

INTRODUCTION

Explaining the Donald Trump phenomenon is a challenge that will occupy critical theorists of U.S. politics for years to come. My first take on the Trump phenomenon is that Donald Trump won the Republican primary contest and is now a contender in the U.S. Presidential Election because he is the *master of media spectacle*, a concept that I've been developing and applying to U.S. politics and media since the mid-1990s.¹ In this study, I will first discuss Trump's use of media spectacle in his business career, in his effort to become a celebrity and reality-TV superstar, and his political campaign. Then I shall examine how Trump embodies Authoritarian Populism and has used racism, nationalism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, and the disturbing underside of American politics to mobilize his supporters in his successful Republican primary campaign and in the hotly contested 2016 general election.

The Trump phenomenon is a *teachable moment* that helps us understand the changes and contour of U.S. politics in the contemporary moment and the role of broadcast media, new media and social networking, and the politics of the spectacle. Trump reveals the threat of authoritarian populism, a phenomenon that is now global in scope, and the dangers of the rise to power of an individual who is highly destructive, who represents the worst of the 1 percent billionaire business class. Trump masquerades as a "voice of the forgotten man," as he advances a political agenda that largely benefits the rich and the military, and is a clear and present danger to U.S. democracy and global peace, constituting an American Nightmare for the world. Trump's rise to global celebrity and now political power is bound up with his use of media spectacle so, I begin my study with analysis of Trump and the politics of the spectacle.