

History in the Making #5**Matt Sedillo on Automation, the Trump Presidency, and the Role of the Artist in An Age of Uncertainty**

April 11, 2018

In January 2015, RESRG hosted LA-based poet and Marxist intellectual Matt Sedillo for three days of lectures, radio interviews, poetry workshops, and spoken word performances in Thunder Bay, Ontario.¹ Matt spoke to a wide range of students, faculty, and community members about topics ranging from the social and political implications of automation, to police brutality and the rise of the radical right in the United States. As an activist poet, Matt also spoke on the role of the artist in a world that is rapidly changing, and on the importance of making one's voice heard.

As the United States enters its second year of the Trump presidency, and as automation has become even more of a transformative force than it was only three years ago, we thought it would be a good time to reconnect with Matt, and revisit some of the key themes he explored when he was last here. RESRG member Steven Jobbitt recently reached out to Matt by email, and this is what he had to say.

¹ Check out Matt's Thunder Bay performances of his poems "Gangsters" and "Los Angeles" at http://www.resrg.ca/?page_id=219 (see also <https://vimeo.com/117800904> and <https://vimeo.com/117800903>). Follow this link to hear his interview on CBC radio (<http://www.cbc.ca/superiormorning/episodes/2015/01/15/champion-slam-poet-matt-sedillo/>). Check out his website at www.mattsedillo.com. Contact Matt at mattsedillo1981@gmail.com.

RESRG: *When you visited us in Thunder Bay in January 2015, you gave a lecture on automation and the revolutionary conditions that this is creating, not just in the United States, but globally. The rapid development of things like driverless cars and trucks over the last few years, as well as the introduction of fully-automated grocery stores, and more recently burger-flipping robots,² has forced even the mainstream media to start paying attention to this emergent reality, and to speculate on the future that is rapidly approaching, and in many ways is already here. I am wondering if you could walk us through this historical relationship between technological innovation and revolutionary change, and reflect in particular on the social and political changes that you think are necessary and/or inevitable as we move headlong into an age of full automation.*

Matt: Well, society is built around tools. Whether they be physical tools or some shared conceptual ones like language or mathematics. Often we discuss mathematics as somehow objective in ways that language is not, but this is absurd. Numerical systems are no less invented than alphabetical ones. Consider the existence of various numerical systems the world over and throughout history. Egyptian numerals, Mayan numerals, Chinese numerals, Roman numerals, Hindu-Arabic numerals that

²<http://www.bbc.com/news/av/technology-43292047/burger-flipping-robot-begins-first-shift>

have become the world standard, all different, all functional, all capable of producing marvels of human ingenuity. Language is similar. We are forever grappling to better describe the world in front of us. We are forever struggling to understand, to categorize the world around us. These tools, these intellectual tools, are the basis for interaction. Physical tools are different. They augment our existence. Whether it be a spoon, a button, a cell phone, or a rocket ship, they change what we are even capable of.

How these grand wonders are produced are determined by the technical demands of production. How many workers are needed to produce this widget given the use of these tools of production are technical questions that are determined by the material world, by the material processes of production. How things are being produced define what demands will be placed on the individuals engaged in the production of those tools.

Who has access to things, how things will be distributed once produced, is determined by our social relationships to one another. There is nothing inherent in the shape of objects that determine what relationships people will have to given objects. That is all socially determined. That all exists in the space between us and the ability to enforce these rules and regulations, a.k.a. the law and the state apparatus.

What makes a physically produced object the property of one party or another? It is based on our relationships to each other and the ability to uphold those relationships. What makes a cup a

commodity first and a cup secondarily is the cruel practice of capitalism.

Under capitalism objects are not produced for their material benefit but for their profit. Labor is the basis of value and surplus labor is the basis of profit. Profit is what capitalists convert from the surplus labor of the worker. It is what they do not pay their workers. Under capitalism what the workers produce are made first as commodities and secondly as objects of use. Succinctly put, capitalism is the commodification of surplus value and the exploitation of surplus labor.

Historically the technological base of capitalism has been based on the factory system. The factory system arose on the back of slavery, genocide, and colonialism, on murder and mayhem, on horrific exploitation and the literal owning of people in order to provide the raw materials to go into factory production. Speculation on stolen land and stolen people also bolstered the market.

