Abstract

Frankfurt School conceptions of culture industry and demagogy are employed in a synoptic historical analysis of the relation between demagogy and US culture industries. A recent New York Times editorial critique of Donald Trump’s demagogy is placed in a ‘tradition’ of tension between US high journalism and demagogy dating from the 1920s. This period saw the near simultaneous codification of professional editorial newspaper ethics and the rise of broadcast demagogues like Father Charles Coughlin. The tradition reaches its most famous conflict point in the now heroicized struggle between Edward R. Murrow and Joseph McCarthy. The state sought to redress the rise of culture industry demagogy via communications regulation known as The Fairness Doctrine. The latter’s demise enabled the 1990s return to prominence of demagogic speech within the culture industries. The article argues, however, that what was pivotal to this history was the facilitation of the commodification of mediated demagogic speech at the advent of broadcasting, a path apparently unique to the USA amongst the major democracies. Rather than a return to the contentious ‘burden on speech’ of a Fairness Doctrine, decommodification is thus the most plausible means of reducing US culture industry demagogy.

Introduction: demagogy, propaganda, populism

On November 24, 2015, The New York Times editorialized against presidential aspirant Donald Trump’s ‘racist lies’ and related aggressive hyperbole. The Times placed Trump in a tradition of US demagogues who arise ‘every generation or so’. Precursors of Trump named and comparatively cited were Joseph McCarthy and George Wallace. Passages of their speech were juxtaposed with similar statements by Trump. In a summary subheader, the editorial board proclaimed, ‘It’s up to the media to confront demagogy with the truth’.

Those familiar with the pantheon of heroicized US journalists would undoubtedly recognize here an allusion to Edward R. Murrow’s exposure of Joseph McCarthy on his See It Now television program in 1954. Murrow’s actions in that instance have been widely celebrated as an exemplary ‘slaying of the dragon’ of demagogy, not least in the recent filmic recreation, Good Night and Good Luck, and as a revered exemplary figure in Aaron Sorkin’s The Newsroom.
However, like Murrow, *The Times* editorial did more than ‘confront demagogy with the truth’ by using orthodox journalistic fact-checking to expose spurious assertions as such. That much had already been achieved by its reporters in the days before the editorial. Murrow and the 2015 *Times* editorialists went further. Their exposure of demagogy required identifying and demonstrating certain techniques of demagogic rhetoric. Famously, Murrow did not confront McCarthy directly, but presented an analysis of archive footage to his viewers that demonstrated McCarthy’s techniques—such as unsubstantiable innuendo—as techniques. Murrow then provided McCarthy with time for a pre-recorded right of reply, which resulted in a set-piece demonstration by McCarthy of the very techniques Murrow had detailed. Likewise, it is the comparative identification of such rhetorical techniques that enabled *The Times* to place Trump as a successor to McCarthy and Wallace.

In US academic traditions, notably the fields of communication and rhetoric, such analysis and critique of demagogy is often articulated via a conception of propaganda. *This* ‘propaganda’, however, is not restricted to actions of the state nor to state actors and aspirants (like McCarthy and Trump); nor even to wartime or war-like circumstances. Historically at least, this conception of propaganda has been applied to advertising and other forms of commercial content of the culture industries.4

So (demagogic) propaganda and culture industry do not stand in an oppositional binary, as in the First Amendment’s binarization of state and free speech. Rather, demagogic practice can be found on ‘both sides’ of state/culture industry. Indeed, crucial to this liminality is the self-positioning of professional journalism *within* the culture industries, again exemplified by Murrow and *The New York Times*.5 For the 2015 *Times* editorialists, part of Trump’s success lies in his usage of social media, where ‘there’s no need to respond to questions about his fabrications’. Accordingly, ‘(t)hat makes it imperative that other forms of media challenge him’.

