

The Plague of White Supremacy in the Age of Fascist Politics

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“Language provides [fascism] with a refuge. Within this refuge a smoldering evil expresses itself as though it were salvation.”

— Theodor W. Adorno

The toxic thrust of white supremacy runs through American culture like an electric current. Without apology, Jim Crow is back suffocating American society in a wave of voter suppression laws, ongoing attempts by right-wing politicians to implement a form of apartheid pedagogy, and the resurgence of a right-wing cultural politics organized around the legacy of white nationalism and white supremacy. The emergence of white supremacy to the centers of power is also evident in the reign of police violence against Black people that came into full view with the murder of George Floyd by a white police officer and the ensuing mass protest against racist police brutality across the globe.

White supremacy works not only through the force of state repression and violence but also in the colonizing of subjectivity, manufactured ignorance, and the power of a reactionary culture with its relentless pedagogies of repression. The cult of manufactured ignorance now works through disimagination machines engaged in a politics of falsehoods and erasure. Its politics of cruelty now cloaks itself in the false claims of “patriotism.” The spectacle of Trumpism and its brew of white supremacist ideology and disdain for the truth undergirds the further collapse of democratic visions in higher education and in broader public spheres, made all the more obvious by the obsession with methodologies and the reign of instrumental reason, which has returned on the educational front with a vengeance. Education as a vehicle for white supremacy now moves between the reactionary policies of Republican legislators that now use the law to turn their states into white nationalist factories and a right-wing social media machine that uses the Internet and other online services to spread racial hatred. As William Barber II, Liz Theoharis, Timothy B. Tyson, and Cornel West have argued, white supremacy has once again turned deadly and has put democracy on trial. They write:

Even now, the ancient lie of white supremacy remains lethal. It has left millions of African-American children impoverished in resegregated and deindustrialized cities. It embraces high-poverty, racially isolated schools that imperil our children — and our future. It shoots first and dodges questions later. “Not everything that is faced can be changed,” James Baldwin instructs, “but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”ⁱ

In what follows, I want to examine the totality of white supremacy as an educational force by connecting its threads through the rise of voter suppression, the attacks on education via critical race theory, and the culture of police violence.

The Republican Party and the politics of Voter Suppression

Jim Crow politics are back with a vengeance. Both during and in the aftermath of the Trump presidency, the Republican Party has dropped any pretense to democracy in their affirmation of authoritarian politics and their embrace of white supremacy. This has been evident in their weaponizing of identity, support for a range of discriminatory policies of exclusion, the construction of a wall that became a resurgent symbol of nativism, and their internment of children separated from their undocumented parents at the southern border. The rush to construct a home-grown form of fascist politics is also clear in the era of Trumpism in the passing of a barrage of voter suppression laws introduced in Republican-controlled state legislatures, all based on baseless claims of voter fraud. Voter suppression has become the new currency of fascist politics. Some states such as Georgia, Texas, and Florida have enacted them into law. As of April 1, 2021, 361 bills had been put into play in 47 states. The Georgia and Florida bills either restrict or prohibit mobile drop boxes, and in the case of Georgia:

eliminates weekend voting days, most notably Sundays, when Black churches hold “Souls to the Polls” voting drives, restricts the use of ballot drop boxes, prevents counties from accepting nonprofit grants to improve their elections, adds new voter I.D. requirements for voting by mail, gives local election officials less time to send out mail-in ballots and voters less time to return them, “and even makes it a crime to distribute food and water to voters waiting in line.ⁱⁱ

What we are witnessing here is not only a return of another ideological and political register of white supremacy, but the use of corporate power and dark money to destroy the last remnants of democracy. For example, *Public Citizen* claims that over \$50 million has been spent since 2015 to undermine voting rights; during the 2020 election cycle, \$22 million went to legislators/lawmakers who support voter suppression bills. *Public Citizen* also notes that “Among the Fortune 100, 81 companies have contributed to these lawmakers, giving a combined total of \$7.7 million. Among the Fortune 500, 45 percent of companies have contributed to these lawmakers, giving a combined total of \$12.8 million.”ⁱⁱⁱ The companies that have given the most to these white supremacist efforts include: “AT&T [which] has given, \$811,000. AT&T is followed by Altria / Philip Morris (\$679,000), Comcast (\$440,000), UnitedHealth Group (\$411,000), Walmart (\$377,000), State Farm (315,000) and Pfizer (\$308,000). More than 60 corporations have contributed more than \$100,000.”^{iv} Such efforts do more than weaponize the lie that the American presidential election was stolen; they also represent an attempt to impose policies that amount to a form of racial cleansing, both of which echo an earlier legacy of slavery and Jim Crow policies in the United States and the fascist genocidal politics that emerged in Europe in the 1920s and 30s.

