

The rhetoric of main street media: An analysis of small-town newspapers

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## Abstract

While traditional print media has long played a vital role in the circulation of political rhetoric, scant attention has been paid to minor market newspapers that service the populations of small rural towns. These papers, soon to be fully supplanted by electronic media, offer a unique window into the politics of rural communities, which during the Trump administration have been understood as the wellspring of virulent conservatism and populism. This project identifies and establishes newspapers published by Main Street Media as a unique and fertile archive for this sort of analysis. Main Street Media is the parent company of thirty-three newspapers that service small farm town markets in Kansas, Nebraska, and Missouri. To focus on the divisive political rhetoric surrounding crime, violence, and immigration, this project concentrates specifically on the opinion and politician statement sections of the three Main Street Media properties (*Red Cloud Chief*, *Smith County Pioneer*, and *The Santa Fe Times*) published in Nebraska, Kansas, and Missouri, respectively. With a sampling frame of January 2015 through January 2017, I capture both the end of the Obama presidency and the sequence of narratives leading into the Trump presidency. This strategy yields a sample of 729 unique opinion/political statement pieces. The aim of this project is to better understand the place of small-market newspapers as an ongoing site for the circulation of political rhetoric in the context of proliferating electronic, new media such as Facebook and Twitter, and to theorize editorial writers as key political actors in this milieu. The findings of this research show a significant use of the far-right populist narrative in these journalists' responses to ongoing national and international cultural debate and support of politicians who adhere to this worldview. Implications for policy responses are also discussed.

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## **Chapter 1 - The Seeds of Far-Right Rage**

Rural America has played a key role in recent elections and the Republican Party has been using that power to their advantage. As Matthew Hildreth (2019), executive director of RuralOrganizing.org says, “Donald Trump won the White House, not because Republicans dramatically increased their number of voters, but because, over the last two decades, they changed the location of their voters.” Hildreth’s words echo the shifting allegiance of the white working class from Democrat to Republican, as rural areas suffer from post-industrialization (Frank, 2004, 2020; Hochschild, 2016; Scoones et al, 2018). Crumbling small towns due to the loss of Democrat support for the working class has led to many rural Americans believing themselves abandoned by a government that is continuing to cater to elite interests (Berlet & Sunshine, 2019; Frank 2004, 2020). These narratives are coined as far-right populism and are used to rally working class whites around far-right populist agendas. It is these narratives that will serve as key theoretical and conceptual anchors in my effort to map the cultural force and political power of Main Street Media.

Main Street Media (MSM) is an organization founded by journalist Jack Krier which is comprised of thirty-three small-town rural newspapers stretching across the adjoining boundaries of Kansas, Nebraska, and Missouri. MSM’s lead writer up until his death in 2017, Krier routinely published editorials and opinion columns across all thirty-three of these papers. In them, he and other editorial writers drafted articles over the current events in America, commonly using a far-right populist narrative to support their opinions on subjects of controversial discourse. Far-right populism is commonly defined as a form of politics that combines an identity of a working-class population against an elite upper-class with themes of

nationalism that are by definition exclusionary towards other races, religions, and foreigners. (Berlet & Sunshine, 2019; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017; Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Scoones et al. 2018). I have performed an Ethnographic Content Analysis (Altheide, 1987; Kort-Butler, 2016) on a selected group of 729 MSM articles published within a theoretical sampling frame of January 2015 to January 2017, which I established in order to zero in on distinct facets of far-right populism. The study aims to examine the cultural zeitgeist displayed by these journalists within the period of the end of the Obama presidency and the lead into the Trump presidency and their rhetoric used to support far-right populist narratives within their writing. Before getting into this, it is important to start with how far-right populism came to be in its current form within Rural America, and to do so, I begin with the 1980s farm crisis in the Midwest, which served as the spark of the new populist movement.

In the 1980s, rural Midwest farming communities faced a substantial challenge from a rapid and unexpected economic downturn. As agricultural economist Barry J. Barnett (2000) writes “Failure to anticipate the crisis was likely due, in part, to a traditional microeconomic orientation and an emphasis on analysis that is largely divorced from political and historical contexts” (p.380). These predictions largely stem from a farming community that had been seeing massive growth throughout the 1970s and was taking out colossal debts in order to increase their productive capacity under the neoliberal system of global free trade, without realizing that their assets could be shifted by foreign influences under this system. As anthropologist Mark Edelman (2019) describes, the crisis was hastened when “prices for petroleum and fossil-fuel-based fertilizers skyrocketed, interest rates soared as monetary policies sought to dampen inflation, loans were called in, and grain prices plummeted with the cessation of sales to the Soviet Union following its invasion of Afghanistan” (p. 509).

When President Jimmy Carter announced an embargo on trade with the Soviet Union, farmers soon faced loans they could not pay off, and the farm crisis unfurled (Correll, 2019; Leiker, 2019; Levitas, 2004). These conditions led many agricultural banks and the totality of small-town communities into bankruptcy, as grocery stores, schools, restaurants, and many other local, family-owned stores collapsed with the loss of profits from farmers drastically crumbling their community economy. The enormous loss for the farming community from this financial disaster proved to be a huge win for corporations looking to profit from their misfortune. Following the “corporate raider” philosophies of 1980s Wall Street, the farm crisis offered a prime opportunity for large businesses and corporate agriculture conglomerates to purchase land, storefronts, and small family farms and strip them of assets for profit.<sup>1</sup> The enormous profits from these practices contributed towards large corporations transforming into full-blown monopolies and furthered the divide of wealth inequality in the United States. All the while, these conditions provided fertile ground for a virulent politics of right-wing populist backlash, which emerged in many forms, but most notably as anti-government militias and fringe millenarian groups.

In 1982, amid the unfolding crisis, the KTTL radio station in Dodge City, Kansas began broadcasting white supremacist, conspiracist and anti-government content, quickly generating a national following. That year, Nellie Babbs and her husband, Charles, owners of KTTL, featured taped sermons and speeches from a man named Bill Gale, a key figure in the white supremacist movement, Posse Comitatus (Levitas, 2004). Latin for “power of the county,” Posse Comitatus has in the United States been used to signify a form of political organization where the county

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<sup>1</sup> This process is known as financialization, which can be described as the growing involvement of financial actors in all forms of economy looking to profit from assets rather than run successful businesses (Edelman, 2019, p. 508).

sheriff, invested with the power to summon armed citizens in order to “keep the peace,” is the key political actor.

The 53-year-old Gale had clear racist and anti-state intentions when he founded the group in 1969, “emphasizing the idea that white Anglo-Saxon Christians were joined together by natural and ‘lawful’ rights that trumped those of a (racially) corrupt state” (Levitas, 2004, p.4). Believing that the United States government was controlled by anti-white and anti-Christian forces (mainly Jewish), Gale intended for the group to battle corruption with extreme violence. Gale displayed this ideology prominently with his broadcasts on KTTL, during which he gave powerful, white-nationalist church sermons over the airwaves. These sermons directed his audience’s animosity into a maze of conspiracies which alleged that “wherever they (Jews) congregated, they attempted destruction of the good things and the blessings given to Adam’s family (White Christians). Their activities always aimed at bringing Satan’s form of government to the nation, which allowed them within its borders.” (Gale, 1963, p. 35). He expands on these ideas in a 54-page volume printed by the Ministry of Christ Church, which, like the Posse Comitatus, he himself founded. Preceding the ascendance of right-wing talk radio and, of course, the chans<sup>2</sup> and message boards of today, KTTL provided a potent conduit for Gale’s virulent politics, allowing his message to reach and incite new audiences across the rural Midwest.

One such listener, North Dakotan farmer Gordon Kahl, was incited enough to act. Kahl, a World War 2 veteran and Posse Comitatus member, opposed the state’s authority and jurisdiction to levy and collect income tax. On parole from prison in 1981, he faced a heavy tax burden, which the state demanded immediately and in full. Unable or refusing to pay, Kahl

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<sup>2</sup> Chans are internet forums known for their anonymity and loosely moderated discussions, allowing people to freely discuss topics from common hobbies to conspiracies and threats.

absconded and violated parole (Levitas, 2004). He then retreated into a Posse Comitatus underground network, where Kahl remained until 1983 when US Marshals caught up with him in Medina, North Dakota. Following the advice of Gale's KTTL sermons, Kahl met the officers with lethal force. The resulting shootout left two of the US marshals dead and three other officers wounded, and Kahl again fled from the scene. Police finally caught up to Kahl four months later in Arkansas, where another gun battle left him dead.

Despite his open support of Kahl, Gale continued to broadcast his openly racist, antisemitic, and anti-state views on KTTL. However, Dodge City residents petitioned the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to reign in Kahl's and KTTL's other questionable programming. As the case against KTTL became national news, residents petitioned the FCC to address the matter. It was not until 1985 that the FCC finally acted on the case and, after an extended period of deliberation, declared that the broadcast was protected by the First Amendment. This outcome was, however, rendered moot, as the Babb's had divorced in 1984, sold the station and shut down KTTL for good (Correll, 2019; Levitas, 2004).

One of the most damning charges set against KTTL was violation of the Fairness Doctrine, which required public media broadcasts to present controversial issues of public importance in a manner that was balanced and fair. The FCC threw out this charge on the grounds that the petitioners were not successful at proving that these were controversial issues (Bolton, 1987). The case against KTTL was one of the many cases that led to the FCC ultimately deciding to repeal the Fairness Doctrine, as they concluded that it violated the First Amendment's right to freedom of speech by allowing the government to deem what was a controversial issue instead of the public (Bolton, 1987; Ruane, 2009).