It is really impossible, however, to imagine the modern capitalist world as it exists without the forging of the United States. The United States is physically impossible without genocide and its forging was economically impossible without slavery. Slavery was the point of the United States. The United States required genocide to even exist. These crimes are not simply features, they are the foundations of the United States which fed the industrial revolution before the United States even became a nation. Cotton from the colonies fed the factories in England. This is what happened. Later England expanded its empire and

absorbed resources from around the world, breaking age-old economies and turning them into feeders for British industry. Other Western European nations followed suit. Capitalism cannot be separated from its origins. Ongoing capitalism cannot be separated from imperialism. History is shaped this way and the world is shaped this way and cannot be discussed in broad abstractions. Nor should it be discussed outside the fact that Spanish conquest provided the initial fusion of capital required to launch the Anglo conquest of much of the world.

The relationship between industry and extraction still very much defines where entire populations fit into the capitalist world order. However, though the factory line assembly worker may be in a better position than the workers in the extractive portion of the productive process, the terms and conditions of exploitation of the individual do not negate the fact of exploitation. The level and quality of the air conditioning in the life of the laborer does not determine whether they are being exploited. If they are selling labor power and a profit is being made from that labor they are putting down then they are being exploited. The terms and conditions, the comfort level of their exploitation, does not determine whether or not they are being exploited. It does, however, usually determine whether or not someone will do anything to confront the slings and arrows of outrageous class warfare levelled against them

What is happening today, however, is qualitatively different than varying uneven levels of exploitation. Today we

are seeing the realities of expulsion from the productive process. Increasingly fewer and fewer people are required for productive processes. Today the leading job in most states is not a computer coder or some job of the future; it is a truck driver.

Truck driving does not represent the brave new world. It represents the old industrial order. It represents a job that could not have been offshored or automated. Until now. The future is forming around us. The future does not show up all at once. I was born in the future that no one bothered to tell me about. Instead I was told to prepare for the service economy, to build a diverse set of skills for the service economy. People younger than me are saddled with what's called the gig economy. There is a straight line downward. Whatever replaces the gig economy will be even more precarious, perhaps the scrounge economy.

This process of automation on the basis of advanced robotics as labor-destroying technology really began in earnest in the 1970s and piece by piece it has disintegrated the vestiges of industrial society wherever and whenever applied. This process will continue to its conclusion. There is no overlord or Pope of capitalism to slow down this process.

The good news is that though times are changing as they always do upon a technological basis, old-school solutions will work. We must seize the means of production. We need to become the collective owners of the means of production. Questions of property and questions of production, though obviously

simultaneously experienced by the individual and whole classes of individuals, are actually independent questions. One is technological based on physics. The other is social based on human relationships. Though we may be pushed from the productive process, our positions as proletariat with only our labor power to sell and only our chains to lose does not change. It's just that no one is buying that labor power. Under such conditions seizing the means of production becomes a survival cry.

The stakes are higher than ever before. Throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, as peoples formed into modern nation states throughout the world and took on the industrial revolution, the question that stood before them in terms of social struggle was whether socialism or capitalism would be the basis of an industrial means of production. People fought and died on the resolution of that question. Today the choice is between paradise on the basis of robotic production, or global starvation on the basis of robotic production. The variable is private property. We must abolish it.

Robotic production + private property = mass proletarian death. Robotic production + the collective ownership of the means of production = freedom from the stultifying division of labor and time to write poems, stare at the stars, contemplate how to extend human life, and stretch our arms further into the cosmos free of Elon Musk.

RESRG: *Many people in the US, and no doubt around the world, were surprised when Trump secured the Republican*

nomination, and then were shocked when he was elected. Since his election victory, pundits from both parties have scrambled to explain his appeal to millions of Americans. Were you surprised when Trump was elected? And why do you think he appeals to so many people? Do you have any confidence that the democratic structures of the American system will act as a check against his right-wing populist agenda? Can the US weather this storm?

Matt: First we must say that neither party does anything for anyone who isn't rich. One party is in word and deed in some key ways harsher than the other, but for the most part these are largely psychological exercises.

There are two major parties in this country. The Democrats look at the pain and suffering this system creates, that they willfully reproduce, and then tell their base, "we are working on it." The Republicans in turn point at the base of the Democratic party and say those people are the problem. This is essentially the difference in how these parties present themselves to the general public. US elections are public referendums for how the world is to be explained as millions of people are caged, as wars rage, and as poverty in the world's richest nation explodes. During US elections, disparities along many lines are discussed and reasons are offered for their existence. Both parties victim blame.

