

Blood in their Mouths: Lies, Violence, and Fascist Politics

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Monsters exist, but they are too few in number to be truly dangerous. More dangerous are the common men, the functionaries ready to believe and to act without asking questions.

Primo Levi

Former President Donald Trump has achieved a unique status in United States history. He is the first president to be indicted for conspiring to overturn a presidential election, defraud the United States, and obstruct official proceedings by attempting to subvert the peaceful transfer of power. He is also a convicted felon. Whether Trump will be held legally responsible for any of his alleged crimes remains to be seen. A right-wing supreme court has issued an immunity ruling that makes it difficult to prosecute him for his most serious, crimes, including his attempt to subvert the 2020 election.

It's now a matter of public record that Trump faces four indictments and 91 felony counts for his criminal behavior. As Alan Feuer and Maggie Haberman point out in the *New York Times*, the charges clearly depict how "Trump promoted false claims of fraud, sought to bend the Justice Department toward supporting those claims and oversaw a scheme to create false slates of electors pledged to him in states that were actually won by Joseph R. Biden Jr."¹ Special Counsel Jack Smith has shown that Trump's lies played a central role in his "unprecedented assault" on the U.S. Capitol and democracy; indeed, he argues, Trump's criminal actions were "fueled by lies."² In response to Smith's indictment, Trump has "described him as a 'thug' and 'deranged,' setting him up as "a particular target of violent threats."³ As a result of the threats, Smith's office has spent between 8 to 10 million "on protective details for him, his family and senior staff members, according to officials."⁴ Trump's lying appears to touch on almost every aspect of his life. He has lied about his affairs with prostitutes, sexual assaults, and his business dealings. On September 26, 2023, Authur Engoron, a New York State judge, issued a ruling regarding Trump's fraudulent business practices in which he made clear that "Much of the reputation Trump cultivated as a business mogul was built on lies."⁵

In addition to legitimating false claims about a stolen presidential election, Trump's vitriolic and dehumanizing rhetoric has also contributed to an unprecedented culture of misinformation and truth-denying that has become so widespread since 2016 that it is now a central feature of politics and a defining condition of the widespread violence, lawlessness, and militarization shaping United States society. Trump's spreading of misinformation is well-known and documented. *The Washington Post* has diligently tracked his lying, documenting that from 2016 to the end of his presidency, he made "30,573... false or misleading statements... averaging about 39 claims a day in his final year."⁶

The lies embraced by demagogues such as Trump do more than distort meaning, turn truth to ashes, and spread misinformation. As Ariel Dorman observes, they also "exhibit a toxic mix of ignorance and mendacity," while legitimizing and reproducing a vocabulary and culture that reveals

in unrestricted power, cruelty, terror, and “homicidal extremes.”⁷ This is a language through which power is enacted, a language in which agency is made manifest “as an act with [often deadly] consequences.”⁸ This is a rhetoric that emerges from living corpses whose mouths are filled with blood. As novelist and civil rights activist Toni Morrison pointed out in her Nobel Prize-winning speech, this is a dead language, “though not without effect.”⁹ She writes that, at its core, it is a language that:

actively thwarts the intellect, stalls the conscience, and suppresses human potential. ... it cannot form or tolerate new ideas, shape other thoughts, tell another story, or fill baffling silences. ...It is the language that drinks blood, laps vulnerabilities, tucks its fascist boots under crinolines of respectability and patriotism as it moves relentlessly toward the bottom line and the bottomed-out mind.¹⁰

Trump’s lies cannot be separated from the language of violence and its ongoing attempts to instill fear, promote threats against alleged opponents, and inspire violence from his MAGA followers. His lies are inseparable from the creation of a language that promotes a lethal formative culture that wallows in the blood of those viewed as disposable and produces deranged anger and unchecked despair. The metaphor of Trump as a fascist monster is not an exaggeration, given his relentless attempts to suck the blood out of democracy in the United States. Trump’s use of inflammatory, violent rhetoric to obtain political power feeds the G.O.P. call for civil war and accelerates the arming of political extremists such as the Proud Boys, the Patriot movement, and a heavily militarized police force.¹¹

Trump’s relentless use of the language of fear, bigotry, racial hatred, and menace does more than accentuate a deeply polarized United States public; it also contributes, as Andrea Mazzarino observes, to a militarized culture of violence obvious, in part, to the plague of gun ownership. How else to explain the fact that “one in five United States households have a weapon, nearly 400 million of them, and that weaponry is only growing more deadly.”¹²