Journalism, or at least professional journalism’s norm of accountability to verified ‘facts’, thus marks a key point of self-differentiation from demagogy *within* the culture industries. Of course the term ‘culture industry’ dates from the Horkheimer/Adorno usage in reference to cinema and radio broadcasting.6 It is the advent of audio-visual recording, editing, and broadcasting that ‘culture industry’ signals technically and those technical innovations, certainly for Adorno, afford commodification.
'The Times’ current concern that social media provide a public space devoid of journalistic accountability norms has an antecedent in the moment of formation of US broadcasting as a new cultural industry in the 1920s. At that time, not only did radio likewise pose a technologico-communicative alternative to print publishing, its US regulatory configuration came to foster broadcast demagogy. These ‘radio demagogues’, as we shall see, are also routinely categorized today as populists, and their demagogy drew the particular attention of Adorno and his colleagues, albeit primarily under the sign of fascism.

Following the recent work of Nadia Urbinati, I classify such populism as ‘demagogic populism’. Against the grain of many contemporary US historians and analysts of populism, Urbinati considers demagogic disfiguration a real, but not necessary, prospect for all populist movements. That is, demagogues have the capacity to ‘capture’ all or some of a populist movement’s momentum, especially those that aim for legitimate governmental power.7

‘Opinion’ and the rise of demagogy within the early US culture industry

Journalistic techniques of fact-verification and the related investigative critical exposure of nefarious political practices are usually traced to the canonical American Society of Newspaper Editors’ Code of Ethics of 1922-23.8 In that text, US professional journalism borrowed from positivism a confidence in ‘objectivity’ as a means of differentiating itself from other practices, including propagandists. As Schudson has put it:

…journalists not only sought to affiliate with the prestige of science, efficiency, and Progressive reform but they sought to disaffiliate from the public relations specialists and propagandists who were suddenly all around them.9

Journalism’s self-differentiation from ‘propagandists’ was more difficult in the new medium of radio, where there was no comparable established tradition of journalistic practice.10
The chaotic early years of US broadcasting were succeeded by a remarkable organizational arrangement. The regulation of broadcasting had become necessary in all nation-states, due to a phenomenon known later as ‘spectrum scarcity’. Since the analogue radio spectrum was a finite resource, frequencies needed to be allocated by a regulator. In the USA, that regulator was the Federal Radio (later Communications) Commission (FRC/FCC). This requirement in turn necessitated licensing individual stations, a practice that had no parallel in US newspapers. Different nation states attached different conditions to these licences. Common European practice established monopoly public service broadcasters (PSBs) like the BBC, funded by a flat-tax-like universal licence fee that enabled a ban on advertising content and revenue. These PSBs developed well-resourced news divisions with charters committed to editorial independence that resembled those of the professionalization movement within US newspapers. However, these PSB charters also routinely prohibited editorialization (in the sense of newspaper leader-editorials) and required that broadcast opinion be balanced and/or mediated by journalistic formats like panel discussions. In US terms, the PSB model enabled broadcast opinionated speech to achieve circulation – but not via a literal understanding of a ‘marketplace of ideas’. It so insulated opinionated speech from being rendered a commodity.

The USA, in contrast, did pursue a literalist understanding of a marketplace of broadcast opinion. Unlike the broadcasting systems adopted in most comparable democracies, the US approach from 1929 resolved the question of ‘public service’ requirements of broadcasters entirely via commercial ‘general public interest’ station licences. Not only would advertising be the chief revenue source for these licensees, but diversity of opinion would be achieved simply via the sale of airtime. Thus in the case of ‘opinion’ – rather than news as such – US broadcasting initially elided a central normative mediating role for professional journalism. The path then lay open for ‘raw’ opinion to be shaped as a commodity.

For Urbinati, a defining feature of demagogic populism, in political theoretical terms, is its overvaluation of the ‘opinion’ over the ‘will’ of a sovereign people as citizens within a democracy. ‘Will’ here refers to the election of governments and the configuration of representative institutions, often as a separation of powers. ‘Opinion’ refers to the ‘extrastitutional domain of political opinions’ that broadly corresponds to most contemporary usage of ‘public sphere’. In successful democracies, following Urbinati’s
normative model, these two domains co-exist in balance. Demagogic invocations of ‘the people’ usually seek to elide or over-ride the domain of ‘will’, claiming that the latter’s mediating institutions and separations of powers are inauthentic.