The repeal of the Fairness Doctrine heralded the rise of conservative talk show hosts such as Rush Limbaugh, which gained popularity once they were no longer bound by the Fairness Doctrine to display both sides of an issue and free to deem anything they chose as a matter of importance to the public. In relation to Gale's broadcast, shows such as Limbaugh's had relatively tame conservative, small government messaging, but appealed to audiences' emotions, feelings of powerlessness, and racist sentiments similarly. As sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild (2016) argues in her book *Strangers in Their Own Land*, conservative media is designed to "suggest what the issues are. It tells 'them' what to feel afraid, angry, and anxious about, drawing on anger and fear as their primary emotions" (p. 126).

But the power of the media is not the only plausible explanation for the success of Gale's broadcasts. It could be that the conspiracy-laden, racist messages of Gale and his kind found fertile ground to take hold in the rural Midwest, because of the precarious position in which many of its residents found themselves. As historian James Leiker (2019) puts it, "rural people could easily overlook the Posse's racism and anti-Semitism while turning a sympathetic ear toward its defense of rural America, with all accompanying hatred of urban life" (p.281). The belief in the main mantra of far-right populism has continued to thrive within American rural communities to this day, which was brought to the attention of the rest of the public in 2016 when Donald Trump was elected president of the United States.

This insurgent narrative of white supremacy in far-right populist politics has existed in America for many years before the present-day formation of Trumpism, encasing right-wing populism. While the nation shifted its focus to international terrorism after the events of September 11, 2001, white domestic terrorism has lived on in the background, continuing long past the death of Bill Gale. White supremacy hides within the populist politics of the far right

and markets itself towards rural communities that are suffering from the negative repercussions of the globalization of the economy and the shift of the world economy to the market of free trade liberalism (Barnett, 2000; Hendrikse, 2018; Rodrik, 2021). It is within the culture, such as bars, newspapers, and radio broadcasts in these small rural towns, that we must look if we are to understand this resilient and noxious form of politics.

While traditional print media has long played a vital role in the circulation of political rhetoric, scant attention has been paid to minor market newspapers that service the populations of small rural towns. These papers, soon to be fully supplanted by electronic media, offer a unique window into the politics of rural communities. This project identifies and establishes newspapers published by Main Street Media as a unique and fertile archive for this sort of analysis. Main Street Media is the parent company of thirty-three newspapers that service small farm town markets in Kansas, Nebraska, and Missouri. To focus on the divisive political rhetoric surrounding crime, violence, and immigration, this project will concentrate specifically on the opinion/politician statement sections of the three Main Street Media properties (*Red Cloud Chief*, *Smith County Pioneer*, and *The Santa Fe Times*) published in Nebraska, Kansas, and Missouri, respectively. I have established a sampling frame of January 2015- January 2017 to capture both the end of the Obama presidency and the sequence of narratives leading into the Trump presidency. This strategy has yielded a sample of 729 unique opinion and political statement pieces, which will form the core of the data. The aim of this project is to better understand the place of small-circulation newspapers as an ongoing site for the circulation of divisive political rhetoric and to theorize editorial writers as key political actors in this milieu. Implications for the cultural politics of journalism and free speech are discussed.

## Chapter 2 - The Populist Problem

Populism is a contested term in both the vernacular and academic sense. During the 2016 election, both the Democratic Socialist Senator from Vermont, Bernie Sanders and billionaire real estate developer and reality television personality Donald Trump assumed the populist mantle. In these two politicians, we can map an expansive “politics of populism” which has existed in many forms and represents vastly different things. In his book *What’s the Matter with Kansas*, political historian Thomas Frank (2004) defines populism as a “general political style that emphasizes class antagonism and the nobility of the common man.” (p.32). While seemingly straight forward from Frank’s position, populism means many things to many people.

In two similar discussions on populism, two vastly different conclusions were reached on the matter. Thomas Frank (2020) sees the true form of populism aligning with the working class left and asserts that “thanks to insurgent campaigns like the one mounted by Bernie Sanders for the presidency in 2016, we know fairly precisely what a modern-day populism looks like” (p.210). On the opposite end, political historian Jan-Werner Müller (2015) argues that “Populism is not just anti-elitist, it is also necessarily anti-pluralist,” and that therefore, “Bernie Sanders is not a populist but Donald Trump, the self-declared representative of the one and true America is” (p.89). It is therefore necessary to be certain of the political vantage that these race and class antagonisms and the nobility of ‘the common man’ discussions approach. Because of the Republican Party’s long history of marshalling anger and electoral power with wedge issues like crime, immigration, and drug use (Kohler-Hausmann, 2017), I am focusing specifically on tenets of right-wing populism or nationalist populism (Berlet & Sunshine, 2019; Dobkiewicz, 2019; Gusterson, 2017).

All forms of populism have certain underlying themes under a common definition. Political Scientist Cas Mudde (2004) categorically defines populism as the general will of the people and a conflict between “two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’” (p.562). The divide between the left and the right becomes who is defined as the people rather than elite, as it is common for both sides to exclude or include different demographics into these vague groups to rally certain populations of voters more easily. To distinguish between left and right populism, Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) use the idea that broadly “left-wing populists combine populism with some form of socialism, while right-wing populists tend to combine it with some type of nationalism” (p.21). So, for instance, this distinction is evident on two approaches to the issue of immigration. Where left-wing populists might argue for a broad humanism, arguing that immigrants deserve a path to citizenship and more inclusive border policies to help refugees, right-wing populists will be much more nativist in comparison, framing immigrants, particularly non-white immigrants, and non-Christians as wholly other, invading hordes aiming to “take” (land, jobs, women) from deserving US citizens. As Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) put it “Each populist actor emerges because of a particular set of social grievances, which influences its choice of host ideology, which in turn affects how the actor defines “the people” and “the elite” (p.21-22).

Right-wing populism is ideologically inseparable from nationalism and authoritarianism, relying on Manichean themes of invasion and war to garner support (Berlet & Sunshine, 2019; Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Scoones et al. 2018). These far-right populist narratives are gaining traction by creating a definite other category that includes various groups, such as liberal elites, African Americans, and immigrants, among many others. Giving an antagonistic role to a specific group allows them to attach blame to people rather than the abstract forces and broken

systems that form our complex reality. Referring to the will of the people creates a sense of unity among supporters of populism, even though the general population of people is not of one will and often has many conflicting interests and unique goals (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Kaltwasser, 2015).

Right-wing populism has seen recent successes in many Western democracies, where it has gained an increasing foothold on power as it becomes a mainstream narrative in politics (Engesser et al., 2017; Gil de Zuniga et al., 2020; Gusterson, 2017; Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Wettstein et al., 2018). The rise of these populism movements has been tied to themes of nationalism because they coincide with globalization and the shifting power balances to countries that conspire with it (Dobkiewicz, 2019; Mudde, 2004; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Globalization ties together with deindustrialization, leading to the loss of jobs and economic stature, causing fury from the people who linguist scholar Ruth Wodak (2017) calls the “modernization losers” (p. 10). These are the people that have had economic loss and fallen in status because of economic downturns like the farm crisis of the 1980s and the Recession of 2008. Supporters of this position are fed up with losing power, status, and wealth, and view the present as worse than the past. This anger is in part because of the worsening inequality in the economy over the past several decades.

Another principal factor in the rise of right-wing populism is the disenchantment of the so-called common man, or specifically, the downfall of the white working class.

Deindustrialization and the rise of big business monopolies have hurt the white working-class considerably, as they and most Americans have fallen into a spiral of disadvantage that is cascaded by the increasing wealth of the top one percent on the economic ladder (Edelman, 2018; Gusterson, 2017; Scoones et al., 2018). While these economic conditions have been

affecting minority communities for decades, the loss of jobs in rural areas and the decay of small towns have created a deep-seated rage in the white working class. Hochschild (2016) explains this rage as the deep story within which the white working class imagine themselves first in line for the American Dream. They see themselves not reaching their dream and believe Democrats in power let minorities cut in front of them using programs such as affirmative action and welfare.

The aforementioned story has been one of the leading statements of right-wing populism, stating that the enemy is both the corrupt elites at the top and the downtrodden minorities leaching off of the demanding work of the working class. The growth of this narrative has been helped by the democrats and the republicans, as the democrats have left behind the working class to court the upper- and middle-class voters, leaving the working class to be incorporated into the republican narrative in the US government (Frank, 2004, 2020). While Democrats have courted corporate support since Bill Clinton's first term, they have left behind a large population that they should still represent, and republicans have capitalized on this weakness to gain more votes and power. While democrats have left behind the working class, globalization has only assured that distance grows even more as our country becomes part of the world stage; connecting us with other countries through business and ideologies, which has left the small formerly industrial towns watching their factories crumble along with their dreams.<sup>3</sup>

Diving deeper into the economic insecurity that ties together many of the populist narratives in our country, we see the success of this rhetoric as a defensive response to the

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<sup>3</sup> Globalization is the concept that the economy has become more interconnected throughout the world now that businesses and ideology can spread across on an international stage. Globalization has led to many businesses outsourcing their blue-collar jobs to countries where labor is cheaper. As Economists Lubos Pastor and Pietro Veronesi (2018) found, according to their globalization model, "countries with high inequality, high financial development, and trade deficits are especially vulnerable to anti-global backlash" (p.34).

economic downturn of the American economy and the loss of jobs. Right-wing populists capitalize on crisis narratives and use these as divisive topics by exaggerating the danger to increase the sense of threat for the voter population (Frank, 2004; Taggart, 2004; Tormey, 2018). While the economies of the world change into a more globalized model and democrats shift focus to elites, a large population of workers are left with no one supporting them in office. As Thomas Frank (2004) observes, “conservatism operates by the erasure of the economic world, which reveals how much power conservatives have over institutions they claim are controlled by leftists” (p. 128-129). Right-wing populism works because of its ability to highlight the decay of the working class’s livelihoods and give them an enemy and a solution to work for while obscuring the damage that they have done themselves. These messages have seen much success in spreading themselves throughout media outlets.

