

# The Populist Connotation

## Rhetorical Similarities in Donald Trump and Thomas Paine's Propagandist Modes of Communication

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### *Abstract*

*In the past two years, the election of Donald J. Trump determined the publication of considerable scholarship on the genealogy of American populism, and oftentimes, the 45<sup>th</sup> president has been compared to other political trends throughout US history (such as the Know-Nothing movement), even chronologically distant ones. The purpose of this essay is to establish a comparison between Donald Trump and Thomas Paine's rhetorical proclivities despite the considerable divergences that characterize the two epochs they belong to. The element that enables this comparison is what I define as populist connotation, a notion whose end is to avoid the recourse to a whole unproductive catalog of content-oriented labels which try to define what is populist in spite of the incompatibilities that distinguish both forms of populism. Instead, I mean to focus on the similarities that characterize Paine and Trump's modes of communication rather than the content of their discourses.*

**Keywords:** Donald Trump; Thomas Paine; populism; rhetoric; media.