Many observers on the left outside the country generously make the distinction between the US government and the US public. This generosity of spirit is misguided. While there are millions of Americans opposed to what this brutal

war machine police state does at home and abroad, millions more in this country are actually just as deplorable as the government that represents them. Donald Trump represents the end of plausible deniability on this question. Given the Trump option, millions of Americans demanded it. The reality is that millions of Americans are equally if not more bloodthirsty than those who represent them.

To watch the Republican National Convention of 2016 was to watch a Klan rally. To watch the Democratic National Convention of 2016 was to watch a rainbow coalition of death. America is a show of horrors.

Trump is an expression of this political process turned up to an unmanageable volume. Trump represents the end of plausible deniability. This country is a horror show and so are millions of people who live in it.

Still others try to understand how Trump came to be. Americans struggle with this because the default setting for the United States of America is denial.

I for one was not surprised that he won the primaries. Once they really began in earnest Trump's eventual victory seemed fairly inevitable to me.

Trump is often discussed as retrograde or a throwback to earlier and frankly uglier times, and in many ways this is true. The battle cry of "Make America Great Again" serves multiple purposes to his audiences. It is a call to put people back in the kitchen, the closet, the orchards, the fields, and wherever his base feels most at

ease having them. It is a band of bigots collected from a mostly but not entirely White bastion of absolute reaction. It is a call for the restoration of The Alamo, Jim Crow, Father Knows Best, and The Crusades. It is scary all around. Every horrific impulse imaginable that exists in the general public is embodied and expressed by Trump.

Trumpism also serves up every false victim narrative imaginable. It is that White people are the real victims here, men are the real victims here, Christians are the real victims here, Americans are the real victims here and, at its very apex, that Donald Trump is the ultimate victim and the wronged party beset by a bastion of baseless ill-wishers, detractors, and haters. It would be funny if not for how dangerous this all is.

When watching this all unfold remember that Trump uses racist outbursts to rally his base. These are not gaffes; rather, they are rallying cries. They are displays of force. So, for instance, when the book *Fire and Fury* embarrassed him with his details of crumbs on the mattress, he called Africa, Haiti, and El Salvador shitholes. This wasn't one gaffe after the other. It was Twitler refocusing attention away from pathetic images back to his own strongman imagination of himself as the Grand Wizard of the American Empire. This continues to happen. And because everyone in America lies so much, everyone acts puzzled as to why his numbers seem to spike upward with racist outbursts. No one likes a loser. Not even Trump's army of Custers. When Trump looks like a loser his numbers go down. When he acts like a Klansman his numbers go up. Now, if you are operating

in denial about large sections of the US population, this will seem confusing. If you accept the truth, then it is clear. These questions can then be explored, researched, and placed in proper context.

That's where we are at.

When talking about how we got here, that is to say how Trump won the primaries and later was installed by the electoral college, it is important we be specific. There is no such thing as general racism or general bigotry. The communities that can be targeted by racist attack arise out of history, they arise out of the history of conquest, the history of plunder, and the culture that arose out of its justification. Donald Trump initially cleared the Republican field primarily on the Mexican question, on hatred of Mexicans, on the promise that Mexico and Mexicans would pay for their sins. He announced from the very beginning that Mexicans were drug dealers and rapists. He asked that a Mexican American judge recuse himself from a court case on the basis of Mexicanidad. He claimed Mexico was lying to the Pope about him. He questioned whether a plane flying above his head during a speech were Mexican bombers. Ann Coulter and Joe Arpaio were key figures in his campaign. One of his surrogates warned of taco trucks on every corner. One of his surrogates complained about Spanish spoken at the Democratic National Convention claiming she would have to "brush up on my Dora the Explorer." The name of the Cambridge Analytica Trump portfolio was Project Alamo. Once he was selected by the Electoral College, Kris Kobach, the mind

behind SB1070,³ led the transition team. Trump said many things and offered many offenses but there have been points of emphasis. And in the primaries he did all he could to solidify in a field of racists that he was the most anti-Mexican. He owned that. This wasn't from a moral crisis or lack of trying from his opponents. Chris Christie wanted to implant undocumented workers with microchips and "track them like UPS trucks." Trump did what he is good at, he captured the imagination of a base of monsters with simple language and baseless promises. Trump, a master brander, sold them a racist dream with two key phrases, which were "Build the wall" and "Mexico will pay." That will show them. Those lazy job stealers, always complaining, we are the real victims here. Amiright? Amiright?