In addition, conservative groups such as the Heritage Foundation, Wallbuilders, and the Koch-backed American Legislative Exchange Council are helping right-wing legislators to craft model voter suppression bills.^v Voter suppression laws represent both an expression of an updated form of Jim Crow and must be seen as part of a neoliberal fascist project intent on eradicating the foundations of citizenship, expanding the punishing state, waging war on truth, elevating ignorance over reason, and pandering to white supremacists and right-wing extremists, while merging elements of twentieth-century fascism and neoliberal rationality.

The United States has entered a period marked by the production of a neoliberal rationality, which includes normalizing the notion that the market is a template for all social conditions, asserting that democracy and capitalism are synonymous, normalizing ideologies of race/culture supremacy, and legitimating the use of state-sponsored violence to repress dissent and those populations considered disposable. It should be clear that fascism thrives in moments of severe capitalist crisis. Moreover, the main reason for its return in the present moment of plagues and pandemics cannot be removed the failure of neoliberalism “to offer any real hope to segments of the population facing increasing inequality and a downward spiral of social and economic mobility.”^{vi} As the social contract withers, civic culture disappears, and any notion of shared citizenship is eroded, neoliberalism reveals its fascist alignments by tapping into deep rooted fears, uncertainties, and racialized popular anger.

Neoliberal fascism attempts to legitimate and manufacture a culture of fear, anxiety, and hatred. It is a pedagogy

rooted in racism and bigotry and is used to divert public attention away from the various crisis of capitalism marked by needless deaths caused by a health crisis during the pandemic and “a downward spiral of social and economic inequality.”^{vii} Senator Raphael Warnock is right in arguing that voter suppression laws are resuscitating a full-fledged assault on voting rights “unlike anything we’ve ever seen since the Jim Crow era. This is Jim Crow in new clothes.”^{viii} This updated version of Jim Crow is waged through the power of political policies and right-wing disimagination machines—it diverts, represses, excludes and creates the subjective conditions for advancing the cause of a racialized authoritarianism. Jim Crow also hides under the liberal call for unity, and a refusal to translate political responsibility into moral responsibility. How else to explain Democratic Senator of West Virginia Joe Manchin’s echoing of Republican Party talking points about voter rights bills and support for the filibuster. Manchin has refused to support the For The People Act, a bill that would protect the nation’s voting rights, because it would destroy bipartisan legislation, as if it existed in the current politically hyper-polarized climate.

Manchin enacts a soft version of white supremacy hiding behind the false call for political unity across party lines, in spite of the current reality of political gridlock. Manchin wants the Democrats and Republicans to come together at a time when the Republican Party only believes in a notion of unity organized around a full-fledged attack on civil rights and democracy itself. A New York congressman was right in stating that Joe Manchin’s position on voting rights “might be titled, ‘Why I’ll vote to preserve Jim Crow.’” Manchin’s claim that passing a voting rights will only “destroy the weakening binds of our democracy” does more than ring hollow, it reaffirms the long legacy of Jim Crow and the white nationalists’ hatred of Black people.^{ix} This is an insult to the thousands of Americans who died on the battlefields of the Civil War, fought for freedom in two world wars, and gave their lives in order to expand civil rights and social justice.

It is one thing to condemn Manchin for his unholy alliance with a party that is resurrecting the legacy of Jim Crow, it is another thing for him to be in alliance with a party that thrives on ignorance, lies, and white supremacy. Manchin appears blind in his support for a party that has a weak connection with reality, apparent in the fact that 63 percent of Republicans claim the election was stolen from Trump along with “23 percent [who] believe that the world is controlled by Satan-worshipping pedophiles.”^x Another 25 percent support the inane and outlandish claims QAnon, with its “imaginary global syndicate of Satan-worshipping child traffickers.”^{xi}

Voter suppression laws breathe new life into white supremacy and fit nicely into the racist argument that whites are under siege by people of color who are attempting to dethrone and replace them. In this case, such laws, along with an ongoing attack on equality and social justice, are defended as justifiable measures to protect whites from the “contaminating” influence of immigrants, Black people, and others considered unworthy of occupying and participating in the public sphere and democratic process. Voter suppression laws are defended as legitimate attempts to provide proof of “real Americans,” code for defining people of color as “counterfeit citizens.”^{xii}

The Republican Party no longer hides its racism and boldly engages in widespread voter suppression.^{xiii} As Robin D. G. Kelly has argued, Republicans have made clear that they endorse the white supremacist notion that “the United States [should] be a straight, white nation reminiscent of the mythic ‘old days’ when armed white men ruled, owned their castle, boasted of unvanquished military power, and everyone else knew their place.”^{xiv} It is crucial to mention that these bills are also aimed at preventing youth from voting as well. Closing polling stations, restricting student I.D. as a form of voter identification, and restricting absentee voting to people over 65 or older automatically eliminates young people from voting by mail.^{xv} All of these issues are a stumbling bloc for young voters, whose changing demographics scares party of the Confederacy. Republicans have also argued openly that voter suppression policies are meant to enable permanent minority rule for them, the end point of which is a form of authoritarianism.

