

UMassAmherst | School of Public Policy

America's decade of confusion

Alasdair Roberts

23 October 2018

FOUR
CRISES OF
AMERICAN
DEMOCRACY

REPRESENTATION, MASTERY
DISCIPLINE, ANTICIPATION
ALASDAIR ROBERTS

CAN
GOVERNMENT
DO ANYTHING
RIGHT?

Alasdair Roberts

I Am Part of the Resistance

Inside the Trump Administration

I work for the president but like-minded colleagues and I have vowed to thwart parts of his agenda and his worst inclinations.

A legitimacy crisis for our democracy

America: the failed state
Francis Fukuyama

The crisis in Anglo-American democracy

The Week Democracy Died

Is There Something Wrong with Democracy?

The End of the Anglo-American Order

Liberal World Order, R.I.P.

Is this how democracy ends?

How Republics End

Is America a Failing State?

Trump and the End of the West?

Are Western Values Losing Their Sway?

HOW THE WEST PROVOKED PUTIN

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

SEE AMERICA
LAND OF DECAY & DYSFUNCTION

Can Democracy Be Saved?

Donatella della Porta

JOSHUA KURLANTZICK

DEMOCRACY. RETREAT

The Revolt of the Middle Class and the Worldwide Decline of Representative Government

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

IT'S EVEN WORSE THAN IT LOOKS

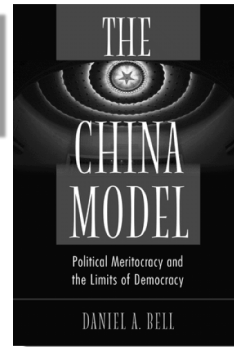
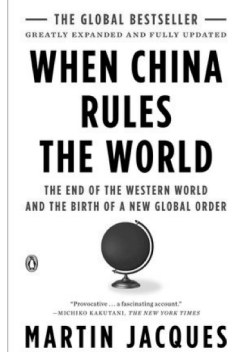
How the AMERICAN CONSTITUTIONAL SYSTEM COLLIDED with the NEW POLITICS of EXTREMISM

The West is suddenly suffused with self-doubt ... The rise of authoritarian capitalism has been a blow to assumptions, made popular by Francis Fukuyama, that liberal democracy has proved to be the most reliable and lasting political system.

— Steven Erlanger, *New York Times*, September 2015

HOW DEMOCRACIES DIE

Chinese state media: US government shutdown exposes 'chronic flaws'



Donald Trump + Add to myFT

Donald Trump vindicates those sick of the west's lectures

THE END OF HISTORY

We are fortunate to be alive at this moment in history. Never before has our nation enjoyed so much prosperity and social progress with so little internal crisis and so few external threats. -- Bill Clinton, 2000

The great struggles of the twentieth century between liberty and totalitarianism ended with a decisive victory for the forces of freedom -- and a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise. -- George W. Bush, September 2002

American Democracy Is in Trouble

Inflation rate nears 13%

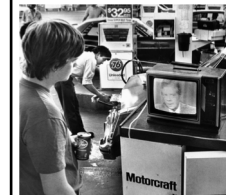
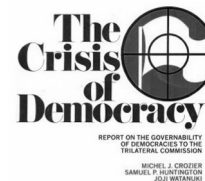
Running Amok With Your Money

THE TERRORIST PLAGUE

U.S. crime rate soars

New Soviet power threat seen

Japan: Partner or Rival?



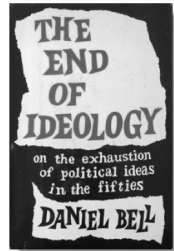
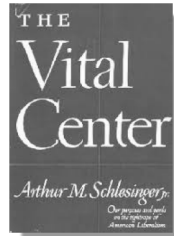
The Crisis of Democracy

By James Reston

WASHINGTON, June 28—It is hard to travel in Europe these days, or even to live in Washington, without recognizing that liberal democracy is now in serious trouble in the world. We are living in a time of widespread doubt about the capacity of free societies to deal with the economic, political and philosophical problems of the age.

