

## **The Trump Phenomenon and the Question of Historical Analogies**

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History repeats itself, people like to say. There is a cyclical recurrence in the course of human events, say some historians. Without a doubt, history does provide certain lessons from which a new generation might learn if it reads the history textbooks carefully and analyzes contemporaneous events clear-sightedly. After all, the fact that there are historical analogies would be hard to deny. It is also a useful psychological tool to have historical reference points on which present-day perception can and must lean. But no two events are the same, no two persons face the same set of circumstances, challenges, and opportunities. The two world wars, for instance, showed certain similarities, but no one would argue that the same course of events unfolded really. Or one can label a person Bismarckian or Churchillesque, but these comparisons more often than not tell about differences rather than seemingly striking resemblances. Superficial similarities and general parallels may abound, but if that is the standard, history repeats itself so often that the whole point of analogy loses its relevance. In this sense, of course, history does not cannot repeat itself.

A variation of this trend is when a new incoming American president is often compared to an earlier president, and people try to see in him the characteristics of a former commander-in-chief, drawing parallels, however distorted and farfetched those may be. It is enough to think of such recent occurrences of this trend when, for example, Bill Clinton was hailed as the inheritor of John F. Kennedy, and the handshake between the two, which supposedly passed the torch to a future generation, was played to boredom on television. George W. Bush, thanks to his foreign policy with the unmistakable effort to export democracy to the Middle East, was announced to be a more Wilsonian president than Woodrow Wilson himself almost a century before. With the ascendance of Donald J. Trump to the highest office in 2017, again one could hear voices that he was following the footsteps, or bear resemblance to, of a long gone president, namely Andrew Jackson.

The Trump team itself often played on the theme of the Jackson heritage. Steve Bannon, one of the main strategists of the campaign and the early phase of Trump's presidency, described his chief's inauguration speech as Jacksonian for its populist and patriotic tone. But Trump himself thought that Jackson was "amazing" and "unique," and he enjoys the parallel drawn between the former president

and himself, as if it gave him already a legitimacy in the White House.<sup>1</sup> Trump also suggested that Jackson could have prevented the Civil War, which shows lack of historical knowledge and shallow historical interpretation on the present President's part.<sup>2</sup> This prompted a historian to describe Trump as coming "closer to full-fledged historical illiteracy than any president since Warren G. Harding."<sup>3</sup> Although Andrew Jackson clearly holds a favorable place among a large segment of the American populace and in popular historical memory, historians rank him out of the first ten presidents, and he is slipping ever behind.<sup>4</sup>

There were also other comparisons. Accordingly, some pundits saw other parallels, like that of Jimmy Carter, who also ran on an outsider platform that appealed to many Americans who felt dislodged from their earlier comfort zone in the mid-1970s.<sup>5</sup> And Trump's campaign slogan, "Let's make America great again!" was taken from Ronald Reagan's bid for presidency in 1980. Reagan, to be sure, was in many ways an outsider despite having held public office, and he also campaigned against the Washington-based establishment that many people had come to see as a block to larger prosperity. And both of them were looked down on by the political elite, even by their own chosen political party, the Republicans. And both of them were measured under by the polls going to the last stretch right before the elections.

Also, Trump in many ways mirrored the Palin-led campaign in 2008 with its angry populism and distortion of facts, not to mention the attacks on Barack Obama that were sometimes on the verge of racism, but it at least had an Islamophobic

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<sup>1</sup> Max Greenwood, "Trump hangs portrait of Andrew Jackson in Oval Office," January 25, 2017, <http://thehill.com/homenews/administration/316115-trump-hangs-portrait-of-andrew-jackson-in-oval-office> accessed April 13, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Dylan Stableford, "Trump on the Civil War: 'Why could that one not have been worked out?'," May 1, 2017, <https://www.yahoo.com/news/trump-civil-war-one-not-worked-135135760.html> accessed May 3, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew J. Bacevich, "The 'Global Order' Myth," ISSF Policy Series: America and the World—2017 and Beyond, July 13, 2017, <http://issforum.org/ISSF/PDF/Policy-Roundtable-1-5AS.pdf> accessed July 14, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Nate Silver, "Contemplating Obama's Place in History, Statistically", *The New York Times*, January 23, 2013. <http://fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/01/23/contemplating-obamas-place-in-history-statistically> accessed April 12, 2013; Presidential Historian Survey 2017, <https://www.c-span.org/presidentsurvey2017/?page=overall> accessed May 3, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Nancy Mitchell, "Is Donald Trump Jimmy Carter, or is he Kaiser Wilhelm II?" ISSF Policy Series: America and the World—2017 and Beyond, April 13, 2017, <https://issforum.org/roundtables/policy/1-5AC-carter-kaiser> accessed April 14, 2017. Mitchell went so far as to see Trump as a modern-day Kaiser Wilhelm.