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White Supremacy and Apartheid Pedagogy

The genocide inflicted on Native Americans, slavery, the horrors of Jim Crow, the incarceration of Japanese Americans, the rise of the carceral state, the My Lai massacre, former President Bush’s torture chambers and black

sites, among other historical events now disappear into a disavowal of past events made even more unethical with the emergence of a right-wing political and pedagogical language of erasure. For example, the Republican Party's attack on the teaching of critical race theory in the schools which they label as "ideological or faddish" both denies the history of racism as well as the ways in which it is enforced through policy, laws, and institutions. For many Republicans, racial hatred takes on the ludicrous claim of protecting students from learning about the diverse ways in which racism persist in American society. For instance, Republican Governor Ron DeSantis of Florida stated that "There is no room in our classrooms for things like critical race theory. Teaching kids to hate their country and to hate each other is not worth one red cent of taxpayer money."^{xvii} In this updated version of apartheid pedagogy and historical cleansing, the call for racial justice is equated to a form of racial hatred leaving intact the refusal to acknowledge, condemn, and confront in the public imagination the history and tenacity of racism in American society.

In the current era of white supremacy, apartheid pedagogy is present in attempts by Republican Party politicians to rewrite the narrative regarding who counts as an American. This whitening of collective identity is largely reproduced by right-wing attacks on diversity and race sensitivity training, critical race programs in government, and social justice and racial issues in the schools. These bogus assaults are all too familiar and include widespread and coordinated ideological and pedagogical attacks against historical memory and critical forms of education. The most aggressive moves by Republican dominated legislatures are focused on efforts to control how American history, particularly the legacy of slavery, is taught in classrooms. As John Feffer states, this is the educational version of an updated Jim Crow and points to "a version of white supremacy is being legislated into classrooms in various republican-controlled states."^{xviii}

The fight to censor critical, truth-telling versions of American history and the current persistence of systemic racism is part of a larger conservative project to prevent teachers, students, journalists, and others from speaking openly about crucial social issues that undermine a viable democracy. Such attacks are increasingly waged by conservative foundations, anti-public intellectuals, politicians, and media outlets. These include right-wing think tanks such as Heritage-foundation and Manhattan Institute, scholars such as Thomas Sowell, politicians such as Mitch McConnell, and media outlets such as *City Journal*, *The Daily Caller*, *Federalist*, and *Fox News*. The threat of teaching children about the history and systemic nature of racism appears particularly dangerous to *Fox News*, which since June 5 has posited "critical race theory" as a threat in over 150 broadcasts.^{xix} What is shared by all of these sources is the claim that critical race theory and other "anti-racist" programs constitute forms of indoctrination that threaten to undermine the alleged foundations of Western Civilization.

The nature of this moral panic is evident in the fact that anti-CRT bills have become law in eight states and 15 state legislatures across the country have introduced bills to prevent or limit teachers from teaching about the history of slavery and racism in American society. In doing so, they are making a claim for what one Texas legislator called "traditional history," which allegedly should focus on "ideas that make the country great."^{xx} Texas stands out in its efforts to influence what is taught in public schools because it has a huge influence in what textbooks are adopted across the country. As Simon Romero reports in the *New York Times*, Texas along with a "dozen other Republican-led states seek to ban or limit how the role of slavery and pervasive effects of racism can be taught [amounting] to some of the most aggressive efforts to control the teaching of American history." He writes that a number of the bills proposed by the Republican led legislature include the following and is worth citing at length:

One measure that recently passed the Texas House, largely along party lines, would limit teacher-led discussions of current events; prohibit course credit for political activism or lobbying, which could include students who volunteer for civil rights groups; and ban teaching of The 1619 Project, an initiative by The New York Times that says it aims to reframe U.S. history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of Black Americans at the center of the national narrative. The bill would also limit how teachers in Texas classrooms can discuss the ways in which racism influenced the legal system in the state, long a segregationist bastion, and the rest of the country. Another bill that sailed through the Texas House would create a committee to "promote patriotic education" about the state's secession from Mexico in 1836, largely by men who were fighting to expand slavery. And a third bill would block exhibits at San Antonio's Alamo complex from explaining that major figures in the