THE AGE OF CONSENSUS

The old sweeping issues very largely have disappeared. The central domestic issues of our time ... relate not to basic clashes of philosophy or ideology but to ways and means of reaching common goals ... What is at stake in our economic decisions today is not some grand warfare of rival ideologies which will sweep the country with passion but the practical management of a modern economy. -- John F. Kennedy, 1962



DEMOCRACY IN CRISIS

by
HAROLD J. LASKI
PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
IN THE UNIVERSITY
OF LONDON

... more positive outlook to be
... of time. There is in America
a wider disillusionment with democracy, a greater
scepticism about popular institutions, than at any
period in its history.
One other point about America is worth making

American Dictatorship Seriously Considered in Official Quarters

By CHARLES P. STEWART
(Central Press Staff Writer)



HEADLINES!

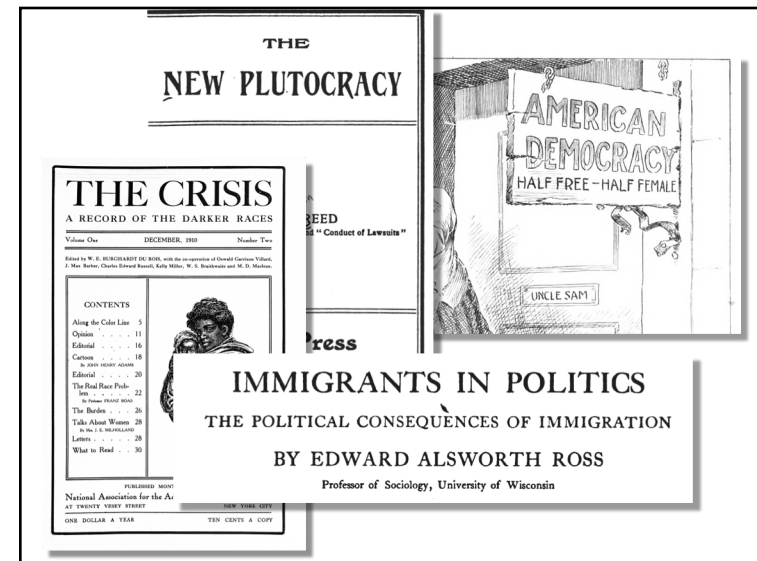
(from "Gabriel Over the White House," the most amazing picture ever made)

- ★ Two million men on the march!
- ★ President made dictator
- ★ President demands cabinet resign
- ★ Gangsters turn guns on White House
- ★ The woman behind a dictator
- ★ Dramatic scenes in congress!
- ★ Gangsters executed at statue of Liberty
- ★ Prohibition thrown out by dictator
- ★ A new hero joins Washington and Lincoln!



THE AGE OF NORMALCY

No Congress of the United States ever assembled . . . has met with a more pleasing prospect than that which appears at the present time. In the domestic field there is tranquility and contentment, harmonious relations between management and wage earner, freedom from industrial strife, and the highest record of years of prosperity. In the foreign field there is peace [and] the good will which comes from mutual understanding.. -- Calvin Coolidge, 1928



The slums are here; they cannot be conjured away by any spell of our old democracy. Disenchanted with the glorious large promises of '76, we are even, like our early European visitors, beginning to ascribe all evils to political institutions, and occasionally the unacknowledged thought arises: "Is democracy after all a failure? Is not the bureaucratic efficiency of Prussia as good as the democratic laxness and corruption of Pennsylvania? Are not progress, honesty, security better than the deceptive 'unalienable rights'? Does democracy pay?"