We might then add to Urbinati’s model a role for professional journalism as an institution whose ideals speak to a comparable mediation within the domain of opinion. Whatever its failings, including a conflation of proprietor/publisher and editor/journalist, this was the intent of the various claims from the mid-nineteenth century onwards that ‘the press’ constitutes a ‘fourth estate’ that might itself represent opinion and so be considered ‘the voice of the people’.\textsuperscript{16}

What was most unusual about the US culture industry configuration in this context was its effective institutional provision of a space, in the hegemonic commercial public service stations, where (professional) journalism’s opposite – the overvaluation of ‘unmediated’ opinion as such –might flourish on a potentially national scale. Ironically, this regulatory approach formally designated the weaker non-commercial educational and non-profit stations as ‘propaganda’ stations.\textsuperscript{17}

US broadcasting had barely commenced when the most influential of US radio demagogues, Father Charles Coughlin, launched his broadcasting career in 1926. Coughlin soon rose to prominence by gathering a vast audience as his weekly addresses became increasingly political. By the summer of 1930, he was networked by CBS, and by the mid-1930s his regular radio audience was conservatively estimated at ten million and speculated to be the largest in the world.\textsuperscript{18} He was initially a supporter of FDR and the New Deal but became increasingly critical of both. He was later reported to be considering an alliance with Senator Huey Long, himself an accomplished (radio) demagogue. Each had established a social movement-like organization of dedicated followers who gathered in large rallies: Coughlin’s Social Justice Movement and Long’s Share Our Wealth. Long seemed a likely challenger to FDR in the 1936 election, but was assassinated in 1935. Coughlin then led the formation of a Union Party that allied his own and Long’s former social movements.\textsuperscript{19} The Union Presidential candidate lost ignominiously in 1936, and Coughlin briefly retired from broadcasting. A more overtly anti-Semitic and fascistic Coughlin returned to the airwaves in 1938. In that year, he even republished the notorious and long-discredited \textit{Protocols of the Elders of Zion} document in his newsletter, \textit{Social Justice}.\textsuperscript{20} Increased self-
regulatory actions by commercial broadcasters, among other reasons, ended his broadcasting career in 1940. Coughlin then continued to publish his views beyond his parish in his newsletter.

Intellectual Responses to Emergent Culture Industry Demagogy

Within critical scholarly analysis of propaganda Coughlin, especially his later broadcast phase, became a paradigmatic case. Alfred and Elizabeth Lee’s now canonical *The Fine Art of Propaganda* (1939) pursued a strategy of popular education of critical awareness of propaganda techniques that they termed ‘devices’. Coughlin was found to employ seven key devices, popular knowledge of which, the Lees thought, would alleviate the effects of propaganda. Separating ‘the device from the idea’ would reveal ‘what the idea amounts to on its own merits’.

The Lees even composed a rhyme, ‘Snow White and the Seven Devices’, to be sung in schools to the melody of the dwarves’ ‘Heigh Ho’ song from Disney’s 1937 film, *Snow White & the Seven Dwarves*:

Oh, we are the seven devices,
We turn up in time of crisis;
We play upon your feeling,
We set your brains a-reeling,
We are seven active contrabanders,
We are seven clever propaganders.

Significantly, the Lees decided to close their Institute for Propaganda Analysis once the USA entered World War II, since its remit to assess ‘all propaganda’ dispassionately would have conflicted with the war effort.

It is a surprisingly little known fact that among the admirers of the Lees’ work were members of the émigré Frankfurt School. Both Theodor Adorno and Leo Lowenthal used *The Fine Art of Propaganda* as a model for handbook-like studies of demagogues that they undertook within the Institute for Social Research’s Studies in Prejudice Project (SIPP). Adorno also referred to the Lees’ handbook frequently in related writings. Funded primarily by the American Jewish Committee, SIPP aimed to identify and analyse domestic anti-Semitic proto-fascism. Unlike the Lees’ work, SIPP
continued its research on demagogy after the USA went to war. Wider social prejudice was also its object.\textsuperscript{25}

However, the SIPP demagogy studies hardly considered the US public a ‘Snow White’ like that in the Lees’ rhyme. As Adorno put it: ‘The devices pointed out in McLung Lee’s book on Father Coughlin … are only elements of a much farther-reaching pattern of behavior.’\textsuperscript{26}