Populism has presented both a challenge to established media sources such as television, print, and radio who have controlled directions from investors and an opportunity for new media to gain a foothold in the market. A good example of the media’s political influence was shown in the 1988 Presidential Campaign Ad on Willie Horton by George H.W. Bush. Horton is a Black man who was released for a weekend under the democratic governor Michael Dukakis’s Massachusetts prison furlough program. Horton did not return from the weekend, instead he violently raped a woman after assaulting her fiancé in Maryland. Bush used this case to portray Dukakis as soft on crime in a heavily broadcasted television commercial that was met with resounding success.

As shown by the Willie Horton campaign rhetoric of George H.W. Bush, “Rational and reasoned debate will always lose out to symbolic and expressive rhetoric” (Newburn & Jones, 2005, p. 7). Media has always been influencing politics and vice versa, as politicians have tried

to spread their symbols and rhetoric across the country. Media has changed with the advent of the digital age, which has seen a hyper-focus of political coverage shifting to cover the more scandalous and shocking aspects of the political world (Gil de Zuniga et al., 2020; Mudde, 2004; Müller et al., 2017). These changes have caused increasing polarization in politics across the globe and have soared with the creation and spread of social media.

Social media has become a new form of media not controlled by the elites of the past, but a new class of wealth arising from the expanding reach of technology. Social media is a friendly form of media to populist politicians allowing them to get out their message to their loyal followers without having to go through a third party like mainstream media, which is often heavily influenced by the elites that they are fighting against (Dobkiewicz, 2019; Gil De Zuniga et al., 2020; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Much of social media's power and influence in right wing populist discourse is an adaptation of their culture war playbook that they have been using for decades.

As Frank (2004) puts it, "conservatives grandstand eloquently on cultural issues but almost never achieve real-world results. What they're after is cultural turmoil" (p.208). They specifically charge at these unobtainable moral standpoints to keep their voting base riled up so that they continue voting conservatively on issues that are rarely changed once they are in office. These election tactics also contribute to the post-truth narrative that flies around right-wing populism, as Silvio Waisbord (2018) puts it "for populism, 'the people' and 'the elites' hold their own version of truth. All truths are necessarily partial and anchored social interests. Truth does not exist as a collective, common goal. A common truth is impossible given the essential nature of agonistic, conflict-centered politics" (p. 9). For example, one of these versions of truth is seen in the narrative of the heartland.

The heartland is the social construction of the ideal world of the past, which many people see as being better than the corrupted and twisted present (Engesser et al., 2017; Kaltwasser, 2015; Taggart, 2004). The idea of the heartland stems from viewing the past in a romanticized, rose-tinted worldview, and believing that it is still feasible as it had already existed. That imagined past will most likely have never existed in the first place, but the created memory of it over the years will build a powerful imagery within someone's mind to meet that ideal. As Paul Taggart (2004) explains, the core values of the far-right populist movement stem from what they define as the heartland, which can lead it to apply to vastly different ideological conditions depending on the people that the ideology is rallying. Outsiders not originating from the heartland become targets because of their exclusion from this narrative, leading to many right-wing populist groups opposing immigration and calling for more restrictions on country borders. Additionally, another concept that ties into the heartland and populism is the idea that the heartland is where the makers of society live.

Those makers of society are called producers and often displayed as heroes in far-right populist narratives using the concept of producerism. Producerism is the idea that workers and farmers are the makers of society and that the elite class of politicians, white-collar workers, and welfare class are parasites that take money from the makers without contributing to society in a meaningful way (Abts et al., 2020; Grdesic, 2017; Peck, 2014). The idea of producerism then gives honor and meaning to blue-collar workers and the feeling that they matter and therefore need to be heard in the government that represents them. Producerism easily combines into the anger forming from deindustrialization and the demise of high-paying blue-collar jobs and feeds producerism support into the populist narrative. Another term used in far-right populist discourse in conjunction with the heartland and producerism is the idea of Main Street.

The concept of Main Street extends from that of Wall Street, where wall street represents the ruling elites, and the main street represents the ordinary working-class Americans (Frank, 2004; Müller, 2016). As the principal streets of many towns across America see their mom-and-pop businesses disappear, they look to Wall Street as the enemy. The narrative pits the pure Main Street compared to the corrupt Wall Street, though leftist populism is found to be more inclusionary than right-wing populism, which is exclusionary in its rhetoric (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). To explore this topic, it then becomes paramount to look to the news of Main Street itself on the local level.

The importance of local news is the fact that it serves as an important form of connection between residents and often increases participation in local events and elections (Kübler & Goodman, 2019; Smith & Schiffman, 2018; Terry, 2011). Some choose even to call these local papers, community papers, as they play an enormous impact in keeping towns connected to local events and activities. In fact, mass communications scholars Christina Smith and James Schiffman show via their 2018 study on local print media that small local newspapers reported heavily on local, state, and national elections and encouraged civic participation within their papers which largely focused on local politics. With coverage given by local papers effecting opinions of their readers, it becomes important to understand who is authoring these papers and what messages that they deem important to inform the public on. In newspapers, this information on author's values and opinions comes into full view on the editorial page.

Editorials are an important part of newspaper media and can hold significant sway over their audiences. Editorials are commonly defined as “officially expressed opinions on a matter by the publication’s editorial board” (Lee Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 2007). These opinion pieces often cover a wide range of topics anywhere from the local to international level and represent the

views of the editor on a given subject. Media and Communications Scholar Julie Firmstone (2019) puts it “Editorials allow newspapers to make allegiances known; support and oppose individuals; speak on behalf of their readers; speak to readers; and speak to politicians, parties, and other organizations.” (p.3). The editorials often represent the voice of the organization running the paper and can serve as influential everyman to whom many within the newspaper’s audience can relate. In a 2002 study done by political scholars Kim Fridkin Kahn and Patrick Kenney, they found that papers with significantly display positive articles for politicians supported by the paper’s writing staff. This can become even more relevant when considering the rise of group ownership among small-town newspapers.

One of the things that grew out of small-town newspapers dying was the idea of group ownership in order to keep papers alive. As journalist historian Beth H. Garfrerick (2010) describes “the introduction of chain ownership and central printing operations brought a new business model to the weekly newspaper field that enabled many communities to retain a newspaper, albeit under new or corporate ownership . . . But chain ownership also led to the loss of an independent editorial voice, as newspapers within a chain often reflected the political leanings of its owner(s)” (p. 155-156). The small-town papers were granted new life by these mergers but also a more prominent voice from an outside source, who often did not have any personal connections to the small towns that their company published newspapers in. This business model helps to ensure the same dialogue repeating itself throughout the collective of papers controlled by one centralized owner that can edit the papers at their own disclosure. Based on these characteristics put together, I used the group-owned company of thirty-three local papers, Main Street Media, to explore the far-right populist narratives within the editorial sections of the papers.

## Chapter 3 - Data and Methods

This thesis analyzes the rhetoric and discourse of small rural communities through a sample of small-town newspapers. As with print journalism as a whole, the small rural newspapers focused upon here are in rapid decline, with massive losses of funding causing many to close their doors for good. While the outlook may be grim, it has presented an opportunity for consolidation. Main Street Media is an organization purportedly founded to preserve and, in a sense, monopolize small-town newspapers, currently owning thirty-three of them across Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska. The organization, founded by journalist Jack Krier, is administered by an editorial board and small 2-4 person teams for each individual newspaper. Still appearing in print, the papers are distributed locally through the mail, by delivery and are available through some local businesses within these small towns. MSM also publishes each paper digitally and maintains an archive online, where each newspaper requires a separate subscription service to access its database. It is through this archive that I gathered the study's data.

To reflect similarities and differences across markets, I sampled one paper from each of the three states that Main Street Media covers, these are *The Smith County Pioneer* (Kansas), *The Red Cloud Chief* (Nebraska), and *The Santa Fe Times* (Missouri). Because they address news at the local, state, and national levels and offer the most open venue for public commentary of all kinds, I focused on the opinion columns and letters to the editor of each paper. I searched the MSM archive for all opinion columns and letters to the editor for the given period, separating these sections, and downloading them to create a database of all articles matching these criteria from my selected timeframe. I chose a sampling period of January 2015-January 2017 to capture the final years of the Obama presidency, the 2016 campaign, and the first days of the Trump presidency. Using this strategy, I downloaded the community section of each individual

newspaper which altogether contained 447 pages of unique opinion columns and letters to the editors. This amounted to 331 articles from the *Red Cloud Chief*, 292 articles from *Smith County Pioneer*, and 322 articles from *The Santa Fe Times*. After excluding 216 duplicate articles, this strategy produced a total sample of 729 unique articles published by the three newspapers sometime between January 2015 and January 2017.