Texas Revolution were slave owners.^{xxi}

Idaho's lieutenant governor, Janice McGeachin, is equally forthright in revealing the underlying ideological craze behind censoring any talk by teachers and students about race in Idaho public schools. She has introduced a taskforce to protect young people from what she calls, with no pun intended, "the scourge of critical race theory, socialism, communism, and Marxism."^{xxii} McGeachin's chilling attack on freedom of expression echoes an earlier period in American history when during the McCarthy and Red Scare period of the 1950s heightened paranoia over the threat of communism resulted in a slew of "laws that banned the teaching of Marxism and communism, and required professors to swear loyalty oaths."^{xxiii}

This version of neo-McCarthyism was on full display in Ohio when Republican Representative Fowler Arthur introduced the "Promoting Education Not Indoctrination Act." This bill would outlaw the teaching of critical race theory not only in the public schools but also "in Ohio's large public university system, threatening any institution that allows such teaching with a reduction of one quarter of its state funding."^{xxiv} Fowler's disdain for democracy, evident in her erasure from state mandated curriculum guidelines of the notion of common good, is matched by her distorted views of racism, environmentalism, and critical thinking itself.^{xxv} When Arthur was asked at a press conference to define the substance of the bill, her ignorance of Marxism and support for a ginned up version of neo-McCarthyism was clear in her response, reported by Timothy Messer-Kruse:

"We really focus on defining the Marxist ideology..." When asked to define what Marxist ideology was, Representative Fowler Arthur said that "those are specifically that one nationality, color, ethnicity, race, or sex is inherently superior to another nationality, color, ethnicity, race, or sex... So the main goal of this definition of divisive concepts is to define the ideology behind some of these Marxist ideals..."^{xxvi}

Such attacks are about more than censorship and racial cleansing. Apartheid educational practices allow the intrusion of criminality into politics by nourishing habits of powerlessness and undermining any viable form of critical agency. Civic illiteracy is the goal of the Republican Party, reinforced by the belief that an uninformed public shaped through a pedagogy of manufactured ignorance will not hold power accountable. Right-wing attacks on critical race theory also ignore any work by prominent Black scholars ranging from Frederick Douglass and W.E.B. DuBois to Angela Y. Davis and Audre Lord. There is no mention of even Derrick Bell, the founder of critical race theory in the 1980s.^{xxvii} Nor is there room for complexity, evidence or facts, just as there is no room for either a critique of structural racism or the actual assumptions and influence that make up CRT's body of work. What disappears in the attacks on anti-racist work is an attempt to analyze how its most profound theorists explore and make visible its history and contemporary effects on the existing social order.^{xxviii} Bell's work on critical race theory was highly theoretical and academic, largely taught in law schools, and focused on how racism is institutionalized in the law. While such work makes clear that racism can only exist along side tyranny, it is not only about racism and an appeal to equality but also about the "possibility of democracy."^{xxix} The goal of the attacks on critical race theory is a reign of tyranny reinforced through a cultural politics that ensures that when and where civic literacy and freedom are destroyed, democracy disappears. The enemy of the Republican Party is not critical race theory, per se, but democracy itself.

In this instance education becomes a site of derision, an object of censorship, and a way of demonizing schools and teachers who address critically matters of racism and racial inequality. Right-wing politicians now use education and the power of persuasion as weapons to discredit any critical approach to grappling with the history of racial injustice and white supremacy. In doing so, they attempt to undermine and discredit the critical faculties necessary for students and others to examine history as a resource in order to "investigate the core conflict between a nation founded on radical notions of liberty, freedom, and equality, and a nation built on slavery, exploitation, and exclusion."^{xxx} The current attacks on critical race theory, if not critical thinking itself, are but one instance of the rise of apartheid pedagogy. This is a pedagogy in which education is used in the service of dominant power in order to normalize racism, class inequities, and economic inequality while safeguarding the interests of those who benefit from such inequities the most. In pursuit of such a project, they impose a pedagogy of oppression, complacency, and mindless discipline. They

ignore or downplay matters of injustice and the common good, and rarely embrace notions of community as part of a pedagogy that engages pressing social, economic, and civic problems. Instead of an education of civic practice that enriches the public imagination, they endorse all the elements of indoctrination central to formalizing and updating a mode of fascist politics.

The conservative wrath waged against critical race theory is example of white ignorance parading as a form of patriotic pedagogy, which in reality is central to the conservative struggle over power—the power of the moral and political imagination. White ignorance is crucial to upholding the poison of white supremacy. Apartheid pedagogy is about denial and disappearance, a manufactured ignorance that attempts to whitewash history and rewrite the narrative of American exceptionalism as it might have been framed in the 1920s and 30s when members of a resurgent Ku Klux Klan shaped the policies of some school boards. Apartheid pedagogy uses education as a disimagination machine to convince students and others that racism does not exist, that teaching about racial justice is a form of indoctrination, and that understanding history is more an exercise in blind reverence than critical analysis.