undercurrent.<sup>6</sup> It is well known that in recent decades Andrew Jackson's various portraits decorated certain presidents' White House. Lyndon B. Johnson, Ronald Reagan, or Bill Clinton all proudly hung the seventh president's portrait in their respective offices, thereby suggesting that they either saw themselves as heirs to Jackson or simply declaring their admiration to Jackson's policy and inheritance in American domestic and foreign policy. Given that usually the last century of American foreign policy has been louder about Wilsonianism, and many historians have dealt more with Thomas Jefferson or Alexander Hamilton, perhaps the newly-found Jacksonian "revolt," to use Walter Russel Mead's recent term for the phenomenon, may be surprising.<sup>7</sup> But it is not that much of an unexpected turn of events, although the parallel that many wish to draw between Jackson and Trump is often wild and lacks historical basis. A close scrutiny of the alleged similarities will shed light on what real resemblances but also differences there are between these two presidents.

Andrew Jackson, was not a political novice arriving in the White House in 1829. He had, of course, had a successful military career, and being the glorious hero of the Battle of New Orleans in 1815 propelled him into countrywide fame. He had also served in state legislation in Tennessee as well as in that state's Supreme Court, and spent time as Representative in Congress in Washington, D.C. In addition, he lost the 1824 presidential election at the hand of the House of Representatives, despite his winning the popular vote. Although gaining fame as a successful business person and reality TV-star, as a political newcomer, Trump cannot be compared to Jackson, and Trump lost the popular vote while winning the electoral vote—another aspect that distances his experience away from Jackson's rather than putting him in the same category.

What may be a similar feature is that Jackson was no intellect. He did not have a long period of education, but rather trusted and relied on his gut feelings many times, although he showed restraint more often than credited with, and he was capable of expressing himself clearly and forcefully—an important presidential trait.<sup>8</sup> Trump does not strike one as a polished and sophisticated thinker either, and his recurrent use of Twitter with his unbridled short messages does not fit the

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<sup>6</sup> Penny M. Von Eschen, "Neoliberalism, the Decline of Diplomacy, and the Rise of the Global Right," ISSF Policy Series: America and the World—2017 and Beyond, April 12, 2017, <http://issforum.org/roundtables/policy/1-5AB-neolieralism> accessed April 13, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Walter Russell Mead, "The Jacksonian Revolt. American Populism and the Liberal Order," *Foreign Affairs*, (January 20, 2017) <http://pacifictchbridge.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Mead-The-Jacksonian-Revolt.pdf> accessed April 8, 2017

<sup>8</sup> Robert V. Remini, *The Life of Andrew Jackson*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2001, 5–6; *Andrew Jackson in the White House*. New York: Random House, 2008, 18.

expected norm. On drummed-up occasions he manages to come through with the message in public, especially among his own voters, but there does not seem to be a coherent political worldview that Trump represents or follows.

The seventh president of the United States is remembered for many things, but perhaps what differentiates him in the field is his expansion of presidential powers. One of its clear manifestations was the use of veto power, a constitutional power tool for the president which had not been discovered to its full potential up until then. The first six presidents had used this restraint on Congress nine times collectively, some of which were not in the case of significant bills. Jackson, starting with the Maysville road project in Kentucky, vetoed twelve bills alone. The long-time effect of this new practice was momentous concerning the office of the presidency and its relationship with Congress. The undecided supremacy in controlling lawmaking had been now won in favor of the White House, and although naturally it took some time before it became the standard form, Jackson was the pioneer, he paved the way for later presidents. It is little wonder that activist presidents such as Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt were thankful followers to this Jacksonian practice. The dozen vetoes of Jackson's are dwarfed by modern-day standards, but the importance and long-lasting effect have shaped the American government to a degree the significance of which cannot be downplayed.<sup>9</sup> Another aspect of enlarging the power of the president was Jackson's inauguration of the "spoils system," that is, removing various officials lingering on from the earlier administration and filling those posts with political appointees. Although Jackson was not as much a political butcher as history sometimes remembers him, he did remove a lot of people early on in his presidency. From George Washington through John Quincy Adams the number of total removals was 73. Jackson's output was a staggering 919, which, in fairness, represented roughly 10 percent of the total government workforce.<sup>10</sup> It was still a staggering magnitude compared to predecessors. Still, as Schlesinger reminded us in his seminal work on the Jackson era, one should think of the spoils system more as reform, since "its historical function was to narrow the gap between the people and the government—to expand popular participation in the workings of democracy."<sup>11</sup>