As an analytic strategy, I pursued an Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA) approach as outlined by sociologist David Altheide (1987). ECA starts with a quantitative analysis in which the objective content of the source, being in this case MSM, is coded and categorized by their article subject. The ethnographic part of the content analysis happens after this approach, taking the categorized results of the quantitative section and examining them for meaning and context on a deeper level. This allows the research to be more reflexive towards findings stemming from the data and allows us to follow these findings so that expected categories can coexist with unanticipated results of the study.

My process is comprised of two main stages. First, a general quantitative content analysis was conducted to assess the topics addressed and to help guide the processes of the second stage, qualitative analysis, in which I explore the thematic coherence of the articles and their meaning. Working with printed copies, I read each article and noted key characteristics, gathering newspaper, publication date, author, title, topic, and assigned up to three keywords to each article. Each data point was then entered into an excel spreadsheet, with one article serving as the case or unit of analysis. Once I had developed a general accounting of the articles in the sample, I used the spreadsheet to create descriptive statistics for the final 560 articles analyzed. I identified topics based on the main topic of conversation within the article such as agriculture being formed around articles discussing crops and farming or politics focusing on matters

relating to government, laws, and bills from local to national level. This resulted in the Table shown below:

**Table 1** : *Themes of the relevant articles from the Community Section of the MSM newspapers*

Themes in sample articles	Frequency of Article topic (%) N= 560
Agriculture	4.8
Economy	1.1
Ecosystem	.5
History	2.3
Local	2.5
Policing	1.8
Politics	83.6
Religion	2.9
Social Security	0.5

Secondly, I focused specifically on the articles coded as political, which totaled to 468 articles. I then used the topics and keywords as a rationale for the in-depth, qualitative stage of the analysis. Following an open coded, grounded theory strategy, I did not impose a particular theoretical position upon the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Instead, I let the data guide me to the theory able to be outlined and supported within the findings. To code my data, I used the open coding method which breaks down the data analytically such as “event/action/interaction and comparing them against others for similarities and differences” leading these to be compared

with equivalent properties forming examinable categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Using the inducted process above, I developed four central thematic subsections of the political articles to focus on for my analysis, which I titled Republican, Democrat, External Cultural Conflict, and Internal Cultural Conflict. Using this strategy totaled to 219 Republican articles, 63 Democrat articles, 56 External Cultural Conflict Articles, and 70 Internal Cultural Conflict Articles.

Articles that did not fit into these categories were then coded into a section titled Other, which totaled to sixty articles. The breakdown of these categories can be seen in Table 2:

**Table 2** : *Sub-Themes of Political articles from the Community Section of the MSM newspapers*

Sub-themes of Politics articles	Frequency of Article topic (%) N= 468
Democrats	(13.5)
- Critique/Condemnation of Democratic leaders	7.3
- Critique/Condemnation of Democratic platform/policies	5.8
- Announcements of Democratic events	0.4
External Cultural Conflict	(12.0)
- Critique/ Condemnation of Immigration	2.6
- Combining and Condemnation of Islam and Terrorism	6.4
- Calls for nationalism/ Military Support	3.0
Internal Cultural Conflict	(15.0)
- Condemnation of LGBTQ+ community	4.3
- Praising Pro-life towards Abortion/ Condemnation of Pro-Choice	3.4
- Praise/Defense towards Christian/Traditionalist Ideals in Government	4.1
- Praise of Policing/ Critique towards Black activism/ Minority Policies	2.6
- Critique against gun control/ mass shootings	0.6
Other Political Themes	(12.8)
-Agriculture in government, Politics affecting farming	3.0
- Unaffiliated information on Voting, Taxes, Medicare etc.	9.8
Republicans	(46.7)
-Praise for Republican Actions in government/ Republican Leaders	27.8

-Praise for Republican leaders and Condemnation of Democratic leaders and/or Establishment Republicans	13.6
-Articles by Republicans in Government	5.3

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As sociologist Lisa Kort-Butler (2016) posits “in interpreting the analytical results, researchers bring the accumulated evidence to bear on the research questions, determining what story their results tell about the texts and their content” (p.6). I did this by noting common topics and keywords used heavily within the articles and going into a deeper study with the political narrative that I found being heavily used within the sample selection.

## Chapter 4 - Analysis

### **The Populist Parasite: The transforming narrative of the GOP**

(219 articles focusing on praise for Republican actions in government, praise for Republican officials, discussion of Republican passed legislation, and condemnation of establishment republicans.)

The growing movement of far-right populism has captured the hearts of the GOP voting base and in turn has been changing the platform of the GOP itself (Engesser et al., 2017; Gil de Zuniga et al., 2020; Gusterson, 2017; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). These effects can be seen clearly through the outrage politics and cultural turmoil that are shown in modern day populist media (Frank, 2004; Waisbord, 2018). These far-right populist rhetorical strategies can be seen in many of MSM's opinion and editorial columns due to the leaning of the paper's owners. As shown here, MSM owner and columnist, Jack Krier (2015c) furiously attacks changes being made to American culture and identifies the blameworthy:

Our society has also lost respect for the backbone of America which is Christianity. While we dare not say or do anything that would hurt the feelings of Muslims, there is no limit on what can be done to insult Christianity. It will soon be that Christians will be considered kooks. Mr. Obama, a willing secular mass-media, and a secular entertainment industry are doing all they can to force homosexuality (two percent of the population) down our throats. And, they have succeeded to the point where they control much of what we can no longer say. Their success, most likely beyond their wildest dreams, is now resulting in transgenderism being forced down our throats. One can only imagine what the leftist will do next to destroy Christianity. Will it soon be that you can marry anything you want, like

your pet? Seems silly but how long ago was it when it didn't seem possible gay marriage would be the law. (p.5)

Krier's writing cloaks cultural outrage at increasing rights for the disadvantaged minority groups such as the LGBTQ+ and Muslim community in a fog of religious rights. Krier's arguments reflect the narrative of cultural turmoil being championed in the Republican Party (Frank, 2004). Many of these issues are impossible to 'fix' as American's trend towards becoming more tolerant and accepting of diverse issues, these cultural acceptances will continue to happen. They also saw this in the fact that the government was seen as losing its Christian majority as marriage rights extended to the LGBTQ+ community, reflecting a turning point both for human rights and religious rights. The legalization of gay marriage was one of many reforms made under the Obama administration that chose to put human rights over the rights of the Christian church, but from the vantage points of Krier and many other Americans, it reflected their losses. Later in the piece, Krier (2015c) hammers his point home:

I sincerely believe the second term of Barack Obama is the final nail in the coffin for the legacy of the white Christian males who discovered, explored, pioneered, settled, and developed the greatest Republic in the history of mankind. I also believe that the American dream is over. My grandchildren will never see the greatness of America that I saw. You cannot touch the water twice because the flow that has passed will never pass again. If it, however, is ever to be recaptured, those who come after us will have to risk their lives as did our forefathers. (p.5)

Here, Krier reflects his continued belief that the white supremacist foundation of the United States is its legacy as he invokes the image of the heartland. Krier discusses his view of the heartland here, idealizing past America as "the greatest republic in the history of mankind" and

marking it as the legacy of white Christian males (Engesser et al., 2017; Kaltwasser, 2015; Taggart, 2004). While hyperbolic, the statement also represents how powerful the narrative of the ideal America is in our country. Populists use this heartland narrative to attack the expansion of rights under the Obama administration as propagating the countries continual fall towards a complete moral collapse. Using these embellished crisis narratives of the destruction of American culture, the establishment GOP members come under siege:

The base is fed up with the mess the ‘best and brightest’ have made of our country, and tired of the fact the world they are told about by media and government bears scant resemblance to what they see and hear. Base members are living in an age of disbelief, and are tired of the lies they are fed, and the actions which are opposite of their beliefs. If GOP leaders can’t see what is happening, they are either clueless or don’t care about their base and their concerns. Despite the fact members of the base are true patriots. (Krier, 2015g, p. 2)

The small rural communities that MSM’s papers reach are perfectly amenable to the crisis narratives set forth by populist politicians because of the state of decay many of their towns are entering into. What they see are the environmental consequences of big industry rotting away their land, while their main streets fall into disrepair and abandonment (Frank, 2004; Hochschild, 2016). Such narratives give them a direct target for their anger and in turn coalesce and mobilize adherents along discernable lines. Some GOP politicians are capitalizing on this growing resentment by taking on an outsider identity in Washington D.C. This strategy is shown here in an article from Kansas Senator Jerry Moran (2016):

The reality is that the future of Rural America is not a big concern for a majority of decision-makers in Washington, D.C. That’s why a strong work ethic and genuine concern

for others – values that bind Kansans together- are as important now as ever. Together we build up the strength and spirit of our communities to keep our home such a great place to live, work and raise a family. Supporting local news is just one piece of that puzzle, but it's up to us to make certain our local papers are a part of our shared futures. (p.5)

Moran's statement is a clear-cut campaign speech aimed at attracting potential rural voters. However, the populist themes he adapts in his rhetoric represent a shift from the standard strategy of the Republican Party. Not unlike representatives of similar constituencies, Moran as well as the other nine elected Republicans on the state and national level who represent Kansas tout themselves as champions of industrious rural Americans, 'common-men' themselves and not defenders of a disinterested government establishment. Whether this is seen through fighting the EPA over harsh water regulations, pushing back against abortion for pro-life viewpoints or trying to prop up local and small owned businesses, these articles created by republican politicians or their staff to directly show that they support the voice of rural America and are fighting for their interests. Moran connects to far-right populism concerns in these articles as well such as saying "It's something few people in Washington think about, but in so many of our communities across Kansas keeping the local economy alive and well is about having a Main Street with a hardware store, grocer, pharmacy, and a weekly newspaper" (Moran, 2016, p.5). Moran places himself outside of the main narrative of Washington here in both quotes by repeatedly identifying other national lawmakers as a group that places little value on rural concerns. He then strategically invokes the populist mantras of the imagery of the heartland and Main Street to appeal to the local rural Kansas audience of the Smith County Pioneer. The fantasized idealistic imageries of a thriving main street and a connected community of culture and family lead credence to the narrative that America must return to its former status of paradise (Engesser et al., 2017; Frank,