That that happened is easy to prove if you are open to the idea that it happened. If you live in some kind of denial, as do most people in this country, you will have some difficulty trying to balance concrete analysis with fanciful flights from reality about the disillusionment of the "White Working Class" about trade, or war, or something that can account for this motion.

A knowledge base of specific histories is crucial to understand why specific attacks

³ Editor's Note: SB1070 refers to Arizona Senate Bill 1070, the Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighbourhoods Act, passed in 2010. It was championed by its supporters as a measure that would lead to a crackdown on "illegal" immigration. Critics of SB1070 condemned the bill, arguing that it sanctioned racial profiling, and that it amounted to a cash grab by Arizona's prison-industrial complex.

are made. When Mexicans are attacked in this country, the resulting conversation often revolves around the history of US xenophobia which inevitably leads the conversation towards the 1800s and the East Coast, the Eastern Seaboard, and the Midwest. Trying to understand anti-Mexican sentiment without a historic base in the history of the American Southwest is the height of East Coast chauvinism but it is the dominant practice here in the United States. That is why legions of experts who sound so intelligent on a great many topics sound so ignorant and confused on this topic. The Rio Grande is not Ellis Island. Point, blank, period. You cannot talk about the politics of Joe Arpaio by talking about the politics of "Irish need not apply." The oppression of Mexicans in the US, aside from the Irish who came in waves, predates and outlasts the period of oppression for the so called "White ethnic" populations who were recruited *en masse* after the civil war as an industrial proletariat to take many jobs in developing urban centers that Mexicans would be informally barred from in a myriad of ways. These pundits and historians view their section of the country as *the* country and cannot allow in their minds for the politics of the Southwest to even for a moment dominate the country as a whole. Such an understanding would call into question what America is and call into question their expertise of the nation as a whole. For them American history moves East to West and never the reverse. This is why they sound so confused and ignorant when talking about the rise of Trump. The Republican primaries were won by Trump on Southwestern reactionary politics.

Through this lens we can in retrospect ask ourselves why. With a clear view of what happened, why it happened can be examined. What is this shift due to? Does this have to do with the changing demographics? White anxiety over the Browning of America? I would argue that's why it exploded as it did, but that Trump was likely acting on a narrower premise.

Unlike, say, Steve King, Joe Arpaio, Ann Coulter, Michael Savage, Kris Kobach, Pat Buchanan or many other professional racists in and out of government, Trump does not have a strong background in anti-Mexican hatred before running for president. Trump had never previously stated anything particularly pro-Mexican; however, Trump's racism in the past was for the most part focused on Black America. There was of course his reference to a Venezuelan beauty contestant as "Miss Housekeeping" and his infamous testimony before Congress wherein he delivered the immortal lines "they don't look like Indians to me." Trump also under a thinly veiled guise of economic nationalism has expressed hatred of the Chinese over the years. He has also weighed in in profoundly racist ways concerning wars waged against the Muslim world. He has had anti-Semitic outbursts, most famously against Jon Stewart. But, again, if we are talking about frequency and consistency, throughout the years Trump hammered over and over again an anti-blackness in word and deed. Trump came to the American landscape on violating the fair housing act by refusing to rent to Black people. In the 1980s he used his own money to run an ad to get four young black men falsely accused of rape and convicted of a crime

they did not commit to be executed by the state. Before his most recent run, Donald Trump positioned himself as one of the central figures of the so-called birther movement claiming Barack Obama was not an American citizen. Trump, like Obama, is the son of an immigrant. No one claims he was born in Scotland. Funny how that works.

Trump is a racist on many fronts, to be sure, but his emphasis for most of his career as a professional racist had been on Black America. So why the shift? Why, in his biggest political moment, shift up? Why 2015? Why reinvent himself as Davy Crockett? I would argue it is a rather simple answer. The first person he had to beat was Jeb Bush, and Jeb Bush, while extremely anti-Black, was vulnerable on the Mexican question. Trump above all things is an opportunist. He simply does not care what he says so long as it pleases him to do so.

Jeb Bush understood the impact of demographic shift and the necessity of the Republican party to split the "Latino vote" to remain a viable party in both short- and long-term elections. 63% of US Latinidad is of Mexican descent; the second largest group is Puerto Ricans at 9%. Conventional Republican wisdom was that Mitt Romney had lost the gains made in securing a competitive percentage of the "Latino Vote" and in so doing he had lost the election.