Andrew Jackson saw himself as the representative of the common people. Relying on the populace that propelled him into the White House and the reforms he

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<sup>9</sup> Dwight Eisenhower issued 181 vetoes in his two terms, while Ronald Reagan vetoed bills from Congress 78 times. Kenneth Janda, Jeffrey M. Berry, and Jerry Goldman, *The Challenge of Democracy. American Government in Global Politics*. Boston, MA: Wadsworth, 2012, 389.

<sup>10</sup> Remini, *The Life of Andrew Jackson*, 185; Meacham, *American Lion*, 82.

<sup>11</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Age of Jackson*, Boston, New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1945, 47.

inaugurated, historians use the term “Jacksonian democracy.” Voter turnout in the United States rose from 27% in 1824, when Jackson lost the bid for presidency, although not the popular vote, to 57% in 1828, when he did win and became president. This result during the expansion of the franchise must be interpreted as a clear sign of his being very popular indeed. Given the backing of a large section of the voting population, Jackson claimed to have a mandate from the people—an idea that many successors liked to invoke as well to justify various political agendas. Trump is trying to claim the same mandate, as basically every elected politician, but in his case the assertion sounds somewhat hollow in light of the fact that he lost the popular vote by more than three million to Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton.

This latter point leads to another aspect that appears similar to a phenomenon almost two hundred years ago: the political division of the country. The last few decades, but especially the last twenty years have shown perhaps unparalleled political division in the United States. Jackson’s age saw also a bitter political fight between the Democrats and the National Republicans. But if it is a similarity, it is not because of Trump’s closeness to Jackson but simply the result of historical outcome, and there have been many other points in US history when political division marred the American democracy.

Andrew Jackson was also a political pioneer in the sense that he used a wide network of unofficial advisers, the “kitchen cabinet.” Jackson consciously built this far-reaching and ever-shifting group that comprised editors, members of Congress, and sectional political leaders as well. This loosely built organization never worked in the regular sense but was instead an ad hoc train braining for the central figure in the network: Jackson.<sup>12</sup> Since then it also has become a custom for presidents to rely on people outside their respective secretaries for advice. Trump’s “kitchen cabinet” is different from this historical pattern in the sense that he has various family members involved, thus there are representatives of a large family business present in and close to government, a situation that might not offer a comfortable precedent.

And, naturally, Jackson is well remembered for killing the “monster,” the Second Bank of the US, which he and his followers saw as the outstretched arm of the financial aristocracy ready to strangle the working class—the common people. Trump is, if on anything, bent on repealing and replacing Obama care, a healthcare measure that gave many million people insurance, and by trying to scrap it Trump was doing something against many of those who he proclaims to have come to represent and protect. So far, the efforts seem to have failed since many in

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<sup>12</sup> Remini, *The Life of Andrew Jackson*, 207; Schlesinger, *The Age of Jackson*, 67–73.

the Congress representing the Republican Party are against such an overhaul of cornerstone politics that might hurt them in their districts or states in the midterm elections next year.

Jackson was clearly seen as an anti-elite Westerner, who held deep suspicion about the John Quincy Adams faction and the people attached to it (Bank men, nullifiers, and conservatives of all shades). Actually, this was what gave him a wide appeal among the working people of the United States in the 1820s and 1830s. In this respect Trump can be said to bear some resemblance, since he often spoke in the campaign about “draining the swamp” in Washington. How much of a reformer he will turn out to be, however, remains to be seen at this point. It is undeniable, however, that Trump tapped into the deep currents of discontent and insecurity of the common people; but he is not an exception—rather, it is the rule among politicians bidding for high office.