2004; Kaltwasser, 2015; Müller, 2016; Taggart, 2004). These popular, imagined views of former America have helped to lead rural communities directly towards Donald Trump, the man who promised to make America great again. Krier (2015f) discusses Trump's rise in popularity here:

Millions of Americans, mainly conservatives, are swooning for Trump, ignoring his politically incorrect, but totally accurate, remarks on illegals invading our country. Trump's troops are not racist and have not been seized by madness. They are, however, very angry. They believe that the vast changes to the country are being wrought in ways that are undemocratic, dishonest, and illegal in some cases. Trump's troops have nowhere to turn. Both parties are to blame. The biggest share of the blame goes to the liberals, but the Republicans are a long way from innocent bystanders. His blunt promise to stop illegal immigration touches on the deepest concern of all, that our culture and our Constitutional order are disintegrating with such rapidity that we hardly recognize our country that we are living in. The change in the past six years has been almost beyond belief. (p. 2)

Krier's quotation here shows his belief that Trump's rise of popularity came about in connection to the ongoing culture war within which far-right conservatives were losing the battle for America itself. Their utopian vision of the past heartland meshes perfectly with Trump's nationalistic and authoritarian rhetoric of protecting the 'cultural identity' of America (Berlet & Sunshine, 2019; Frank, 2020; Gusterson, 2017; Scoones et al., 2018). The also represented a fundamental shift as this narrative marks establishment republican politicians as part of the problem and signifies the continuing support of the takeover of the Republican Party by a far-right populist narrative. The populist narrative emerging under Trump defines the working-class white man as an ideal representative of the people and the corrupt politicians in Washington as

the elite class that must be overthrown (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Kaltwasser, 2015; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). The far-right populist narrative began to take over the Republican Party voting class and came to dominate the GOP platform after Trump's victory in the primaries and selection at the national convention. Republicans like Larry Lambert (2016a) quickly turned to his side for these reason Lambert outlines:

Those of you that said you wouldn't vote for Donald Trump or Hilary Clinton, that is not an option. Consider this. A vote for the lesser of two evils is a vote for less evil. We always want less evil. No vote at all is a vote for Hillary. A third party or write in vote never has won in a Presidential Campaign. ... Let's make sure Hillary Clinton is not the next president! We have been told what kind of U.S. Supreme Court; she would give us. She would tear down the U.S. Constitution with her supreme court nominations. In place would be a continuation of President Obama's policies. (p. 5)

Larry Lambert speaks directly to his audience of Smith County Republicans here in explaining why he has chosen to vote for Trump, despite originally supporting Ted Cruz. Lambert does however reflect the power of the two- party system that reigns supreme in America, and that he is more concerned about the continuation of the Obama-era liberalism through Hilary Clinton than he is of the far-right populist stance of Donald Trump. An example of the distinction of praising Republican politicians through bashing of Democrats is displayed through Krier (2016d):

There is no better evidence of the media wanting to destroy Trump than the 11-year-video in which Trump was guilty of vulgar talk. For at least a week it dominated news coverage despite the fact Trump showed genuine remorse. The hypocrisy of it floors us. Members of the left have continually forced filth upon us and have insisted we are prudish if we don't accept the grotesque as the new way of life in America. Remember

how the left and the media ridiculed us because we thought it was wrong for a sitting president to have oral sex with an intern in the Oval Office. Bill Clinton is a sexual predator, JFK and Teddy Kennedy had numerous affairs, yet all are icons of the Democratic Party. But, because he is a Republican, Trump is not fit to be president because of some vulgar language. The icons of the Democratic Party are allowed to do anything they want with women and get away with it, while Trump gets crucified for the vulgar words and people who claim molestation but have stories full of holes. Words are much more serious than action within the Democratic Party! (p.2)

Within these defenses of Trump, we see Whataboutism, a classic political maneuver that instead of addressing any of the candidates' personal shortcomings or flaws, they immediately shift to the member of the opposing party and begin to discuss how much worse they are in this area than their candidate in an effort to shift the blame. The aforementioned hypocritical viewpoint harkens directly back to the divide of Republicans and Democrats and how populism has surfaced due to their struggle. It becomes important, therefore, to understand where this hatred of Democrats arises from.

### **The Demonization of Democrats: The Outrage towards Cultural change in America**

(63 articles critique/ condemnation of Democratic party leaders and platform)

As whataboutism has been continually used by far-right populist figures to obscure republican tactics, it becomes paramount to discuss the Democratic Party, the frequent target of much of their ire. Trump came to dominate the Republican Party largely due to the willingness of many Republicans to vote for him in spite of his many large scandals and hateful rhetoric for

the simple reason that he was not a democrat. For these authors, their reasoning stems from their sheer hatred of democratic politicians and Hilary Clinton as Lambert (2016b) demonstrates here:

If it is said in the mainstream media, be skeptical of believing it. The media is so biased. There is massive collusion between the major media and Democrats. Hillary has led the charge to destroy women and families. Hillary wants for America open borders and America under global control. Progressives and globalists want to deconstruct America and prefer a Godless society. Totalitarianism is built into leftism. As much as possible leftists want to control your life, even to the extent of what you think. The left destroys whatever it touches. (p.5)

Lambert's hyperbolic exaggerations of the democratic party agenda highlights them as totalitarian thought police, out to destroy the foundational structure of America. His rhetoric is heavily exaggerated and charged off of deep resentment, but it serves its purpose of providing a palatable narrative to give smith county republicans an enemy to vote against in the election, by shaping a clear view of who their enemies should be (Gil de Zuniga et al., 2020; Mudde, 2004; Müller et al., 2017; Newburn & Jones, 2005). These narratives keep the right-wing echo chamber fueled and continue to shape the extensive list of enemies to the far-right populist narratives, much like Krier's (2016a) description continues here:

Last Tuesday was a dark and sad day for the rule of law in the United States as FBI Director James Comey proved there are two sets of laws in America: One for the powerful and one for the rest when he said there was no "there" there in Hillary Clinton's email scandal. Many have done far less and were severely punished while Mrs. Clinton skated. If you had done what she did, you would be in prison. With the fall of the FBI as a non-political entity, there is nothing left to trust in America. We can't trust the media which will do most

anything to advance its agenda; we can't trust Congress which is one party with two branches with most members saying and doing anything to get re-elected; we can't trust the administration which has repeatedly lied to us on such things as Obamacare and has broken numerous laws; we can't trust the Supreme Court which has become political; we can't trust the education system which does more indoctrinating than education. What's left to trust? The rotting system from both sides of the aisle is why Donald Trump is on the verge of garnering the Republican nomination. Indeed. Washington is rotten to the core and the people, are fed up with the stench from members of both parties, and most especially from the last 25 years of the Clintons. The system needs to be blown up. Who better to do that than Mr. Trump? Love him or hate him, he is America's last hope. (p.2)

Krier is directly selling his audience in all thirty-three papers here on the far-right post-truth narrative of populism (Waisbord, 2018). He outlines a viewpoint here that threads together the majority of American's governmental institutions and the mainstream media as collaborators participating in a rotten and corrupt system of politics that allows the rich to buy their way out of trouble. While much of these systems may be corrupt in some fashion, the purpose of this narrative is to outline a heroic story for Donald Trump, who is still embroiled in as much scandal and corruption as the rest of them but uses his ability to obscure his own place in the economic world and align his narrative with 'the people' to draw a strong supportive base. But there is another part of this equation that is the view of liberals themselves, as outlined by Krier's (2015d) reaction to multiple events of microaggression:

In other words, any phrase that steals someone's right to wallow in their victimhood is a microaggression and should be avoided at all costs. Without victimhood, there is no way the liberal agenda can survive and prosper. All of the above incidents took place in the span

of just a few days and are the result of liberalism at work, trying to destroy the backbone of America. This movement picked up steam 50 years ago but has made more strides in the past half-dozen years under President Barack Obama than in the previous half century. (p.2)

Here, Krier responds with outrage towards the new liberal policies that have led to microaggression training, his specific example being the University of California's President Janet Napolitano giving faculty training sessions to avoid microaggressions such as phrases such as saying, 'America is the land of opportunity' or 'America is a melting pot.' Anthropologist Hugh Gusterson describes the working class's view of college universities and other high educational institutions as places that appear as "alien citadels of class superiority and elitist prejudice towards those who work with their hands" (Gusterson, 2017, p.211). In many ways, the anger from rural voters is a direct result of the mainstream media being the only source of interaction with university decisions, which end up showing the outcome of university policies without much of the context that led to the policy creation in the first place. Assumptions based on seeing only parts of these policies play into Krier's (2015d) views of the shifting of American ideals and cultures under Obama as described here:

Mr. Obama promised to transform America and he is succeeding, probably beyond his wildest dreams. Look at what he has done: Doubled our national debt; forced same-sex marriage upon us; treated our friends as enemies, and our enemies as friends; forced national health care upon an unwilling populace; no plan to confront terrorists, etc. And, the worst is yet to come, as it appears there is nothing on the horizon to stop him. (p.2)