Mitt Romney received 59% of the "White vote" but only 27% of the "Latino vote." He lost the general election by nearly 5 million votes. This was significant. Romney was perceived to have lost the gains of the Bush years with all kinds of

cavalier talk, most notably his proposed plan of "self-deportation" and quotable gems like, "I say that jokingly, but it would be helpful to be Latino."

In 2004 George W. Bush received an unprecedented 44% of the "Latino Vote," the highest on record in no small part due to the Bush brand which is based primarily on Jeb Bush and the political use of his immediate nuclear family. Or as daddy Bush said back in 1988, "Jebby's kids from Florida, the little brown ones."

The Bush brand is one of the most explicitly anti-Black brands in American politics. From the Willie Horton ad of Bush Sr., to George W's abandonment of New Orleans, to Jeb's own support for Stand Your Ground laws in Florida, a very clear and very overtly anti-Black image emerges. Along the campaign trail, and in an act of racist desperation, Jeb Bush tried to revitalize his campaign with his anti-black outburst, saying that his message to black voters was not "get in line and we'll take care of you with free stuff." On the other hand, the Bush brand is perceived as "Pro-Latino" and explicitly "pro-Mexican," which is an anomaly in Republican national politics in general. Even in the American Southwest this political position is a minority within Republican politics. However, the anti-Black, pro-Hispanic, White evangelical is a viable political type with Republican politics of the region. And while no Republican ever really wins this vote, breaking off a significant section of it is the political strategy of this brand of politics. No Republican on the national stage embodied this political trend better than Jeb Bush. No political figure served

better than to win 40% or more of the "Latino vote" than Jeb Bush.

To this end Jeb Bush ran as Jeb Bush. Several years before the 2016 election the specter of a Bush-Clinton race dominated the beltway. As the primaries neared, Jeb Bush's strategy was to run a bilingual pre-campaign, delivering speeches across the country wherein he switched from English to Spanish for points of emphasis. This was something that, to my knowledge, was unprecedented for a Republican Presidential candidate. He cut full language Spanish ads, even one celebrating Cinco De Mayo as an American as well as a Mexican holiday. The early effect of this was profound. The gamble of it was recognized early. In September of 2015 it was written that this strategy for the general election might backfire in the primary. At the time Jeb Bush was polling at 44% likeability among "Hispanics" but only 39% among Whites. Trump at the time polled at 82% unlikeability with Hispanics and 48% positive with Whites.

Trump's path was clear. Use Bush's family against him. Paint him as a Mexican lover. Trump had good reason to think this would work. A backlash against the Bush brand specifically on the Mexican question had been brewing for more than a decade within the Tea Party. The title RINO, Republican in Name Only, had been applied by the Tea Party to politicians that were seen as hostile to Republican values. This essentially could be applied to anyone who did not think an overtly White man's party was a viable political platform. Both the Bush brothers were seen in this light by sections of the Tea Party, so much so that the horrific guest

worker program of George W. Bush, which essentially reinstated indentured servitude, was seen in the convoluted minds of the Far White of the Republican party as kowtowing to the special interests of Mexicans and big business. Trump understood this.

Trump was merciless in his attacks calling into question Bush's marriage, cutting an ad entitled "An Act of Love" that was almost a scene for scene recreation of the Willie Horton ad. He also chastised Jeb for speaking Spanish in public, stating in a debate: "this is a country where we speak English not Spanish." Within months Jeb Bush, who had been the assumed next candidate of the Republican party since at the very least 2013, was destroyed and Donald Trump—a reality TV star, a real estate mogul, a professional racist carnival barker—was leading polls by double digits

Even if the electoral college had not later handed Trump the presidency, Trump's defeat of Jeb Bush would have been of deep historic significance. In many ways it was the first Republican primary of 2040, with the question of shifting demographics placed at the center of the table. They were running a primary that pivoted on how the Republican party would handle the Browning of America. For now we have our answer.

In other primary news Kasich and Rubio marketed themselves like Jeb Bush before them as men of decency and poise, who would stand as lines drawn in the sand against Trump. Like Bush they never had a chance.

The only time Trump ever slipped in the polls was to Ben Carson, and the only primary he lost was to Ted Cruz. The reason Cruz and Carson ever had any leg up on Trump was that they had articulated a stronger hate platform against Muslims. Which is universally shared by the mainstream political spectrum of the United States of America as the United States of America is a war machine and is currently bombing seven Muslim majority countries. Vicious anti-Muslim rhetoric is shared by both parties and there is very little difference in tone and voracity.