The Lees’ emphasis, as we have seen, was on techniques of propaganda, which they evidently regarded as shared by nation-states at war, public relations, and domestic demagogic figures like Coughlin, who were ‘playing with fascism’.\textsuperscript{27} This technicism usefully moved the discussion away from the still-prominent essentialist conception of the demagogue as an exceptional figure driven by a lust for power. As Adorno reflected in 1968:

\begin{quote}
The opinions of the demagogues are by no means as restricted to the lunatic fringe as one may at first, optimistically, suppose. They occur in considerable measure in the utterances of so-called “respectable” people, only not as succinctly and aggressively formulated.\textsuperscript{28}
\end{quote}

The Frankfurt analyses, in contrast to both the essentialist conception and the Lees’ work, tied ‘propaganda’ and demagogy together more closely, but then tied both of these to the culture industry. The result, in Adorno’s words, was a conception of demagogy as ‘a kind of psycho-technics’.\textsuperscript{29}

SIPP’s demagogue was a modern figure, not even necessarily a skillful orator of the assembly. He – consideration of the prospect of female demagogues is a significant lacuna – did not persuade by applying the classical techniques of oratory to an issue of the day, nor by developing an orthodox political programme. Rather, he consistently worked with ‘an amazing stereotypy’ of agitational themes. The demagogue was thus a narcissistic opportunist who was best understood psychoanalytically while the stereotypy of the techniques, as initially identified by the Lees and extended by SIPP, lent themselves to culture industry standardization.

As Adorno notes in the quotation above, the demagogue differs from his audience primarily by degree – in his capacity to articulate succinctly using verbal aggression. Indeed, it is the performance of a mode of disinhibited hysteria that elicits a rapport with the audience.\textsuperscript{30} This dynamic was assessed within SIPP as irrational in that it did not operate cognitively, but – in contrast to essentialist
models of the demagogue – neither did it rest on a binarization of a correspondingly essentialist conception of ‘emotionalism’ to account for demagogic success.

The key psychoanalytic dynamic of that rapport for Adorno, Horkheimer, and Lowenthal was based in paranoia and projection. The psychotechnics of demagogy relied on thematics that portrayed social relations as entirely interpersonal ones. In other words, and consistent with Urbinati’s more recent conception, demagogic speech so seeks to elide all forms of institutional mediation. Beyond this, and once institutional and systemic social relations are elided, the paranoia/projection dynamic can fixate on the alleged conspirators.

The complexity of this model may seem at odds with some of the titular forms SIPP employed: Prophets of Deceit, ‘Enlightenment as Mass Deception’ and so on. So, again, a risk arises of an over-reliance on an unexamined notion of rationality pitted against the irrationality of demagogic mobilization. There is no question that the use of an irrationalism that exploits mood states forms the core SIPP charge against the demagogues. However, their audiences are typically regarded sympathetically as victims – albeit potentially dangerous victims if fully mobilized – rather than merely dismissed with elitist disdain.

Moreover, the titular deceit motif is also indicative, for Adorno at least, of a sympathetic dialogue with American democratic norms. In later writings, Adorno certainly stated this explicitly. It would seem that, to some degree, the SIPP researchers were prepared to speak to, but not embrace, what I would call a ‘liberal exposure’ framework. Consistent with the Lees’ work, and indeed The Times editorial regarding Trump, this framework posits a good cognitive citizen who is susceptible to rational argument and always-already capable of rational judgement. Present this citizen with sufficient information, so this critical logic goes, and demagogic power, understood as deceit, collapses.

For Adorno, there is a prominent counter-example to this liberal exposure strategy (or ‘truth propaganda’, as he calls it): the case of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion document. Its continuing survival and circulation – including, as we have seen, by Coughlin – despite its exposure as a fake (by The Times of London) is sufficient evidence for Adorno that ‘truth propaganda’ is an inadequate counter-demagogic strategy.
Pathological Tradition or Populist Dissidence?

Now, notwithstanding *The Times*’s identification of Trump’s demagogy as the reiteration of a generational pattern, to suggest here that Coughlin’s demagogy forms part of a long demagogic populist tradition within the culture industries remains controversial.