Krier frames of the advancement of the Obama administration policies in the United States as a fundamentally flawed transformation of America society. Krier structures his view here using

keywords like ‘forced’ to represent these new policies and laws, which are portrayed by Krier as an unwanted change set out to harm the American people (Frank, 2004; Taggart, 2004; Tormey, 2018). Krier (2016c) elaborates further on these themes here:

True to his word, President Barack Obama is playing a major role in the transformation of America. The greatest super-power in the world is fast becoming just another failed socialism experiment. Socialistic nations have always failed. We will be no exception. Certainly, not all the blame can be placed upon Mr. Obama’s shoulders, but he most certainly has accelerated the pace at which America is being socialized (transformed!). The amazing thing is, thanks to a friendly press, he has been able to maintain a healthy popularity rating while transforming (socializing) America as he promised. ... Riding this wave of amoral liberalism has been legalizing of abortion. Nearly 60,000,000 babies have been aborted since Roe v. Wade. Unarguably, Democrat party leaders’ worship at the altar of abortion. The decline of other things we consider moral has certainly accelerated during the Obama administration which has saddled us with same sex “marriage” and the right for all of us, youth included, to choose the gender of our choice, and use whichever bathroom we want. Hillary is even more extreme. Most Americans think America is on the wrong track, both fiscally and socially. (p.2)

Similar to Krier’s previous quote used above, he once again capitalizes on the use of crisis narratives surrounding the moral wellbeing of the United States. The LGBTQ+ population and the need for abortion are both issues far-right populism can continue to use because they are both things that are never going to go away. More repressive treatment, violent actions and exclusion from societal settings will never actually end the LGBTQ+ community or remove abortion, but they are continually used by far-right populists as targets to hit, representing the abstract bogeyman

of socialism, to continue feeding the voting base with fear and anger (Frank, 2004; Gusterson, 2017; Taggart, 2004; Tormey, 2018). In this sense, as long as the far-right populist narrative sides with the Republican Party and creates an ‘Us vs. Them’ dichotomy that ensures that anything the Democrats do will be interpreted as bad, creating a positive feedback loop, that directs any action they take to be seen as bad merely because of the false logic that they must be the enemy since they don’t support the guiding narrative of populism. To articulate the beginning of this narrative, I draw back to another of Krier’s (2015b) quotes:

As one who has spent about as many years aligned with the Democrat Party as with the Republican Party, our attention was recently captivated by an article written by columnist Laura Hollis, “Aren’t Democratic Voters Fed Up Yet?” During our formulating years, there is little doubt the Democratic Party was the party of the little guy. That’s no longer true. The Democratic Party now is all about controlling the little guy and turning America into a socialist nation. Also, that Democratic Party had a strict sense of moral values, and stalwarts such as Ted Kennedy and the Rev. Jesse Jackson were pro-life supporters. Today, the Democratic Party worships at the altars of abortion and gay marriage. Witness the fact President Barack Obama supported infanticide while an Illinois state senator. Recall, too, the Democrat Party is so ashamed of God they didn’t want Him included in their party platform. (p.2)

Krier directly connects himself with the disenfranchisement of the ‘common working-man’ and blames the Democrats for leading us here. The theme of the shift of the democratic party ties directly back into Hochschild’s (2016) deep story and the idea that they are not getting their fair share of the American Dream. Their anger connects back to their view of the heartland being a place where they were able to easily achieve the American Dream and they were able to live in

peace with their great morals, which also were harshly exclusionary to everyone but rich white males (Engesser et al., 2017; Kaltwasser, 2015; Taggart, 2004).

The far-right populist narratives displayed represent their views on our present-day American society. They focus heavily on a binary definition of good and evil created around the theme of the people as a united majority of white, Christian males against the corrupt elites that are both helping themselves to ill-gotten riches and serving equally corrupt minorities (Dobkiewicz, 2019; Hochschild, 2016; Wodak, 2017). Their worldview helps to easily shape their perspectives of others and allows for the creation of an easy-to-follow narrative regarding democrats/ establishment republicans and populist republicans. By dividing them into binary opposites and labeling the democrats/establishment republicans as an absolute evil, this viewpoint enables populist republicans to get away with as much as they want with these rural voters and still be able to gain their votes, as nothing they've done is seen as bad as the democrats and thus can be glossed over through a continual feedback loop of whataboutism (Frank, 2004, 2020).

Their worldview also has the added effect of excluding everyone that the democrats will make laws in support of. Whether that means African Americans, the LGBTQ+ community, or immigrants to the United States, classifying them with support from Democrats helps to ensure that the community negatively views them. But this is hardly the only reason they separate out these marginalized communities and which I explore more in the next topic.

### **The Outsiders: Nationalization and the fear of foreigners**

(56 articles focusing on critique/ condemnation of immigration, terrorism and/or praise of U.S.A. using nationalist terminology)

To begin with, it is foremost to address the continual connection that is made by these journalists within these texts between Muslim refugees and Islamic terrorists. The editorial

writers of Main Street Media had much to say about immigration and often directly correlate refugees to terrorists infiltrating America, such as this example from Jack Krier (2015h):

There are plenty of reasons to be worried about radical Islam terrorism on our soil. First and foremost, our immigration system is broken. The fact that radical Muslims have infiltrated us is beyond argument. Our patient enemy is very cunning and is taking advantage of our lax enforcement of immigration laws, and our borders being the most porous in the world. Because we have enabled the enemy to be among us, we can look forward to many more examples of what took place in California a few weeks ago, some of which will be far worse. But even if we were to join the delusional world of Mr. Obama and Mrs. Clinton and not believe in radical Islam terrorism, the continued influx of Muslims into America is still very dangerous to our future well-being. It will lead to cultural suicide and an end to present-day America because of multiculturalism. (p.2)

Krier dives directly into the popular populist narrative of nationalism within his quote. Nationalism is a common theme running through far-right populist discourse in America relying heavily on themes against foreign influence and harsher security measures to keep the status quo within the United States borders alive (Berlet & Sunshine, 2019; Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Scoones et al., 2018). In particular, the attack against Muslims stems fears of a subversion of the white supremacist based institutional structure of the United States, using similar tactics used by the American government against Jews and Communists in the past (Berlet & Sunshine, 2019; Cincotta, 2011). Tying back into the heartland narrative, Krier (2015h) combines his fears of Muslims with his fear of losing his heritage:

We love American culture and want to ensure our grandchildren learn to also love it. It saddens us to see the liberal's changing history by wiping away things they disagree with,

even liberal icons such as Woodrow Wilson. They don't realize that, while not perfect, those before us laid the foundation for the best-ever country in the world, and that foundation is what propelled us to greatness. Unfortunately, some Americans will never appreciate America until after they help destroy it and have then begun to suffer the consequences. Right now, there are some 5,000,000 Muslims in America. Not all that many in a land of 310,000,000 but that's enough for example after example of them forcing their values upon us. For instance, we see it in governments where the Koran is substituted for the Bible in swearing in ceremonies; we see it in schools where religion is prohibited, but Muslim indoctrination is allowed; and we see it in a compliant media which refuses to report the full story of terroristic attacks and the failure to assimilate. We have nothing against allowing Muslims into the country as long as they assimilate and accept our culture and values. (p.2)

For Krier, his worries of an Islamic subversion of the United States fall back onto the heartland narrative. For the far-right populist narrative heavily draws upon a centralized concept of the idyllic heartland of the United States made up of white Christians and the view that to lose this is to lose the cultural heritage of the United States (Berlet & Sunshine, 2019; Engesser et al., 2017; Kaltwasser, 2015; Taggart, 2004). These narratives against Islamic culture and the view of Muslims combined with terrorist imagery ultimately ties in with other enemies to the far-right populist agenda, such as the democratic party:

If Hilary Clinton becomes the next U.S. President, her number one aid is going to be someone who is committed to the extermination of Western civilization. All candidates for President should be asked the question of what part Muslims will play in their administration. Islam jihad is out to destroy the West and the election of Hilary Clinton

will enable more of that mindset. Under the Obama administration attorney general Loretta Lynch, telling the truth about Islam can become an indictable offense.