Apartheid pedagogy aims to reproduce current systems of racism rather than end them. Institutions such as *No Left Turn in Education* not only oppose teaching about racism in schools, but also comprehensive sex education, and teaching children about climate change, which they view as forms of indoctrination. Without irony, they label themselves an organization of “patriotic Americans who believe that a fair and just society can only be achieved when malleable young minds are free from the indoctrination that suppresses their independent thought.”^{xxxix} This is the power of ignorance in the service of civic death and a flight from ethical and social responsibility. Kati Holloway, citing the NYU philosopher, Charles W. Mills, succinctly sums up the elements of white ignorance. She writes:

“White ignorance,” according to NYU philosopher Charles W. Mills, is an “inverted epistemology,” a deep dedication to and investment in non-knowing that explains white supremacy’s highly curatorial (and often oppositional) approach to memory, history, and the truth. While white ignorance is related to the anti-intellectualism that defines the white Republican brand, it should be regarded as yet more specific. According to Mills, white ignorance demands a purposeful misunderstanding of reality—both present and historical—and then treats that fictitious worldview as the singular, de-politicized, unbiased, “objective” truth. “One has to learn to see the world wrongly,” under the terms of white ignorance, Mills writes, “but with the assurance that this set of mistaken perceptions will be validated by white epistemic authority.”^{xxxix}

New York Times columnist Michelle Goldberg reports that right-wing legislators have taken up the cause to ban critical race theory from not only public schools but also higher education. She highlights the case of Boise University, which has banned dozens of classes dealing with diversity. She notes that soon afterward, “the Idaho State Senate voted to cut \$409,000 from the school’s budget, an amount meant to reflect what Boise State spends on social justice programs.”^{xxxix} Such attacks are happening across the United States and are not only meant to curtail teaching about racism, sexism, and other controversial issues in the schools, but also to impose strict restrictions on what non-tenured assistant professors can teach and to what degree they can be pushed to accept being both deskilled and giving up control over the conditions of their labor.

In an egregious example of an attack on free speech and tenure itself, the Board of Trustees at the University of North Carolina denied a tenure position to Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, Nikole Hannah-Jones because of her work on *The Times Magazine’s* 1619 project, “which examined the legacy of slavery in America.”^{xxxix} The failure to provide tenure to Hannah-Jones, who is also the recipient of a MacArthur Foundation “Genius Grant,” and an inductee into the North Carolina Media and Journalism Hall of Fame is a blatant act of racism and violation of academic freedom. Let’s be clear. The North Carolina Board of Trustees denied Hannah-Jones tenure because she brings to the university a critical concern with racism that clashes with the strident political conservatism of the board. It is also another example of a racist backlash by conservatives who wish to deny that racism even exists in the United States, never mind that it should even be acknowledged in public and higher education classrooms.

This form of “patriotic education” is being put in place by a resurgence of those who support Jim Crow power

relations. This type of retribution is a part of a longstanding politics of fear, censorship, and academic repression that conservatives have waged since the student revolts of the 1960s.^{xxxv} It is also part of the ongoing corporatization of the university in which business models now define how the university is governed, faculty are reduced to part-time workers, and students are viewed merely as customers and consumers.^{xxxvi} Equally important, this case is an updated attack on the ability and power of faculty rather than Boards of Trustees in making decisions regarding both faculty hiring and the crucial question who decides who gets tenure in a university.^{xxxvii} Keith E. Whittington and Sean Wisents are right in stating that the Board's actions to deny Hannah-Jones a tenured professorship are about more than a singular violation of faculty rights, academic freedom, and attack on associated discourses relating to critical race theory. They write:

For the Board of Trustees to interfere unilaterally on blatantly political grounds is an attack on the integrity of the very institution it oversees. The perception and reality of political intervention in matters of faculty hiring will do lasting damage to the reputation of higher education in North Carolina — and will embolden boards across the country similarly to interfere with academic operations of the universities that they oversee.^{xxxviii}

Holding critical ideas has become a liability in the contemporary neoliberal university. Also, at risk here is the relationship between critical thinking, civic values, and historical remembrance evident in the current attempts to suppress voting rights, dangerous memories, and an urgent analysis of racism in the U.S. The current conservative attack on critical race theory testifies to a renewed effort to eliminate any critical teaching and dialogue regarding racism. It also testifies to the degree to which anti CRT bills are funded by organizations such as the Koch brothers, and the American Legislative Exchange Council, which provides the template for these bills used by many state legislators. David Theo Goldberg has brilliantly outlined how the war on critical race theory and other anti-racist programs, which he defines as critical race studies, is designed largely to eliminate the legacy and persistent effects of systemic racial injustice and its underlying structural, ideological, and pedagogical fundamentals and components. This is apartheid pedagogy with a vengeance. Goldberg is worth quoting at length:

First, the coordinated conservative attack on CRT is largely meant to distract from the right's own paucity of ideas. The strategy is to create a straw house to set aflame in order to draw attention away from not just its incapacity but its outright refusal to address issues of cumulative, especially racial, injustice.... Second, the conservative attack on CRT tries to rewrite history in its effort to neo liberalize racism: to reduce it to a matter of personal beliefs and interpersonal prejudice. ... On this view, the structures of society bear no responsibility, only individuals. Racial inequities today are ...not the living legacy of centuries of racialized systems.... Third, race has always been an attractive issue for conservatives to mobilize around. They know all too well how to use it to stoke white resentment while distracting from the depredations of conservative policies for all but the wealthy.^{xxxix}

Apartheid pedagogy in the form of attacks on CRT also have a chilling effect on freedom of expression, suggesting that even thinking about racism and the legacy of racial injustice is unacceptable pedagogically in the nation's schools. Vincent Wong, a research associate at African American Policy Forum, states that "it is difficult to separate the conservative critique of CRT from the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement and "the backlash to constrain, censor, restrict the ability to talk about racial justice both in terms of contemporary inequality but also the history of it."^{xl}

Police Violence and culture of white supremacy

The face of white supremacy and its culture of violence is most evident in the scourge of police violence with its long legacy of racism in the United States. Police aggression, the criminalization of social problems, massive inequality, the surge of a culture of lies, the rise of white supremacy and the easy availability of guns represent a mosaic of factors contributing to a larger culture of violence. This culture of aggression has not gone unnoticed by a public increasingly disturbed by racist violence. The spread of gun violence, police brutality, and mass shootings have galvanized public attention and produced a widespread debate focused largely on defunding the police and "legislative initiatives for how to better prevent gun violence [that] may lead to substantial state gun policy changes."^{xli} Increasingly, the call

for reform has challenged the notion that police violence is the result of the behavior of a few rogue or bad cops and has little to do with the availability of guns in America.

Liberal reforms aimed at violence have done little to restrict the proliferation of guns in American society. A more sustained and louder call for reform against systemic violence has built upon earlier calls for defunding the police, abolishing the police completely, and eliminating prisons. At best, these varied critiques have pushed the criticism of police violence into mainstream conversations and produced a newfound public concern with the institution of policing and issues of safety and protection. What has been ignored or under theorized in the mainstream concern with police brutality is what Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, citing Mariame Kaba, refers to as a larger system of violence and punishment with its “death-making institutions” organized to produce entire systems of “harassment, violence, and surveillance” whose function is “to keep oppressive gender and racial hierarchies in place.”^{xlii}

While not without merit, such calls for reform, especially those advocated by liberal politicians and the mainstream media, do not go far enough in understanding the reach and power of violence in America, especially with regards to a politics and culture that fuels racist forms of police brutality. What is missed in these calls for police reform is a broader interpretation of the culture of violence, especially as it has emerged with the melding of neoliberalism with fascist politics defined through the lens of white supremacy and white nationalism. The problem of police violence is part of a broader crisis and must be addressed as part of a more comprehensive view of racism and class oppression, produced through a neoliberal politics that merges the market-driven imperatives of a criminal economy with a fascist politics defined increasingly by its advocacy of white supremacy and racial cleansing.

Sociologist Alex Vitale rightly insists that the call for police reform begins not with producing “better” police through technocratic reforms such as the increased use of body cameras and bias training but with a “larger structure of economic life in America.”^{xliii} In the age of neoliberal austerity, the defunding of the welfare state has given way to a range of social problems--extending from the criminalization of homelessness and the relentless erasure of human rights to the mass proliferation of surveillance and the placing of police in the schools--all of which has contributed to the expansion of police power as a way to control people “disconnected from meaningful participation in the global economy.”^{xliv} Turning over every social problem for the police to fix is more than an impossible task; it is a failed, if not diversionary, political decision.^{xlv} That is, it is a decision divorced from not only from a history in which the police have been murdering Black people with impunity--but also from the emergence of neoliberal social order in which economic activity is divorced from social costs. Under such circumstances, state-sanctioned acts of lawlessness, a politics of domestic terrorism, disposability and white supremacy have become normalized, and removed from the grammar of social and ethical responsibility. Investing in force as the first strategy of police engagement, and a widespread acceptance of lawlessness have accelerated and expanded the power of the police. This perfecta of violence constitutes a first principle of policing and is part of what Cornel West calls “a failed social experiment.”^{xlvi} According to West, this experiment is rooted in a form of capitalism that brutalizes people of color and is built on staggering levels of inequality, a culture of anti-intellectualism, and concentrated economic power that tramples “on the rights of poor people and minorities decade after decade.”^{xlvii}