For decades, American historians have debated a similar thesis, most associated with the work of Richard Hofstadter. Drawing openly on the SIPP research, Hofstadter and his collaborators argued in the 1950s and 1960s that Coughlin had rearticulated – and so changed the emphasis of – key thematics from the US Populist movement. A line, albeit a crooked one, could thus be drawn from the Populists to McCarthy. Hofstadter famously named this tendency ‘the paranoid style’ in US politics.

Hostadter’s historian critics misinterpreted the chief ‘target’ of his suspicions (Coughlin) and mounted a defence of the Populist movement as such. This defence of the legitimacy of Populism – and its Progressivist legacy – was extended to Coughlin and Long who, in Alan Brinkley’s much-lauded work, were rechristened ‘dissidents’. Demagogy disappeared from the revisionist vocabulary, and in what remains the definitive work on US populism, Kazin’s *The Populist Persuasion*, even Coughlin’s anti-Semitic demagogy is relocated as merely ‘a populism of fools’.

This revisionist orthodoxy provides the background to Urbinati’s 1998 observation that while European populism is routinely marked ‘bad’, mainly due to its associations with fascism, US populism seems to endure as almost necessarily ‘good’.

Yet parallels between the two are certainly discernible. If recent European developments are dominated by the rise of new formations that seek to render proto-fascist positions ‘respectable’ within multi-party electoral systems, the US narrative is well-known to be one of a steady shift towards the Right by the Republican Party, driven in part by demagogic figures. Trump can be readily located within such developments.

More recent revisionist research, still positioned against Hofstadter, has emphasised the grassroots character of this Republican transformation from the early 1960s through to the emergence of a Reaganite ‘populist conservativism’.

In an important recent corrective to the terms of this enduring debate, Heather Hendershot has highlighted the role of minor but influential post-McCarthy cold war demagogues who proliferated
until the beginnings of the Reaganite ascendancy in the 1970s. As in Europe, their positions were regarded as too extreme for the respectable New Right. Yet they nonetheless contributed to the rightward shift.

Hendershot’s key insight is the underestimation of the significance of the role of broadcasting in all these developments. But this claim does not refer to the routine acknowledgement of the rise and very gradual decline of mainstream network television’s influence on political communication in electoral politics since the televising of election debates. Rather, she refers primarily to the curiously pivotal, but initially marginal, role of broadcast radio in the rightward shift. Hendershot’s ‘ultras’ – ultraconservative or extremist demagogues – resumed elements of Coughlin’s practices on a smaller scale. While others of their ilk did not use radio, those researched by Hendershot used it in highly strategic ways and as a result were more successful and enduring.

Moreover, radio provided not just a forum but a consolidating form to what appeared from a radio-blind perspective to be a disparate array of eccentric egoists. Small independently owned stations scheduled these figures in succession. Even Hendershot doesn’t draw out the full implications of her insight here. For her ultras thus established a bridge between Coughlin’s solo purchases of discrete packets of radio broadcast time – funded by listener donations – and the contemporary format of ‘aggressive talk radio’.

My titular ‘long tradition’ thus relies on the slow development of what Adorno and Horkheimer saw as a two-sided merger of propaganda and cultural industrial form. Arguing from the case of advertising in the 1940s, they pointed to the US broadcast culture industry’s dependence on advertising for revenue but equally to advertising’s role as propagandistic cultural form (in the broad critical sense of this term introduced above). In the case of this tradition of demagogic speech, a comparable convergence point was not reached until the 1990s when an important shift occurred in mediated demagogy’s other liberal nemesis, regulation.

Culture-Industrial Demagogy Unbound?

The surfacing of Trump’s demagogy vindicates a predictive warning issued within the last writings of the First Amendment and media-regulation scholar, C. Edwin Baker. Baker developed an entire ‘democratic safeguard’ model of democracy to address what he called ‘the Berlusconi effect’ and its risk of ‘demagogic power’.
Unlike most theorists of populism, he saw definite risks for US democracy – indeed all democracies – in the precedent set by that European case.\textsuperscript{44} Certainly Trump shares with Berlusconi not only a disinhibited mode of demagogic rhetoric but also the willingness to convert vast reserves of economic capital into a personal grasp for the highest political office.\textsuperscript{45}

Yet such a model of demagogic media power is a somewhat limited one, even if it does account for real threats. It relies on what is in many ways a nineteenth-century model of the ‘politically minded press owner’, i.e. a proprietor-publisher baron who subordinates journalistic professionalism and editorial autonomy to the use of publications for personally preferred political goals.\textsuperscript{46} Undoubtedly that figure has survived and meets the demagogic tradition in Murdoch’s US Fox News.