During the primaries Ben Carson made use of every chance he got to warn his audiences of encroaching Sharia law. Cruz spoke of making the "desert glow." It was not until Trump came up with a succinct and catchy way to convey his hatred of Muslims that he overcame his only two potential obstacles to victory. He came up with the ban. Again, Trump is a master brander.

So there it is. He knocked off Bush with a wall and knocked off Cruz and Carson with a ban. Trump understands how to keep a thing simple and how to sell it, especially if that thing is hate. Most politicians play a game of charades called the Grand Republic. Trump gets that politics, particularly Republican politics, are reality TV.

I am not surprised the hate vote won. And between Trump, Carson, and Cruz I am not surprised the non-Hispanic White guy won. And to be honest Trump is just a catchier sloganeer as I have twice now said, a master brander. I am not surprised he won the primaries.

As to the general election, Trump didn't win. He lost. By three million votes. The electoral college won the day. Truth is Clinton banked on demographic shift to ensure her victory. And if votes counted she would have been right. But they don't. In many ways the electoral college robbed California of its voice in this election. California is ground zero for this demographic shift and it is no surprise that it is constantly at odds with the administration. And not just high-ranking Democrats but in the streets as well. The protests against Trump during his initial campaigns were epic and the wide majority of the really major ones have been in the state of California for obvious historically developed reasons. Also consider that Trump lost the general election by 3 million votes. However, he lost California by 4 million. California alone accounts for more than the loss in the general. The electoral college as it stands today is a form of affirmative reaction. It exists as a means to empower generally more reactionary states. Demographic shift will mean nothing if it remains in place. The electoral college erased the Californian vote. A voter in Wyoming had a vote that accounted for 3.5 Californian votes. This is nonsense. The electoral college is a holdover from slavery. To repeat what I just wrote above, it is a form of affirmative reaction.

Again, why California would be at odds with Trump is not often discussed in terms of the direction of the nation, but rather in terms of the direction of California, America's most populated state. This is because of denial and, to be frank, a sort of New England/Eastern Seaboard/Midwest chauvinism/narcissism that is never done

speaking of itself. The default lens of the US is that of East Coast centrism that argues its political formations and history are the general and primary history of the United States of America and everywhere else has a regional history with regional characteristics and formations to be accounted for but still ultimately understood within the general lens of American history, meaning that dominant lens.

All this despite the fact that people are leaving those areas, primarily populating the Southwest. Seven out of the ten most populated cities in the United States of America are located in the Southwest. Yet nothing in our political discourse, cultural production, or general understanding of the country as a whole conveys that. For instance, Houston is the fourth biggest city in America. Why is there nothing about the political discourse or cultural production of this country that would convey that?

We see this play out in many ways. In the aftermath of the election, article after article spilled out of publications about the "white working class" and the rust belt and their pain, their hurt, their betrayal, and asking how could they vote for Trump. All kinds of wild, silly contextualizing for supposed non-racist reasons to vote for Trump. People just made bizarre claims saying that the Trump vote was a peace vote. It was anything but what the man had clearly campaigned on, which in the primaries and later the general election was a whole host of horrible and profound bigotries and chauvinisms with the wall and the ban being central.

Misreadings aside, the US intelligentsia could not stop talking about the Midwest in particular. Why they voted, why they didn't vote, etc., etc. Meanwhile, the fact that California rejected Trump by over 4 million votes, 1 million more than the nation as a whole, was not seen as a fact fit for the national discourse.

Both right and left there are people who refuse to deal with the impact and significance of changing demographics and the regions central to that shift as defining the future of the country, and that's why they sound bizarre and downright confused when speaking about Trump.

I had a discussion with a noted historian from Michigan and he completely scoffed at the idea that demographic shift accounts for California's shift into a blue state. This despite the fact that when California had a white majority it swung for Nixon, Ford, Reagan, Bush and when the white majority was broken the vote shifted with it. He couldn't imagine that to be true. This kind of willful ignorance is why people cannot understand the significance of a candidate relying so heavily and specifically on anti-Mexican rhetoric as a national platform.

The attempt to historicize Trump's Southwestern politics as a chapter of American xenophobia does not simply obscure the topic, it literally changes the subject. Once again the conversation becomes about the US and Ellis Island. I will repeat, Ellis Island is not the Rio Grande and Southwestern politics cannot be understood in this manner.