Police violence has become a form of domestic terrorism. domestic terrorism—or what Mark Levine has called in a different context “a necropolitics of the oppressed.”^{xlviii} This is a form of systemic terror and violence instituted intentionally by different levels of government against populations at home in order to realize economic gains and achieve political benefits through practices that range from assassination, extortion, incarceration, violence, and intimidation or coercion of a civilian population.^{xlix} Some of the more notorious racist expressions of U.S. domestic terrorism bring to mind the assassination of Black Panther Party leader Fred Hampton by the Chicago Police Department on December 4, 1969. The MOVE bombing by the Philadelphia Police Department in 1985, the existence of COINTELPRO an illegal counterintelligence program designed to harass anti-war and black resistance fighters in the 60s and 70s, the use of extortion by the local police and courts practiced on the largely poor black inhabitants of Ferguson, and the more publicized killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd by the police--to name just a few incidents.

Domestic terrorism is informed both by the scale of increased militarism, violence at the level of everyday life, and the increase in technologies of surveillance, arrests, convictions, and privatized prisons. In our digitally mediated world, marginalized populations are tracked, reduced to data, and mapped onto different avenues of disposability. The discourse of criminality and control has produced a slew of law enforcement measures that targeted urban schools, social services, and public housing, all of which became terrains of surveillance and fodder for the expansion of the punishment state.^l At work here, is also a move away from the war on poverty to a war on the poor. As welfare programs were defunded, a culture of punishment morphed into a war on drugs that became synonymous with a generalized war youth. According to Vitale, police reform must move from talk about police accountability to political accountability to address police violence as part of a broader set of economic and political issues. He writes:

the decision to turn social problems over to the police is a political decision (as is the creation of the social problems in the first place). Responding to this deeply entrenched form of governance requires a new politics. We just cannot fix policing with a set of superficial, technocratic reforms, because they don't address the way the most basic needs of people have themselves been defunded, creating the "crime" that must be policed in the first place.... This is not about just getting the police out of the homelessness and mental health business: this is about a radical rethink about how safety is produced.^{li}

The liberal call for reforming the police largely fails to address what Zach Beauchamp calls police culture, or the tenets of police ideology, which are shared by police departments throughout the United States. Police ideology is part of the hidden curriculum of police culture, and while it is not taught overtly in police academies, it is often part of a silent code that is passed down to each generation of police officers and offers "a deeply disturbing picture of the internal culture of policing," which Beauchamp describes as follows:

The tenets of police ideology are not codified or written down but are nonetheless widely shared in departments around the country. The ideology holds that the world is a profoundly dangerous place: Officers are conditioned to see themselves as constantly in danger and that the only way to guarantee survival is to dominate the citizens they're supposed to protect. The police believe they're alone in this fight; police ideology holds that officers are under siege by criminals and are not understood or respected by the broader citizenry. These beliefs, combined with widely held racial stereotypes, push officers toward violent and racist behavior during intense and stressful street interactions.^{lii}

What is often not evident to the public and liberals is that this is an armed culture that trains the police to be an occupying army, views Black communities as a threatening population, and privilege the use of violence as a privileged response to dealing with targeted Black communities. This approach to policing cannot be separated from a broader neoliberal fascist culture in which whiteness becomes both a badge of solidarity and is shaped by larger forces of structural racism. It is no accident that "the officer corps remains overwhelmingly white, male, and straight [and] that police heavily favor Republicans."^{liii} The rise of white supremacy at the center of power with the election of Trump in 2016, and the transformation of the Republican Party into a party of white supremacists after Trump lost the presidential election to Joe Biden points to a racist system in which the targeting of Black populations has the potential to get worse rather than better in the future. The delusions of white supremacy have turned into a project spearheaded by a Republican Party that celebrates the racist legacy of the Confederacy.

Conclusion

The United States has suffered a steep decline in democracy over the past few years, especially under the Trump regime. According to The Freedom Report, the U.S. has experienced an 11-point drop in freedom since 2020, "making it one of the 25 countries to suffer the steepest drops over the 10-year period."^{liv} The U.S. now ranks "closer to countries such as Romania and Panama than western European partners such as France and Germany."^{lv} The Freedom House report was not alone in assessing the decline of democracy in the United States. The Economists' Intelligence Unit cited the U.S. as a "flawed democracy" and ranked it 25th out of 167 countries analyzed as democratic nations.^{lvi}

The length and breadth of the struggle in the United States to close the gap between its ideals, promises, and reality have reached a vanishing point. America's penchant for violence abroad has now turned inward. The Trumpian call for "law and order" inspired dictators across the globe and accelerated a politics of disposability connected to updated forms of racial cleansing, white nationalism, and white supremacy. Authoritarian nationalism increasingly finds its counterpart in forms of cultural triumphalism and the proliferation of state violence, now largely waged by Republican-controlled state legislatures.