The SIPP studies laid the ground for the recognition that demagogy could also become a cultural industrial \textit{commodity} administered by a shareholder corporation, rather than the family businesses typical of nineteenth-century press barons and their successors. The format of aggressive talk radio is, in this context, economically self-sustaining in that its production costs are low. As a result, it has tended to replace local news services. The rationale for its expansion thus need not require a baron-like directive but merely the banality of cost-effectiveness.

Moreover, the key figures in this culture-industrial demagogic tradition – from Coughlin to Limbaugh – have tended not to pursue political power for themselves but instead sought to move close to those in power while claiming to act as a representative of popular opinion. To this extent they constitute a more direct populist challenge to the fourth estate conception of opinion representation than to political office-holders as such. They also threaten the professionalist ‘social responsibility’ ethic within US network broadcast journalism that, as Baker reminds us, was one means of redressing the informational consequences of concentrated broadcast media markets, especially in television.\textsuperscript{47}

Historically, such self-regulatory professionalization of broadcast journalism was coupled with stuttering attempts to redress the rise of broadcast demagogy more directly, including the use of overt content regulation. Coughlin presented an ongoing problem to nascent US broadcasting corporations (notably CBS & NBC) and to the FRC/FCC, whereby his notoriety continually presented managements with spotfires of controversy.
The NBC network, dominant at first, moved early to delimit locally based figures like Coughlin by refusing to sell airtime ‘for discussion of controversial issues religious or otherwise’ and by insisting, from 1928 onwards, on only dealing with central or national agencies of major religions. The CBS network could not afford to practise NBC’s regulatory position on sale of airtime and attracted many religious broadcasters, including Coughlin. ‘(A)s a result of its battles over Coughlin’, and following an attempt to ‘delete objectionable material’ from one of Coughlin’s speeches in 1931, CBS moved to the NBC policy regarding the sale of airtime and cancelled Coughlin’s contract. He then ‘cobbled together his own network’ from independent stations. Finally, in 1939, the National Association of Broadcasters, which represented independent stations as well as network affiliates, adopted a self-regulatory code requiring panel discussion of all controversial matters. It was less an enforceable directive than ‘a means of giving squeamish stations a reason to deny’ contracts. Coughlin’s radio career finished when his existing contracts expired in 1940.

The FRC/FCC moved towards European regulatory practice by banning all editorialization in 1940 and then shifting to its famous Fairness Doctrine, which – like the panel model adopted by the self-regulators – sought to achieve balance across a schedule by guaranteeing a right of reply to contentious opinion. Broadly, these were the same norms of ‘balance’ that professionalizing newspaper editors advocated but were here applied to licensee-proprietors. Perhaps most notably, the right-of-reply principle was not only invoked by Murrow in his conflict with McCarthy but was also one he knew from his previous development work in broadcast editorial policies as a CBS news executive.

The Fairness Doctrine remained the dominant US regulatory framework from 1949 to 1987. McCarthy exploited it and similar FCC rules to gain television airtime. It was used, at times very cynically, by the Kennedy administration to silence the ultras in the 1960s. The Reagan administration effectively ended the Fairness Doctrine in 1987 and, it is widely agreed, so opened the doors to the rise of aggressive talk radio in the 1990s, leading to the 250% expansion of this format in the USA between 1990 and 2006. Scholars now refer to the ‘echo chamber’ of a conservative media establishment, with talk radio at its core, that arose during the 1990s as ‘mainstream’ broadcasting of the Fairness Doctrine era and its news programs lost hegemony. This formation continues to define itself against the ‘media elite’ of those who still practise the liberal
norms of professional neutrality. The commodification of
demagogic speech is thus complete.