Walter Weyl, 1914



Grand Strategy Isn't Grand Enough

Government leaders craft strategies to pursue national objectives given the circumstances that confront them at a particular moment. Leaders want to believe that they have crafted an overall strategy that will work forever, a durable way of managing national problems. But leaders are always disappointed. Circumstances change and strategies have to be reconsidered and overhauled. This process of self-scrutiny and adaptation is unpleasant but unavoidable.

MOMENTS OF STRATEGIC SHIFT

- Changed circumstances
- The toppling of an old paradigm
- Political and social "unfreezing"
- Political entrepreneurship:
 - Framing, experimentation, false starts
- Consolidation of a new paradigm
- Dismantling and construction of institutions

A New Age of Uncertainty

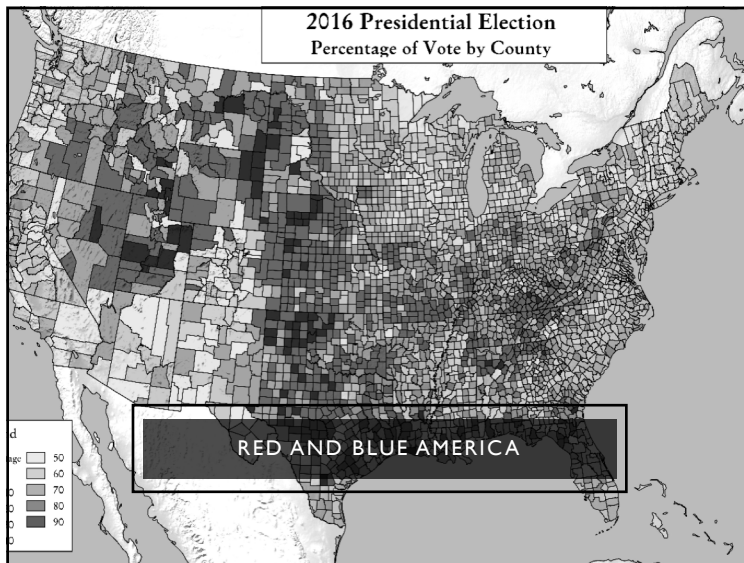
DAVID COEN* and ALASDAIR ROBERTS**

Although we cannot anticipate the new orthodoxy, it is possible to say something about the period of transition itself. We know from prior experience that is likely to be prolonged and marked by the intensification of political conflict. This will be true in conference rooms, as experts disagree more sharply about the content of policy; in voting booths; and on the streets, as protests become larger and more strident. The economic crisis will therefore mutate into a political and social crisis, distinguished by concerns about the dysfunctionality of political processes and the decay of public order.

Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions, Vol. 25, No. 1, January 2012 (pp. 5-9).
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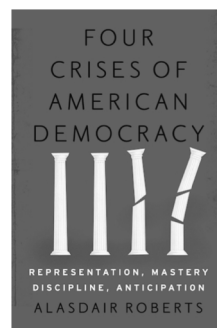
WHERE ARE WE NOW?

- Changed circumstances
 - Frustration with inequality
 - Economic destabilization and insecurity
 - Reaction against technocracy
 - Resurgence of sectionalism
 - Revival of great power rivalries
 - Technological changes
- The collapse of a governing strategy
- Ideational and institutional deconsolidation
- Search for a new strategy and supporting coalition



- A series of unfortunate events:
 - Aftershocks of financial crisis
 - Disruptive effects of cable news, social media
 - Advent of reality television (and the making of Trump)
 - Persistence of the Clinton machine
 - Comey's "October surprise" on the email investigation
 - Russian meddling in the election
 - Clinton's hubris and failure to campaign in key states
 - Unusual features of the Electoral College

If we take the long view, there is more room for optimism about American democracy. There have been many periods in American history where settled ideas about the role of government have been thrown into doubt. The task of forging a new public philosophy is not easy, and it takes years. The first steps in that process are especially confused and difficult. But these first steps cannot be avoided, and we should resist the temptation to make broader judgments about democracy in this difficult moment. Democracy does not work neatly, but it does work.



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