America's collective desire for a democratic future has not simply been diminished; it appears to have become irrelevant, if not an object of scorn by both the Republican Party and the legion of Trump followers. America is haunted by apocalyptic yearnings camouflaged in the promise of a white public sphere and society cleansed of those populations considered disposable. Central to this bigoted and nativistic social formation is a racially infused notion of citizenship, an atomized notion of personal liberty, and an unmitigated defense of individualism and selfishness free of any sense of social responsibility.^{lvii} To paraphrase Zygmunt Bauman, visions have now fallen into disrepute, and what once produced shame, many Americans are now proud of.^{lviii}

America's slide into fascist politics with its undercurrent of white supremacy has been acknowledged even by President Joe Biden in speeches he delivered marking both the Tulsa race massacre and Memorial Day.^{lix} Using a language long associated with leftist critics, Biden warned that U.S. democracy was not only in danger but that Americans had to recognize and challenge the "deep roots of racial terror."^{lx}

The U.S.'s slide into the chasm of white supremacy demands a revitalized understanding of the historical moment in which we find ourselves, along with a systemic critical analysis of the new political formations that mark this period. Part of this challenge is to create a new language and mass social movement to address and construct empowering terrains of education, politics, justice, culture, and power that challenge existing systems of racist violence and economic oppression. The beginning of such a strategy can be found in the Black Lives Matter movement and its alignment with other movements fighting against authoritarianism. The Black Lives Matter movement teaches us "that eradicating racial oppression ultimately requires a struggle against oppression in all of its forms...[especially] restructuring America's economic system."^{lxi} This is especially important as those groups marginalized by class, race, ethnicity, and religion have become aware of how much in this new era of fascist politics they have lost control over the economic, political, pedagogical, and social conditions that bear down on their lives. Visions have become dystopian, devolving into a sense of being left out, abandoned, and subject to increasing systems of terror and violence. These issues can no longer be viewed as individual problems but as manifestations of a broader failure of politics. Moreover, what is needed is not a series of stopgap reforms limited to particular institutions or groups but a radical restructuring of the entirety of U.S. society.

The call for a socialist democracy demands the creation of visions, ideals, institutions, social relations, and pedagogies of resistance that enable the public to imagine a life beyond a social order in which racial, class and gender-based violence produce endless assaults on the environment, systemic police violence, a culture of ignorance and cruelty. Such a challenge must also address an assault on the civic culture and the social contract, mediated through the elevation of war, militarization, violent masculinity, and the politics of disposability to the highest levels of power. Capitalism is a piece of death-driven machinery that infantilizes, exploits, and devalues human life and the planet itself. As market mentalities and moralities tighten their grip on all aspects of society, democratic institutions and public spheres are being downsized, if not altogether disappearing, along with the informed citizens without which there is no democracy.

Central to any viable notion of resistance to the threat of white supremacy and fascist politics is the courage to think and take on the challenge of what kind of world we want—what kind of future we want to build for our children? These are questions that can only be addressed when addressing politics and capitalism as part of a general crisis of democracy. This challenge demands the willingness to develop an anti-capitalist consciousness as the basis for a call to action, one willing to dismantle the present structure of neoliberal capitalism. Chantal Mouffe is right in

arguing that “before being able to radicalize democracy, it is first necessary to recover it,” which means first rejecting the common-sense assumptions that capitalism and democracy are synonymous.^{lxii}

Given the current threats to democracy in the U.S., the time has come to reclaim the great utopian ideals unleashed by a long history of civil rights struggles, the insights and radical struggles produced by the Black Lives Matter movement and ongoing struggles against the rise of fascism across the globe. There is a need to rethink and relearn the trajectory of history by considering the role that critical education and notions of civic literacy have played in producing a collective anti-capitalist consciousness. At stake here is the crucial project of once again creating the critical agents and social movements that refuse to equate capitalism and democracy and uphold the conviction that the problems of ecological destruction, mass poverty, militarism, systemic racism, and a host of other social problems cannot be solved by leaving capitalism in place. Only then can mass movements arise in which the future can be written in the language of justice, compassion, and the fundamental narratives of freedom and equality. Resistance in a time of tyranny is no longer an option. It is a crucial necessity.

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