My long tradition has thus been an episodic one. While regulation
interrupted its development, the crucial moment, in my view, was
the early facilitation of demagogic speech, not as the broadcast of
speech as such but as an emergent program form in a system that
hegemonized the commodification of airtime. Baker disagreed with
the Fairness Doctrine on standard First Amendment principles, but
did more than most such scholars to recognize the contributing role
of a political economy of speech markets to such First Amendment
deliberations. He also recognized that the replacement of spectrum
scarcity with digital abundance reconfigured, but did not solve, this
dilemma. Indeed, contemporary demagogic ‘ultras’ tend to be
multi-platform practitioners.

The New York Times is of course correct in seeking to revive the
liberal exposure strategy as each demagogue arises within electoral
politics, and its concern that such anti-demagogic journalistic norms
are absent or weak in the horizontal post-broadcast forms of digital
media are pertinent. But cultural-industrial demagogy, as Adorno
warned, is not always so susceptible to ‘truth propaganda’.

Horkheimer and Adorno saw an opportunity instead in the differing
industrial and regulatory configurations of the broadcasting and
cinema sectors of the culture industry. They planned to use the less
consolidated field of cinema for their own (unfulfilled) counter-
demagogic action.

Similarly nimble perspectives regarding the contemporary cultural
industries may become necessary to complement the approach of
such newspapers as The New York Times. The most pertinent
general lesson this tradition offers to those who seek to counter
demagogic speech in the culture industries is the need to find
appropriate means to delimit it, not by censorship, but by its
de commodification.
The Editorial Board, "Mr. Trump’s Applause Lies," *The New York Times*, November 24 2015. This editorial came shortly after Trump’s unverifiable claim that he had seen on television ‘thousands and thousands’ of people in an ‘Arab’ community in New Jersey cheering the fall of the World Trade Center on 9/11.

2 This byline was only used in the app edition of *The Times*.


5 A measure of the complexity here is the fact that US State Department runs an *Edward R. Murrow Program for Journalists*, aimed at mentoring international journalists, and has issued an illustrative pamphlet which highlights Murrow’s challenge to McCarthy as one of his exemplary achievements. See: [http://eca.state.gov/files/bureau/factsheet_edwardrmurrow-2014.pdf](http://eca.state.gov/files/bureau/factsheet_edwardrmurrow-2014.pdf)


7 Nadia Urbinati, *Democracy Disfigured: Opinion, Truth, and the People* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014). It is important to state at the outset that Urbinati’s and the Frankfurt School’s conceptions of demagogy introduced below, and indeed the critical propaganda analysis to which I connect it, are not completely congruent. Crucially, unlike Adorno and Lowenthal, Urbinati insists on the relevance of the classical analysis of demagogy because she sees the present as further marked by a form of plebiscitory and spectatorial ‘audience democracy’ which resembles the role of the crowd in ancient Rome. ‘Audience democracy’ in turn derives from the influential politico-theoretical work of Manin: Bernard Manin, *The Principles of Representative Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).


10 It is worth noting here how little continuity there is between scholarship on ‘US journalism’ and that on US broadcast journalism. The latter tends to be the domain of historians of broadcasting rather than those of journalism per se. There is a decided tendency, very notable for example in Michael Schudson’s much-cited work, to equate the history of journalism – and its current crisis – with the history of newspaper journalism. Another example would be Mott’s much-cited history


14 David Goodman’s recent history of this period of US radio addresses both the propaganda concerns of the 1930s – rightly emphasising that such analyses rarely regarded audiences as ‘passive’ - and the regulatory framework I have begun to sketch here and which is elaborated further below. Curiously, Goodman’s emphasis on the ‘civic ambition’ of radio policies – here the presentation of diverse opinions to citizens via diverse programming – overlooks both the degree to which this policy facilitated the demagogues’ entry into radio and how the later phase of FRC/FCC content regulation was an attempt to contain those demagogues (see final section of this article). Likewise, journalistic professional norms play no major role in this narrative. Hilmes in contrast emphasises those demagogues but also regards the regulatory contraints placed on Coughlin as an inhibition of the speech of an ‘unwashed’ minority. David Goodman, *Radio’s Civic Ambition: American Broadcasting and Democracy in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). Hilmes, *Only Connect: A Cultural History of Broadcasting in the United States*, 144.