Under such circumstances and within a social order in which violence has become an organizing principle of politics and society, members of the Republican Party and other MAGA followers have become more willing to accept violence in the service of political power, most evident in the events leading to the January 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol. They are also willing to normalize mass shootings in the name of gun rights, accept the incorporation of extremist groups into the highest levels of power, and normalize the use of violence to obtain political power regardless of the cost. Some members of Congress show their support for gun violence by wearing lapel pins in the shape of AR-15 rifles. This is an act of moral and political degeneracy that embraces the perfect symbol for a political party that is ethically and politically nihilistic and embodies fascist politics, displaying an unfathomable disrespect to the children and individuals killed by such guns in the United States. As Anisha Kohli reminds us in *Time Magazine*, the “AR-15-style semi-automatic rifles have been used in most of the high profile mass shootings in recent years, including at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas; Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown Conn.; and the Route 91 Harvest music festival in Las Vegas.”¹³

Trump’s embrace of lies and violence has produced an unrelenting series of shocks to the body politic and its democratic ideals. Violence that was once considered inconceivable and relegated to the margins of society now passes for normal.¹⁴ As Trump’s violent rhetoric accelerates, actual acts of violence “have become a steady reality of United States life, affecting school board officials, election workers, flight attendants, librarians and even members of Congress, often with few headlines and little reaction from politicians.”¹⁵ David French notes that death threats have surged across America. He writes:

Death threats have surged across the country. As terrorists realize death threats work, they are using them more often—including against Republicans who voted for President Joe Biden’s infrastructure package. Death threats to congresspeople doubled by May of last year

compared to the year before. “These are not one-off incidents,” according to Vox, “Surveys have found that 17 percent of America’s local election officials and nearly 12 percent of its public health workforce have been threatened due to their jobs during the 2020 election cycle and Covid-19 pandemic.” Reuters tracked more than 850 individual threats against local election workers by Trump supporters last year, up from essentially zero in previous elections.¹⁶

Right-wing extremists have escalated their use of death threats against those who either oppose or criticize Trump, with a special bile reserved for threatening immigrants and Black people. The targets of the death threats also include politicians, health workers, local election workers, journalists, teachers, and members of the justice system engaged in holding Trump accountable for his crimes. Trump is indifferent to how his lies often provoke his followers to engage in both violent rhetoric and death threats, and he is unrestrained in who he targets with his vitriol. For instance, he has relentlessly attacked the justice system and the rule of law. He even went so far as to claim, two years after the fact, that when federal agents showed up in a raid on Mar-a-Lago, that then President Biden “authorized the F.B.I. to use deadly (lethal) force” during the search.¹⁷ Not only was Trump not present during the raid, the agents went out of their way not to draw attention to their presence. This false and incendiary claim of an effort to “assassinate Trump” clearly put the F.B.I. agents who conducted the search in potential danger. Michael S. Schmidt et al., writing in the *New York Times*, report that:

The F.B.I., which has seen the number of threats against its personnel and facilities surge since its agents carried out the court-authorized search of Mar-a-Lago, Mr. Trump’s private club and residence in Florida, in August 2022, subsequently created a special unit to deal with the threats. A U.S. official said threats since then have risen more than 300 percent, in part because the identities of employees, and information about them, are being spread online.... ‘Their children didn’t sign up for this,’ a senior F.B.I. supervisor recently testified to Congress.”¹⁸

In a culture that barely tolerates dissent and increasingly confuses the truth with falsehoods, it’s not surprising that Professor Robert Pape, a professor at the University of Chicago who studies political violence, found that “between 15 million and 20 million United States adults believe that violence would be justified to return Mr. Trump to office.”¹⁹ The correlation between the public support for violence and the willingness to buy into Trump’s lie about a stolen election is worth noting. The Chicago Project on Security & Threats reported in April 2023 that 20 percent not only believe the 2020 election was stolen from Trump, “that an estimated 142 million Americans believe that elections won’t solve America’s most fundamental problems – up from 111 million last September. And one in five American adults still believe that the 2020 election was stolen from Trump, representing very little change from 2021.”²⁰ It gets worse. A 2023 survey, quoted in the *New York Times*, observes that [6.8 percent] of Americans believe that “the use of force is justified to restore Donald Trump to the presidency and 8 percent believe that “the use of force is justified to prevent the prosecution of Donald Trump. Speaking at a rally on March 16, 2024, at Dayton International Airport in Vandalia, Ohio, Trump stated that there would be a “bloodbath” if he wasn’t re-elected in November, as reported by Emma Barnett and Jillian Frankel for N.B.C. News.²¹ Many of his followers share his propensity for violence, especially in light of his being deemed by the judicial system a convicted felon. Soon after he was convicted by a New York jury on 34 felony counts for falsifying business records, a number of his right-wing supporters flooded conservative online platforms with threats against the jurors and Judge Merchan, who presided over the case.²²