But who are the Trump followers today, those tens of millions who voted for him in 2016? They are “anti-regulation, pro small business, pro Second Amendment, suspicious of people on welfare, sensitive about any infringement whatsoever on their freedom.”<sup>13</sup> And many circumstances in the country bear a resemblance to the 1820s: financial crisis and recession, and in the wake of the former financial struggle of the working people in general, the effect of globalization and the discontent on its trail, disgruntlement with Washington, violence. The historian’s words of seven decades ago can be quoted to describe the situation: “The tensions of adjustment to new modes of employment and production created pervasive anxieties, and evidence of actual suffering under the new system led humble working people to fear for their very self-respect and status in society.”<sup>14</sup> In this sense there is a certain historical analogy between two periods of time far removed from each other.

Of course, with Trump being in office for less than a year, it would be unfair and unscholarly to speak about Trump’s legacy and achievements, or the lack of them, which is another point why these parallels are complicated to draw.<sup>15</sup> Tensions abound and it is impossible to tell which crisis will lead to American

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<sup>13</sup> George Saunders, “Who Are All These Trump Supporters?” *New Yorker*, July 11, 2016, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/07/11/george-saunders-goes-to-trump-rallies> accessed April 20, 2017.

<sup>14</sup> Schlesinger, *The Age of Jackson*, 132.

<sup>15</sup> At the mark of the famous “first 100 days,” the picture was as muddy as ever as to what could be expected of Trump and his presidency, if not his style. An interesting sample of historians’ opinion regarding the first 100 days of Trump, TIME Staff, “What Will Future Historians Say About President Trump’s First 100 Days? Here Are 11 Guesses,” *Time*, April 27, 2017, <http://time.com/4748940/historians-president-trump-100-days/> accessed August 31, 2017.

intervention, perhaps to war. The biggest threat is North Korea, but Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Iran are all on the current list of hot places, and the membership can grow. There are also tensions with Russia and China, therefore one can expect that Trump will have his hands full in his term. If one takes into consideration what we know about Trump as a person and his foreign policy steps so far, there are characteristics of him that form a parallel with Jackson. So far, Mead has worked out the most comprehensive and guiding schools of foreign policy traditions of the United States: he famously identified four basic American schools of thought concerning the basic political constellations, where domestic and foreign policies are closely connected: Hamiltonian, Jeffersonian, Jacksonian, and Wilsonian.<sup>16</sup> Obviously, one can take issue with the number or the persons behind the terms, still, it is a really useful description to anyone wanting to make sense of many American foreign policy actions in the history of the United States.<sup>17</sup>

The basic building blocks for the Jacksonian principles are honest work, equality, individualism, financial esprit, and courage.<sup>18</sup> When assessing the Jacksonian tradition, Mead offers the following description: “the Jacksonian school gets very little political respect and is more frequently deplored than comprehended by both American and foreign intellectuals and foreign policy scholars.”<sup>19</sup> This is exactly what has taken place so far regarding Trump: he was downplayed as an incoherent, unsophisticated, and unexperienced political aspirant. Despite, or exactly because of this, many people saw in him a possible solution. But the term “solution” is problematic since, according to Mead, in the Jacksonian school “while problems are complicated, solutions are simple.”<sup>20</sup> This seems typical of Trump’s way of executing the highest office, and this is the reason that many fear might lead to an unnecessary military confrontation in the world.<sup>21</sup> In addition, the way Mead describes the nature of how Jacksonians look at war may not give much reassurance: “the first rule of war is that wars must be fought with all available force, Jacksonian opinion finds the use of limited force deeply repugnant, and considers the phrase ‘limited war’ to be oxymoronic.”<sup>22</sup> It is hard to imagine that in the near future

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<sup>16</sup> Walter Russel Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World*, New York: Routledge, 2002.

<sup>17</sup> For example, Theodore Roosevelt or Franklin Delano Roosevelt might also be included, but obviously a Rooseveltian school would be confusing as to which president is really meant, and a higher number would further complicate the quadruple picture.

<sup>18</sup> Mead, *Special Providence*, 231–240.

<sup>19</sup> Mead, *Special Providence*, 224.

<sup>20</sup> Mead, *Special Providence*, 240.

<sup>21</sup> Mitchell, “Is Donald Trump Jimmy Carter, or is he Kaiser Wilhelm II?”

<sup>22</sup> Mead, *Special Providence*, 254.

the United States should devote itself to a large scale war effort given the existing challenges bar North Korea. Therefore, according to the characterization above, a local misunderstanding and diplomatic argument, or the lack of the latter, may escalate into outright war under a Jacksonian leader. Naturally, it would be too farfetched to say that Trump is the incarnation of Jackson or an unquestionable representative of the school bearing Jackson's name. On the other hand, it is also undeniable that much of what has been just said fits the Trumpian image, for better or worse.

