

# By co-opting an ultra-right wrecking crew, Donald Trump is sending the US back to the 1920s

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*Since Donald Trump's election, he has been assembling what [Walter Dean Burnham](#) has termed his 'ultra-right wrecking crew'. And while Trump's proposed Cabinet members are the most right-wing group of leaders in 90 years, at least they will require Senate confirmation. Trump's appointment of Steve Bannon, on the other hand – who is heavily linked to the alt-right – in a high-profile White House role will require no such approval by elected officials.*



The forthcoming Trump cabinet membership is now in the pages of the daily press. They are mostly outsiders – on the domestic side, very wealthy business “tycoons” (“gazillionaires”), and generals (except for Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson of ExxonMobil) on the foreign/military policy side.

This array is the most right-wing leadership cadre since Calvin Coolidge (R) left the White House in 1929. That may tell us something, particularly in view of the pivotal role that Breitbart chairman Steve Bannon will occupy as chief of White House operations from January 20, 2017. All of the cabinet members will require confirmation by the Senate. Some may not survive that challenge. But Bannon will not be subject to that process.

Movie mogul Sam Goldwyn once commented, “Never make predictions, especially about the future.” Sage advice, that; yet it is very often true that the past – especially the very recent past – is also a prologue to what will hasten next. Bannon was a major player in Breitbart/alt-right affairs. Linked to this fringe movement were still more extreme groups of truly Nazi views. It is said that since Election Day 2016 these elements have retired the swastika from public display, in a quest for respectability in the new order of things. But this, after all, is rather like putting lipstick on a pig!



The goal of ultra-right ex-fringe groups is, essentially, the destruction of the domestic functions of the American state. Huge progress to that end has been the sharp rightward trajectory of the Republican Party ever since Ronald

Reagan proclaimed a generation ago that: “Government is not a solution to a problem. Government *is* the problem.” But there is this difference with the alt-right crowd: the Republican Congressional party seeks ultimately to run the state, not to overthrow it. This has led them, coping with Obama’s place in the constitutional order of things, to some quite extreme actions (and non-actions), but their objective will not extend beyond “rule or ruin.” The incentive to go further, one assures, will now evaporate.

Donald Trump has, as I have suggested earlier, played the role of “[Savior with a \(backward-aimed\) time machine](#)” to near-perfection. I had supposed that his “primal date” would be something like 1954. With the 2017 wrecking crew in place, why not, say, 1925 – so 92 years before the present? If that effort is on offer, it is literally impossible to realize in any setting where democracy has any place whatever in that state of affairs. There is yet more to be said, but that must move to other analysts. As the preacher saith, “Here endeth the lesson.”

Featured [image](#) America First rally, 1940. Credit: By The original uploader was Jerry Jones at English Wikipedia (Transferred from en.wikipedia to Commons.) [Copyrighted free use], via Wikimedia Commons.

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*Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of USAPP– American Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.*

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Walter Dean Burnham is Professor Emeritus at the Department of Government at the University of Texas at Austin. Professor Burnham is best known for his work on the dynamics of American politics (particularly electoral politics). His chief areas of concentration have been on the causes, characteristics and consequences of critical realignments in American history, and the modern-day decay of partisan linkages between rulers and ruled. Much of his recent work has also concentrated on the “turnout problem” and its relationship to other elements of change in American politics. Before coming to Texas in 1988, he was Ruth and Arthur Sloan Professor of Political Science at Massachusetts Institute of Technology.



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