Mohammad slaughtered 600 Jews that wouldn't follow him into battle. Five percent to 10 percent of Muslims or 75 million are radicalized. It is a false religion. Not all roads lead to heaven. There are over 900 ISIS investigations, but the San Bernardino tragedy was not one of them. (Lambert, 2015d, p.5)

Lambert distinctly connects the two of the hated 'others' from populist discourse here by stating that both the democratic party and Muslims all seek to carry out the 'extermination of Western Civilization.' Lambert's narrative highlights terrorism as an immediate existential threat to the way of life of many within these small-town communities and uses this to unite his community against the parties in question. In this we can again see the theme of 'cultural suicide' as which Krier uses to represent the destruction of American's heartland by an alien, foreign threat and presenting this as an immediate catastrophe for America (Frank, 2004; Engesser et al., 2017; Kaltwasser, 2015; Taggart, 2004). The Islamophobic narratives continue throughout these papers through other authors such as columnist John Hinz's (2015a) writings as well:

Hi folks, I am on a serious subject today. ISLAM: What is it? Who is it? What are they doing? It is a large group of religious people who worship Allah, who is not a living god. They are the fastest growing group of people in the world today. It seems to me that their goal is to kill everyone who is not a Muslim. Why should we worry? Why does the world allow the cruel behavior of murderers to continue? World War 1 began after the killing of one man, and now we have murderers killing individuals by the thousands by beheading them. It appears that after they have 10 to 15 percent of the population, they are able to

control the country or region and enforce the Sharia law, which takes away women's rights and, in my opinion, is just a terrible law for everyone. Does our government not do anything because of fear or are we part of the deal? How safe do you feel when people driving down I-70 get shot. There are more people killed in Kansas City than in Afghanistan. I am beginning to feel a captive in my own country and fearful of going to Kansas City. (p.2)

Hinz shows an extremely dangerous viewpoint here, both in directly associating all Muslims as terrorists and believing that even as a minority, Muslims can still pose a threat to the working order of the country. Using these far-right populist narratives firmly separate Muslims out of the American identity defined by visions of the Heartland and classifies the entire religion into an enemy role to American society at large, opening anyone practicing Islam up to persecution (Berlet & Sunshine, 2019; Dobkiewicz, 2019; Engesser et al., 2017; Kaltwasser, 2015; Taggart, 2004). Connections to their hatred of Islam as a religion largely stem from their view of Christianity as America's proper religion, as Lambert (2015c) describes here:

Needless to say, the world events of the past week have been chaotic. To understand why what is going on it helps to have a local church. The President said the Paris events are an attack on all humanity. More properly the attack was on Western Values which are rooted in Christianity. It doesn't sound like the administration yet GETS IT. World leadership from our Commander and Chief and America is lacking and Islam, a religion of peace is the great lie. Islam is a religion of lies, a religion of darkness, a religion of deception, a religion of fear. In the U.S. there, according to the Department of Justice were 27 honor killings last year. Victims are mostly accused of being too Western and their father is almost always present at the killings. (p.5)

Lambert here explicitly connects ‘Western Values’ and ‘Christianity’ here, attaching the religion as a key aspect of his concept of the heartland. Lambert connects Islam using negative terms such as lies, darkness and fear in a blatant display of Islamophobia (Berlet & Sunshine, 2019; Cincotta, 2011). Muslims are not the only minority that these journalists separate from the far-right populist narrative, and they display similar adaptations of these crisis narratives towards other Americans as well.

### **The Others: the crisis narrative around minorities in the USA**

(70 articles focusing on critique/condemnation and/or moral panic surrounding internal issues in America i.e., abortion, LGBTQ+, policing, racism, religion)

Considering the continual theme of the United States’ success being attributed to white males alone, it should come as no surprise that these editorials speak negatively of other minority groups within America as well. To start, Krier (2016b) weighed in on the ongoing battle against the Black community and police brutality here:

If there is any doubt Mr. Obama’s impulse has been to unite himself with Black America against White America, it is answered with his proclaimed admiration of BLM. He has done this despite the fact a number of police charts in major U.S. cities are on record as proclaiming BLM as a radical hate group which advocates murder of American police... America has a real problem on its hands; a problem which has dramatically intensified because leadership and people of influence have been sympathetic to a non-existent problem. For America to get well again, people of power and influence must undo much of what they have largely been responsible for. They must immediately stop the admiration and support of hate groups, including BLM. They must stop unlawful protests and riots. All leaders, most notably those in the Democrat Party, must realize the root of

the problem is the destruction of the Black family and an inadequate education system in the inner city and not police bias, for they are the reasons young blacks suffer and hate.

(p.2)

Krier denies the problem of issues of systemic racism in America here and asserts that the problem is an internal one within the Black community. Here we see a deliberate erasure of the economic world from the narrative of police brutality and the Black community, continuing to support the more personal approach of fixing family relations. The Black community has been affected by many of the same issues as the white working class in regard to the economic downturn of America, but by ignoring the larger picture of police brutality and mass incarceration, Krier aims to display these acts of violence as individual occurrences (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Kaltwasser, 2015). Krier (2015a) particularly describes police on what he believes to be the 'correct' side of the culture war in America:

America is being torn apart. We are headed towards anarchy with liberals, their allies in the mainstream media, and professors on college campuses leading the way. They are doing it now by trying to destroy our faith in our police, the vast majority of whom are great Americans, when in fact, our law enforcement officials are one of the few things left that are truly right and great about America. The seeds if what these anarchists are sowing are now coming home to roost. There isn't one of us who should be surprised by the assassination of two New York City cops, the shooting death of another cop in Florida, and the shooting of another cop in St. Louis, all within one day. It was a very predictable outcome. Police aren't out of control, society is. (p.2)

Krier uses loaded hyperbolic language here in support of the police officers, representing the opponents as a collective of anarchists planning a diabolical takeover and the police officers

as stalwart defenders assassinated as if in some sort of conspiratorial plot. Krier's argument here seems to be in favor of the status quo that the police protect, mainly as right-wing populist narrative's view police officers as part of the working class, even if they are a step above with their ability to defend themselves (Thomas & Tufts, 2020). Police are therefore not a member of the 'Other' class and are not treated harshly in the same manner, such as the way Krier (2015e) describes the LGBTQ+ community here:

Since same sex "marriage" has now been determined to be a universal human right by the highest court in the land, will it eventually trump religious liberty, churches, seminaries, Christian schools, businesses, and individual liberties? Seems improbable? Well, five years ago, so did same-sex "marriage." Intended or not, the Supreme Court has set the table for an all-out war on religious freedom, and the future of Christianity in America is at stake. What are we Christians and other defenders of the First Amendment to do? We are going to have to ante up in a way that so-called leaders seem ill-prepared to do. There is no combating chaos with a chaotic spirituality. If that's the game, the devil wins either way. Pleas of "be nice to me" won't cut it. Want to be friends with modern-day Pontius Pilates and Neros? They are coming for our religious liberty. They are leaving us with no choice but to fight or surrender these precious liberties. (p.2)

In addition to Krier's quote here on the gay marriage ruling, Larry Lambert called the ruling a "9-11 on religious freedom or free speech" (2015b, p.4) and John Hinz called it "another Pearl Harbor" and "a violation of the separation between church and state" (2015b, p.2). The harsh and derogatory language used serves as an extreme othering of the LGBTQ+ community and aims to create fear, shock and anger within these papers reading bases to treat this as an American catastrophe (Frank, 2004; Taggart, 2004; Tormey, 2018). The gay marriage ruling therefore

becomes a rally cry to recruiting more working class, traditionalist white man to the far-right populist narrative and the re-creation of the American heartland that Donald Trump promises in his campaign. Crisis narratives on the LGBTQ+ community can also be seen in discussions on changes in the workplace, such as what Lambert (2015a) describes here:

Homosexuals are able to operate as secret agents in the advancement of their own interest. Homosexuals can operate in complete secrecy as long as he doesn't declare himself to be a homosexual. What they do when they target a company, labor union or anything, they simply get one of their people in a hiring position, that person simply stacks the deck with their own people from that point forward. Then when there are enough LGBT people in an organization, they have the influence of the organization. They don't take action until they know they can win. Then they will ask for a gay and lesbian employment association and will get it. Then take over the organizations culture, first by putting in a gay employment policy based on sexual orientation, followed by mandatory sensitivity training for all employees and that indoctrinates all employees in the gay and lesbian perspective and has a dual purpose of identifying all the employees that are strongly opposed and have strong pro-family values. Then at meetings some conventional person will speak out and they will ridicule and intimidate that person so that no one else will dare speak out, but they will identify those people who are strongly opposed, and those persons will be targeted for termination and over a period of time they will create a paper trail so when they are able to terminate, it will look like it is performance related and not ideological. (p.5)

Lambert's horrifying assessment of the LGBTQ+ agenda describes members of the community in a grotesque monstrous image seemingly uprooted from the horror trope of body-

snatchers. Lambert uses this argument to shape the LGBTQ+ community as an enemy that is at the very least partially responsible for the continual downfall of the white working class. His hateful, preposterous othering creates a narrative with a far more tangible enemy than the abstract concepts of globalization and deindustrialization and gives his readers a target for their continually building ire (Dobkiewicz, 2019; Rodrik, 2021). These narratives against the many different minorities of America are then also used to build up support for the white male that was running for office, Donald Trump. The concept of masculinity was also used in these articles explicitly in a letter to the editor written by retired psychology professor, Kent G. Bailey (2015):

The everyday people of America long for strong warrior male leadership of the kind that has sustained the human race from the dawn of time. Donald Trump is the prototypical, archetypal, and testosterone-driven alpha male who rules by the sheer force of his personality, imposing physique, quick wit, mastery of repartee and almost hypnotic control over his gathering masses of adoring followers. He is Attila to the Huns, Henry V to the outnumbered English army, Winston Churchill to desperate allied forces, and now our fearless leader against the pagan forces of progressivism and political correctness. He is the unapologetic, quintessential warrior male of yore capable of vanquishing any and all opposition in his way. (p.4)

Bailey's description of Donald Trump as a 'quintessential warrior male of yore' paints him as an explicit leader in the battle against the 'other.' His narrative uses the classic masculine identity of a warrior to portray the battle of 'us v. them' as a populist uprising against 'pagan forces of progressivism' and imagines Trump as a figurehead of the new movement (Berlet & Sunshine, 2019; Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Scoones et al, 2018). Trump was able to use his image

as a leader of the far-right populist movement to gather many supporters among the white working class and rise to the presidency.