16 The fourth estate metaphor has impeccably British origins but there have been significant attempts to tie it to First Amendment principles – cf. L. A. Scot Powe, *The Fourth Estate and the Constitution: Freedom of the Press in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 260ff.


20 Charles J. Tull, *Father Coughlin and the New Deal* (Syracuse Univ Pr, 1965), 193ff.


25 Its most famous ‘output’ was *The Authoritarian Personality* which produced a controversial ‘F-scale’ predictor of susceptibility to fascist demagogy. Here I draw primarily on the demagogy studies, which were mostly conducted earlier, but also rely on some of Adorno’s related and later writings. On the controversial reception of *The Authoritarian Personality*, see Martin Roiser and Carla Willig, "The Strange Death of the Authoritarian Personality: 50 Years of Psychological and Political Debate," *History of the Human Sciences* 15, no. 4 (2002). Cf Theodor W Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1950).


29 Adorno, *The Psychological Technique of Martin Luther Thomas’ Radio Addresses*, 8. Adorno certainly saw these psychotechnics (detailed below) operating within cinema, popular song and (radio) soap opera but not universally
so. The Frankfurt position was decidedly not, as Goodman has recently glossed it, that 'American mass culture was indistinguishable from propaganda'. Rather, with the exception of advertising, these were noted only as tendencies within specific culture-industrial forms. Demagogic speech was the ‘core’ case from which Adorno developed such comparative comments about particular instances within the culture industry. A more indicative contemporary example would be the comparison drawn by The Times’ television critic between Trump as demagogue and Trump as reality TV participant on The Apprentice. Ibid., 44; “Anti-Semitism and Fascist Propaganda,” 134, 31; Goodman, Radio’s Civic Ambition: American Broadcasting and Democracy in the 1930s, 85. James Poniewozik, “Trump’s Campaign Classroom: Reality TV,” The New York Times, October 10 2015.


38 Nadia Urbinati, "Democracy and Populism," Constellations 5, no. 1 (1998). Urbinati reprises this position into a more open disagreement with that body of work that ‘represents populism as reclaiming politics on the part of ordinary people against an elected elite that concentrates power’ in Democracy Disfigured: Opinion, Truth, and the People, 133.


41 Hendershot’s general complaint is that these figures were treated as ‘propagandists’ rather than ‘media producers’. This is certainly the case with Hofstadter and his colleagues but not so of SIPP (whose influence on Hofstadter she does not mention). Ibid., 13.

42 The key figures researched by Hendershot include H.L. Hunt, Dan Smoot, Carl McIntire and Billy James Hargis. For a contemporary analogue see: Jane Mayer, "'Bully Pulpit: An Evangelist Talk-Show Host’s Campaign to Control the Republican Party’,” The New Yorker, no. June 18 (2012).

43 Horkheimer and Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments, 132-33. In tying advertising to propaganda in its demagogic sense, Horkheimer and Adorno were still moving broadly within the empirical terrain of the US tradition of liberal propaganda critique.

44 Richard Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics,” Harper’s Magazine 229, no. 1374 (1964); The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays (New York: Knopf, 1965). While another of Hofstadter’s categories, ‘pseudo-conservative’, is well-known to have been derived from Adorno, ‘paranoid’ curiously has not been so recognized for its SIPP linkages. While Hofstadter’s SIPP source may have been The Authoritarian Personality, another likely candidate was Prophets of Deceit, which follows the paranoia/projection model closely, as it is that text that initially drew Hofstadter to consider the rhetoric of some Populist figures in such terms. Cf The Age of Reform (New York: Vintage/Randome House, 1955), 60-93. See especially section II, ‘History as Conspiracy’, and its notes to pp. 72-73 and 80.


51 Ibid., 144.
57 Baker, "Viewpoint Diversity and Media Ownership."
58 Cf Jane Mayer’s emphasis on the multi-platform presence of her ‘talk radio’ demagogue case-study. Mayer, “’Bully Pulpit: An Evangelist Talk-Show Host’s Campaign to Control the Republican Party’.”