Jackson was also a fervent patriot and a subscriber to the notion of American exceptionalism. This national myth claims that Americans are a chosen nation of God, the rules of history do not really apply to them, and they have a mission to carry out—this is to spread the freedom that they represent to the highest degree. The United States, according to this idea, is a unique nation: an example to the rest of the world blessed with a mission for democracy. In his farewell speech, written largely by Chief Justice Roger Brooke Taney, Jackson said: “Providence has showered on this favored land blessings without number, and has chosen you as the guardians of freedom, to preserve it for the benefit of the human race.”<sup>23</sup> Trump's relationship to American exceptionalism is somewhat complicated, which is not his fault at all. In the 1820s and 1830s the United States was much more isolated from the world in many respects than today. Also, the nation was on an upward curve historically—a trend the opposite of which may be taking place in front of our eyes, at least in the comparative sense. Still, Trump on occasions issued statements that can be interpreted as a manifestation of his belief in American exceptionalism, even if his “America First” slogan might cast doubt on the missionary component of the idea. Although during the campaign he said he wanted to avoid the term and focus on short-term gains, in his inauguration speech he declared that “We do not seek to impose our way of life on anyone, but rather to let it shine as an example for everyone to follow.”<sup>24</sup> Therefore, Trump seems to believe in the exemplary version of American exceptionalism. Trump is known to send controversial and conflicting signals on a host of issues. Regarding his seemingly opposed statements on America's unique status in the world is not so surprising if we listen to a historian who put it this way: “paying homage to, and therefore renewing, this tradition of American exceptionalism has long been

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<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Remini, *The Life of Andrew Jackson*, 333.

<sup>24</sup> Stephen Wertheim, “Donald Trump Versus American Exceptionalism: Toward the Sources of Trumpian Conduct,” ISSF Policy Series: America and the World—2017 and Beyond, February 1, 2017, <http://issforum.org/roundtables/policy/1-5K-Trump-exceptionalism> accessed April 14, 2017; Donald J. Trump, Inaugural Speech, January 20, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/inaugural-address> accessed January 20, 2017.



one of the presidency's primary extraconstitutional obligations."<sup>25</sup> What is seen as the most shameful legacy of the Jackson administration is the way it handled the Indian question. The policies of the Jackson White House led to the forced relocations of tens of thousands of Native Americans to areas alien for them, all in the name of providing them with land for good, but in reality to gain more land for white farmers. Also, Jackson himself had slaves and did not lift his finger to end or limit slavery to any degree. Again, it is too premature to hold any judgment on Trump, and no direct parallel can be found to Native Americans and slaves almost two hundred years later, but Trump's seeming indifference to and sometimes harsh criticism of various groups might be a signal. Although minorities are different in composition today, Trump mimicked a wheel-chaired reporter, and the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community also fears him somewhat as to what policies he may come up with to curb their recently gained constitutional freedom.

Trump has promoted the virtues of unpredictability, as he declared during his campaign: "We must as a nation be more unpredictable."<sup>26</sup> But the President also seems to be predictable in one category: believing blindly in his own infallibility. What was true for Jackson, that "though accustomed to maintain his own position with pertinacity, he yielded gracefully when convinced of his error", cannot be said of Trump.<sup>27</sup> Trump, in this sense, cannot be declared or seen as a follower or successor of Jackson or his ideas. The real novelty of Trump's presidency, and the biggest problem at the same time, is his governing style with its bravado and great deal of unpredictability, especially in the domain of foreign policy. This strain came to the forefront already in the campaign.<sup>28</sup> And this is a clear discrepancy from the long-standing US presidential style. Also, this seems to be a conscious effort on the president's part, when he claims that he is trying to establish "a different

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<sup>25</sup> Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Limits of Power. The End of American Exceptionalism*. (New York, Henry Holt and Company, 2008), 18.

<sup>26</sup> Kevin Sullivan and Karen Tumulty, "Trump Promised an 'Unpredictable' Foreign Policy. To Allies it Looks Incoherent," *The Washington Post*, April 11, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-promised-an-unpredictable-foreign-policy-to-allies-it-looks-incoherent/2017/04/11/21acde5e-1a3d-11e7-9887-1a5314b56a08\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-promised-an-unpredictable-foreign-policy-to-allies-it-looks-incoherent/2017/04/11/21acde5e-1a3d-11e7-9887-1a5314b56a08_story.html) accessed August 21, 2017.

