the tax bill entails a neoliberal assumption that graduate education is a "luxury" that only certain individuals should enjoy, rather than a career-plan. In many fields, graduate school is required for professionalization.

However, the backlash from graduate students is hopeful. While the students received considerable help from the higher education lobby, most of the political engagement began through grassroots organizing (Kreighbaum 2018, Jan. 10). Eight graduate students, for example, were arrested for protesting outside of House Speaker Paul Ryan's office (Harris 2017, Dec. 5). Wearing shirts that said "Fighting for the Future of Higher Education," the students claimed that the proposal would gut their funding for graduate school (Harris 2017, Dec. 5).

While the tuition waver tax provision was finally removed from the tax bill, the final version still contained several questionable provisions for higher education. One of these is the taxation on endowments for private universities. The provision entails a 1.4 percent tax on investment income at universities with more than 500 students and an endowment over \$500,000

per student (Wilson 2018, Jan. 16). While this would impact wealthy universities that serve primarily wealthy students, many note that the significance of the provision is the message it sends to universities “hostile to Republican interests” (Wilson. Jan. 16).

Republicans have blamed elite universities themselves for the tax, claiming that they have garnered contempt from conservatives for espousing “liberal” viewpoints. According to Harvard Law Professors Jack Goldsmith and Adrian Vermeule, “Conservative politicians and their constituents hear, on the one hand, that government owes universities a continuance of largesse and, on the other, that conservatives are ignorant, unworthy or corrupt. This sounds suspiciously like special pleading by an intellectual elite that wants to indulge in social criticism at the expense of the criticized, in both figurative and literal senses” (Wilson, Jan. 16).

According to this perspective, the endowment tax sends a “warning” to what are considered politically left-leaning institutions.

Conclusion

The gutting of higher education will continue to occur under a Democrat or a Republican. Under Obama, the gutting was centrist in nature –he promoted education instrumentally, as a mechanism for economic growth and individual prosperity. This instrumentalism was aimed potentially at positive measures: increasing opportunity for marginalized groups, especially those that have historically been excluded from higher education as a whole. His promotion of STEM further signaled a commitment economic advancement. Students, he maintained, must be prepared to be productive members in the modern economy, and the best route to this is by educating human capital. The Obama administration may have pursued goals that aimed to increase the welfare of the worst off. However, these goals were always accomplished through a

neoliberal lens: by investing in those individuals, and training them to “pull themselves up by their bootstraps,” they too could discover the American dream.

The Trump Administration’s relationship with higher education, while new and developing at the time of this writing, still reflects a new trend in neoliberal ideology. Renegade neoliberalism is characterized by anti-intellectualism, authoritarianism, a reliance on an “outsider persona,” and nationalism –all traits that Trump exemplifies. Through rhetoric that rejects facts and experts, the appointment of Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education, and initiatives dismantling for-profit university regulations, it is clear that Trump views higher education, and information and knowledge more broadly, as a burden, a persistent critic that he must undermine.

CONCLUSION

How can two vastly different administrations, with two vastly different political agendas, both be neoliberal? The answer lies in the rejection of neoliberalism as a static policy doctrine, and the acceptance of neoliberalism as a dynamic political ideology. While Obama and Trump both fall into the category of “neoliberalism,” I argue that this category is much broader than has previously been theorized. Trump, I maintain, is a renegade neoliberal – a branch of neoliberalism that is reactionary in nature. Renegade neoliberalism relies on the image of an “outsider,” without actually subverting the existing political, cultural, or economic status quo.

This paper has analyzed renegade neoliberalism through the context of higher education policy. Higher education has historically been understood as an essential public good in a democratic society, necessary for the civic flourishing of its citizens. Thus, considerable scholarship, both in political theory and in civic education, has analyzed the extent to which the university as a public sphere has been diminished by privatization. Brown and Giroux, in particular, write about the neoliberal onslaught on higher education. However, following Foucault and Bourdieu respectively, both theorists examine the relationship between neoliberalism and higher education as though neoliberalism is one single set of policies. Thus, their analyses render the advent of Trump difficult to explain.

The Obama Administration, I have argued, falls into the category of “progressive neoliberalism.” In the policy arena of higher education, the Obama Administration attempted to expand access to racial and ethnic minorities, and to decrease abuse and exploitation on campuses. Through regulations regarding for-profit colleges, for example, it protected students from fraud and corruption. However, these actions still fell into the neoliberal paradigm – protecting students as *consumers*. Furthermore, the college ranking system illustrated a desire to

both increase competition among schools, a significant facet of neoliberal thought, but also to again protect students as consumers or investors, future human capital, ensuring that they would receive the most educational “bang for their buck.”

In contrast, the Trump Administration rejects higher education, and the intellectualism that it fosters, entirely. Instead, Trump prefers to perpetuate a narrative where experts and even facts are elitist, and where truth is subjective. Through Trump “University,” and through initiatives to deregulate for-profit colleges, Trump makes it clear that he views education as not only instrumental, as with Obama, but also somewhat useless. As a renegade neoliberal, I argue that Trump fosters this anti-intellectualism for political gain.

This research examined higher education as a specific policy arena. Therefore, its scope is naturally limited. Other direct policy research, in a different area, could shed more light on Trump’s ascent to office and his political maneuverings as president. Because trade policy presents a direct contradiction in Trump, this would be an illuminating area for further research.

I argue that the concept of renegade neoliberalism, while embodied by Trump, is not specific to him. Therefore, perhaps the concept of renegade neoliberalism can be used to explain other nationalistic and authoritarian movements and figures across the world, such as Brexit in the United Kingdom (as already mentioned), Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, or alt-right and neo-Nazi enthusiasm across Europe. More research on these particular movements and figures could be helpful in further identifying the concept of renegade neoliberalism.

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