Overall, in these two sections of sampling, a harsh Manichean worldview is portrayed that pits the people, defined by the far-right narrative as white working-class males, and pits them up against the elite. As other scholars articulate, this elite class is twofold, both aimed at the people in upper echelons of wealth and power in American society and the disadvantaged minorities that their policies protect (Dobkiewicz, 2019; Hochschild, 2016; Wodak, 2017). The dualistic view of society displayed then meshes with their biblical vision of the heartland of America as a form of paradise on earth which lumps in the progress of modern society with the pitfalls and aims to recreate the segregated communities of the past. For the self-proclaimed evangelical Christian writers of these editorials, it becomes obvious that they consider the changes wrought on society today as precursors to the apocalypse, with the continual cries of fear that its coming being a sharp cultural crisis narrative to draw Christians into the far-right populist narrative (Berlet & Sunshine, 2019; Frank, 2004).

Fear is a major power of the far-right populist narrative as they fear the loss of their lands, culture, and livelihoods which are being threatened by the abstract forces of globalization and deindustrialization. They lash out in anger towards these minority groups as they have become a perfect tangible target for their loathing and lamenting of their own languished fates. In many ways, the deep story described by Hochschild (2016) can be seen clearly in these writings, as they fight against things that will improve their own lives because they are afraid that minorities will overtake them and leave them behind, unable to realize that they are merely coming to more equal grounds.

Far-right populism is a prevalent theme throughout these sections through two main ways, a heavy use of an ‘Us vs. Them’ dichotomy and an extensive appeal to the heartland narrative. Much of the subject matter employed by the journalists sampled here show an extensive reactionary vocabulary designed to criticize and condemn various opponents to the far-right populist agenda, which includes people from liberal elites to disadvantaged minorities (Berlet & Sunshine, 2019; Dobkiewicz, 2019; Wodak, 2017). The exclusionary language used in these articles largely leaves only the white working class as its primary audience, though its nationalist and authoritative themes stem to attract white extremists of all classes to adhere to the more violent rhetoric used. Defining the people and elites in this way serves to elicit the status quo of the white supremacist foundation of America and serves as a uniting call towards all various members of the white working class, aiming to bolster supporters of a more authoritarian government to ‘save’ white culture (Berlet & Sunshine, 2019; Gusterson, 2017). The far-right populist narrative seen in these papers echoes back to the narratives used by *Posse Comitatus* as well, using themes of rural decay and cultural suicide to mask the racist and supremacist views of the writers in question. The biggest part of that being the importance of the heartland to rural culture.

Many in Rural America remember an America where they were able to live with a small, united community and use the plentiful lands to provide for themselves. The idealistic imagery of the past never existed in the way its described, but the land of rural America has undoubtedly been changed beyond recognition as the blight of globalization, deindustrialization and pollution of the environment have shifted the landscape into something unrecognizable (Berlet & Sunshine, 2019; Frank, 2004; Gusterson, 2017; Hochschild, 2016; Scoones et al., 2018). There are many reasons for rural Americans to detest the government and the elites, but the far-right

populist movement has managed to captivate a substantial portion of this audience largely due to their ability to obscure far-right populist leaders own actions towards furthering humanity's destruction of the land and instead gives them a compelling narrative of good and evil to lead the white working class towards a fight against its own interests.

## **Chapter 5 - Conclusion/Discussion**

Overall, this paper's ethnographic content analysis finds evidence of a far-right populist narrative being purported throughout the Main Street Media newspaper's editorial section. This narrative stems from the journalists who create these editorials and in the specific case of Jack Krier, allows the same editorial voice to exist in all thirty-three local newspapers owned by MSM. These editorial writers both allow elected republican politicians to write columns within these community sections and supplement these ideas with their own political leanings. The three papers examined over the course of this timeframe from January 2015 to January 2017 also show that the narrative Donald Trump appealed to was one that was already firmly within the minds of these journalists, as they soon came to create positive coverage for him within their opinion and editorial columns after he began to gain national attention in his campaign for the presidency.

Another aspect of this debate is to consider how objective truth should be managed within editorial and opinion columns as they are where subjective truths are allowed to reign. Consider this quote from Lambert (2015c) once again where he says that "Islam is a religion of lies, a religion of darkness, a religion of deception, a religion of fear" (p.5). This subjective truth directly attacks the Islamic community and serves to berate and condemn their religion. Even if this type of writing is seen as an opinion, it can serve to inspire and insight these rural communities against all Muslims practicing their faith in America with its all-encompassing condemnation. We must consider whether all subjective truths are equal in this manner, and what our responsibility is towards representing objective truth within our own opinions.

## **Policy Implications:**

The findings of this paper indicate a spread in far-right populist discourse through MSM's ability to send out editorials through their group-owned organization and should be considered as one of the potential consequences facing newspapers being bought up by larger organizations. It should also call into question the proper way to preserve failing newspapers in small towns. Future considerations must also be made to include a re-evaluation of the concept of the Fairness Doctrine and where to draw the line between freedom of speech and hate speech.

These journalists are currently able to freely attack disadvantaged minority cultures and spread messages of hatred towards them that feed into a right-wing populist narrative. They also have the ear of the small rural communities and help to serve to inspire them to vote and on who to vote for (Kübler & Goodman, 2019; Smith & Schiffman, 2018; Terry, 2011). However, any laws addressing hate speech must also address where we allow the role of the government to stand as well in deciding what classifies as free speech. A government with too much power over our speech can curb critique of itself in an authoritarian manner and silence dissent among its populace.

Nevertheless, the targeted disadvantaged communities within these writings can be placed in serious danger from these words. These journalists can be viewed as experts on these topics by their audience and can influence both public opinion and political consequences (Cincotta, 2011; Newburn & Jones, 2005). We must consider how this power could be used to stoke discrimination policies and hate crimes among the general public and whether the risk of violence is worth larger government oversight. This paper serves to raise awareness of these journalists and bring these questions to our attention as this continual debate must be critically analyzed for the best way to protect from libel and harm while protecting our freedom of speech.

### **Theoretical Implications:**

Another concept to be extracted from this Ethnographic Content Analysis is the continual reflection of the far-right populist narrative feeding off of the consequences of neoliberal policies in America. My findings here also align with the idea of the two-headed beast of neoliberalism and far-right populism put forth by other scholars and support the view that both must be considered as a part of the problem when searching for solutions to help the downtrodden rural working class in American society (Edelman 2019; Frank, 2004, 2020; Hendrikse 2018). Theorists should continue to view neoliberalism and far-right populism as interconnected ideologies that share many similar traits beneath their outward rhetoric.

This ECA also shows evidence of the emotional turmoil being stirred on by these journalists' massive dedication to framing cultural differences as a crisis for the American population (Frank, 2004; Hochschild, 2016; Berlet & Sunshine, 2019). This adds more weight to the continued studies of far-right populism and lends support to the idea that emotions must be studied in the future in regard to their effects on right-wing discourse in America.

### **Limitations and Strengths of research:**

My coding process over the articles in my sample selection was done entirely by me. Other researchers may have chosen to code the same articles in a separate way from my own method, which could have influenced which section that they were included in, and the article counts included within the database. Other factor that played into this study is that I could not access each of the 33 Main Street Media newspapers without a subscription to each of them individually. While I was able to confirm the presence of Jack Krier's articles in all thirty-three newspapers, I was not able to see the sections of the papers that they were printed in and the

other various journalists working for the other thirty papers. Another factor would be that other group owned small town local papers may have different editorial policies in place that prevent owners like Krier from printing an editorial in each newspaper.

This Ethnographic Content Analysis was able to highlight and examine a distinctive far-right populist viewpoint in the editorial sections of these newspapers and display and analyze the extent of this narrative being portrayed. The size of this sample selection of 729 unique articles across the timespan of January 2015 to January 2017 also lends credence to showing this far-right populist narrative as a continual presence within these 3 MSM newspapers. My qualitative analysis over the 468 articles labeled as political also shows consistent themes aligning with far-right populist viewpoints reoccurring repeatedly throughout the articles within this timeframe. However, this also displays specifically the 2015 to 2017 timeframe and the editorial and opinion column writers within this timeframe. Different timeframes may highlight less of these prevalent themes found or different editorial writers that are approaching their columns in a separate style of narrative instead of the far-right populist narrative within this timeframe.

**Ideas for future studies:**

Future studies in the field of far-right populist narratives in rural America should approach this topic using other forms of media available to residents in these small-town communities. It is important to know where rural America is receiving its information on the news from and what sources are being used the most, such as television, social media, and radio. This should also include research that ties directly into understanding where the rural audiences within these communities get their information from through the use of a quantitative or qualitative study done in the field. This study could also use the knowledge of what types of media do rural communities consume based on their political leanings, and how much trust do

they put into opinion and editorial columns as sources of news rather than merely a single point of view. Future research should also look into more detail on the source of hatred for these many minority groups that far-right actors capitalize on in order to find ways to work towards resolving these ideological divides and bridging these gaps between diverse groups.

**Final conclusion:**

Overall, these MSM journalist's reactionary and inflammatory dialogue seen within their writing show the narrative of far-right populism on clear display for their readers. They see their world as a crumbling forgotten civilization where a utopian heartland once roamed, and they desire to return to that idyllic past that never was. In order to calm their hatred and anger, we must be able to address ways to fix the roots of their problems in the economic world.

Addressing these problems must also coincide with our overall concept of objective truth in journalism. We must also question how much free reign we are willing to give to journalists in writing opinions and editorials, as they can hold more power towards swaying audiences than we may believe. To continue our understanding of the media we must continue to push forward towards critiquing our media and ourselves in our understanding of the world.

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