<sup>27</sup> Schlesinger, *The Age of Jackson*, 39.

<sup>28</sup> Kevin Sullivan and Karen Tumulty, "Trump Promised an 'Unpredictable' Foreign Policy. To Allies it Looks Incoherent," *The Washington Post*, April 11, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-promised-an-unpredictable-foreign-policy-to-allies-it-looks-incoherent/2017/04/11/21acde5e-1a3d-11e7-9887-1a5314b56a08\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-promised-an-unpredictable-foreign-policy-to-allies-it-looks-incoherent/2017/04/11/21acde5e-1a3d-11e7-9887-1a5314b56a08_story.html) accessed August 21, 2017.

kind of presidency.”<sup>29</sup> Another interesting case of similarity concerning presidential prerogative is firing various officials who seemingly are against the President’s person or his policies. Jackson, for example, did not hesitate when he came across opposition in the Bank fight. When Secretary of Treasury William J. Duane balked, he simply fired him—also setting a new precedent. In May 2017, President Trump suddenly fired James Comey, Director of FBI, under whom an investigation had been going on into the Russian connection of the Trump campaign team. Interestingly enough, when only a few days prior to the 2016 elections Comey reopened the case against Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton on account of her careless use of a private email server for the Department of State business, Trump was loud with praise for Comey. The swift, apparently political retribution on Trump’s side brings to mind, however, not Jackson but another president, Richard Nixon. Nixon, during the Watergate investigation fired Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox in the “Saturday Night Massacre” in October 1973, during which both the Attorney General and the Deputy Attorney General resigned in protest. Whether the Russian tie will be Trump’s Watergate is premature at this point to say, but it will burden his presidency for a long time to come.

But Trump, however, really seems to have more of a Nixonian than Jacksonian temperament. He often flies into rage, he suspects enemies around him, and basically everywhere. It is enough to think of his tweets about the courts when they opposed his ban on immigration, his often impolite and sometimes outright mean and mocking messages on persons, or his relentless attacks on the media. Those news outlets that report negatively on him and his administration are labelled as provider of fake news. For his core this is appealing since the large media outlets for many represent the elitist East Coast mentality that is supposedly out of touch with Americana. Trump also fires people in the heat of the moment, and seems to think of himself as above the law. In many ways, of course, the president enjoys a very wide latitude legally, and although everyone takes issue with what Nixon famously said in an interview in 1977, nobody can really deny that he mainly hit the nail on its head: “When the president does it, that means that it is not illegal.” So, who fits more Trump’s image, Jackson or Nixon?

So, after all, Trump ought not to be compared to his predecessors, old or modern, however luring such comparisons may be. He simply defies easy categorization or being put in a comfortable historical comparison bracket. He is a rather new phenomenon that naturally takes a great deal from certain former presidents,

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<sup>29</sup> Julie Pace, “Trump at 100 days: ‘It’s a different kind of presidency,’” Associated Press, April 24, 2017, <https://www.apnews.com/c9dd871023064917932966816d6c2c2d> accessed August 23, 2017.

but creates a new version of the executive branch, the presidential privileges, and manner of leadership. The question in this article was not whether Trump is a good or bad president, since that question cannot be answered yet, let alone its simplistic nature. The more important issue at hand in this essay was whether one can find historical analogies to describe a new president, and whether such a method is useful. In my opinion, Donald Trump is a clear example how dangerous it might be to draw close parallels with former presidents. Since he is unique in many ways, it is hard to find, or it is too forced to come up with, a good enough example of earlier commander-in-chief. Putting too much emphasis on some seemingly tangible resemblance distorts reality and distracts attention from far more important issues. Falsely attractive historical analogies do not help us understand the present. This is not to deny that there is some resemblance between Trump and some earlier presidents, for instance, Andrew Jackson. But trying to put such a label on Trump is misleading and offers only a false historical analogy, thereby creating a blinding effect. Trump must be studied and interpreted in his own time and environment, where earlier historical moments might, to be sure, give a basis of comparison, but there it must stop. Like every president, Trump brings his own personality to the office, and perhaps in his case it appears that his humility to the preexisting norms is low or nonexistent. He regularly steps over boundaries that earlier was unheard of. His four years in office might become historical, but will probably prove ahistorical.