Trump is the son of an immigrant. His wife is an immigrant. Most of his children are the children of immigrants. Hell, Joe Arpaio is the son of immigrants. Michael Savage is the child of immigrants. Michael Savage defines his politics as a defense of "borders, language, culture."

There is no immigration debate in the US. There is a "keep the US white" debate in the US. By talking about xenophobia, the conversation again shifts to the Northeast and a time that no longer exists and for a targeted population to whom that history does not apply.

A debate about general US xenophobia when discussing Trump's specific targeting of Mexican and Central American populations is a swift change of subjects. It does not historicize the conversation, it prevents the historicization of the conversation.

Similarly, it should be said that the Trump-Sessions attacks on the Central American, primarily Salvadoran, community that have become a dominant feature of the Trump presidency, must also be understood on their own terms. They cannot simply be collapsed into the attacks on Mexico or seen as simply an extension thereof, which is often how these attacks are discussed. The Trump-Sessions attacks are often simultaneous, but "why Mexico?" and "why El Salvador?" are distinct questions and do not simply exist in proximity to one another. The shift of focus to Central America in general and El Salvador in particular is rooted in the US and Mexican joint oppression of migrants from these countries. Once seizing power Trump had to deal with the realities of power, and

dealing with Mexico as a trading partner became very difficult given his rhetoric. The United States' relationship with the Central American republics is a horrific one of assassinations, coups, and again more scapegoating for domestic political purposes.

In the global sense, the United States' relationship with Mexico and its relationships with the various republics of Central America has its facets, its features, its unique histories and conflicts. But at its base the historic processes and phenomena that have been set in motion here are not dissimilar to what is happening today in Europe and the fascist politics and rhetoric targeting populations of North Africa and West Asia around similar demographic questions. Of course, these places all have their histories as well and must be understood on their own terms. But the same patterns emerge, today and not in the 1800s, under very different conditions. To understand Trump you must look at what he is saying and learn the history behind why he is saying what he is saying. Same is true of Le Pen. Same is true of Erdoğan for that matter, or Modi or Duterte. Fascism is taking hold the world over and takes the shape of the history it stands on. We must fight the whole globe over. In order to fight we must first know what the hell we are talking about.

RESRG: *I am guessing that, as a Marxist activist and intellectual, you feel a sense of urgency today that is as great as—if not greater than—it was three years ago. How does this sense of urgency, and more importantly your critique of the system we currently find ourselves in, shape your work as a spoken word artist? What role*

can—or should—art and artists play in a moment like this?

Matt: We should all do what we can from where we can. We should demystify these professions. A profession is a lot of things but what makes one capable of doing any said profession is just a skill set. What should I do with this skill set? I should write the best anti-Trump poems I possibly can. A professor should deliver the best lecture they can and write a poem. A poet should deliver a lecture and plumbers should write plays if so inclined. We really need to demystify titles and capacities. Hair stylists should write speeches. Accountants should deliver them. Baristas can make the signs and vice versa. We don't have time for gate keeping in the midst of a crisis. We should all be firing on all cylinders and ringing the alarm to the best of our ability in multiple ways with whatever talent and skill we have in us.

These are extremely dangerous times. The whole of the world is teetering on becoming something new. There is so much potential and possibility but the instinct of billionaires is of course to hoard and unleash murder and mayhem to protect their wealth from the huddling masses. Unfortunately, the instinct of the majority of those masses is to kick downward in whatever historical role that is available to them at any given moment. That is why working people with so much to gain would often rather protect a spot in the pecking order by abusing people rather than fighting the common exploiter. I can't account for this sadism. Luckily the majority is never required to reshape the world.

It will take an organized mass of people fighting for something better for us all, dragging so many people kicking and screaming into a better world. But in order to achieve that critical mass, people need to know they can reshape the world by organizing and collectivizing their efforts. This is why alternatives and platforms need to be organized and the profile of those organizations raised high and raised proud. Great people will join the fight for a better tomorrow given the opportunity. We can win. We must win. We will win. It's only a matter of time. If not us, then a future generation. Or the species dies, and along with it most of the species that live now on earth, at least most of the animal kingdom. I don't know enough to comment on how insects and plant life will fare.

We must abolish capitalism and pursue technology that does not destroy our ability to live on the planet. I think we win. Despite everything I am an optimist. It beats the alternative.