The plunge into a culture of irrationality fueled by Trump’s lies has upended assumptions regarding the rejection of violence as a governing principle and the necessity of recognizing that a democracy cannot exist without informed citizens. In the MAGA world, ignorance has become the

new civic standard, and justice and injustice collapse into each other. This is more than political theater; it is the normalization of the lies, ignorance, and ethical void at the heart of a fascist and white nationalist movement in the United States. Ignorance in the service of violence has become an organizing principle of fascist politics. It is not merely the absence of curiosity, informed judgment, or a willed disdain for critical thought. It is also part of a larger ideology that churns out lies, misinformation, and a kind of habitual manufactured illiteracy designed to keep people badly educated. As the esteemed novelist James Baldwin notes, it is dangerous in an authoritarian society to be educated. He adds that “to become educated (as all tyrants have always known) is to become inaccessibly independent, it is to acquire a dangerous way of assessing danger, and it is to hold in one’s hands a means of changing reality. ... This is one of the reasons, as it seems to me, that we are so badly educated.”²³ He also makes clear what risks one takes confronting oppression in its various forms. As he noted in *The Fire Next Time*, “to act is to be committed, and to be committed is to be in danger.”²⁴

In Trump’s worldview, the opposition is not to be debated; it is to be destroyed and eliminated.²⁵ This friend/enemy distinction reinforces the notion that a pledge of loyalty to Trump is comparable to becoming part of a militarized army engaged in war. In this discourse, violence is equated with power, and brutality becomes a measure of loyalty. Reason is now replaced with loyalty, and loyalty becomes the medium to “deploy sadism by bullying and humiliating others.”²⁶ How else to explain the increasing use of threats of war coupled with violent language and imagery by Republicans attacking politicians, justice officials, and prosecutors who have held Trump accountable for his crimes? According to G.O.P. extremists such as Marjorie Taylor Greene, Kari Lake, and Roger Stone, such actions mean, as Steve Bannon puts it, that “we’re at war.”²⁷ Trump’s incendiary language does more than evoke the call for civil war; it completely abandons any belief in democracy itself. How else to explain his claim to want to be a dictator for a day, his echoing a fascist past by touting that if he wins, the U.S. will become a “unified Reich,” and talk about staying in office for a third term, and his claim that Joe Biden tried to get him assassinated. Trump offers Americans the promise of a police state and the death of democracy itself.

Moreover, Trump continues to broadcast the message that if he’s held accountable by the criminal legal system for spreading his relentless lies and threats, he will, if elected, enact revenge, punishment, and violence. He has repeatedly told the U.S. “that if he doesn’t get his way—regardless of democratic norms like elections or the rule of law—” then the consequence will be violence.”²⁸ In a message posted on his social media site, Trump made this threat clear—a threat aimed at people prosecuting him in four criminal cases across four jurisdictions. He wrote: “IF YOU GO AFTER ME, I’M COMING FOR YOU.”

Such rhetoric does more than pour fuel on the fire of extremism. In the face of Trump’s ongoing lies about a stolen election and his ensuing violent discourse, the nation increasingly inches towards a point where the lie of a stolen election can easily lead to increasing support for an expanding military-industrial-surveillance complex and “a massive increase in its militarized policies.”²⁹ While Trump has repeatedly distanced himself from surging acts of violence against people of color and others by his followers, his rhetoric serves as a source of inspiration for these perpetrators, encouraging them to engage in violence that is too heinous to ignore. For example, an exhaustive study by *The Washington Post* “identified at least 54 criminal cases where Trump was invoked in direct connection with violent acts, threats of violence or allegations of assault.”³⁰ Mike Levien provides one concrete example of these Trump-inspired acts. He writes:

After a Latino gas station attendant in Gainesville, Florida, was suddenly punched in the head by a white man, the victim could be heard on surveillance camera recounting the attacker’s own words: “He said, ‘This is for Trump.’” Charges were filed, but the victim stopped pursuing them. When police questioned a Washington state man about his threats to kill a local Syrian-born man, the suspect told police he wanted the victim to “get out of my country,” adding, “That’s why I like Trump.”³¹

Needless to say, Trump has a long history of using dehumanizing language, which is often connected to encouraging violence. While The Washington Post journalist Ishaan Tharoor has rightly labeled his language as polarizing, it is more accurate to describe Trump's racist rhetoric as both potentially violent and part of his broader political project of waging a race war, if not a broader civil war.³² A central element of his war rhetoric and race-baiting is a belief in white nationalism and the toxic assumption that only white people can occupy the mantle of full United States citizenship. At work in this discourse are pathological levels of demagoguery and white anger that fuel dangerous levels of racial terrorism "based on the fear-the terrifying eternal fear-of living with difference."³³

Journalist Roger Cohen is right in stating that Trump "has inured people to the thread of violence and meanness lurking in almost every utterance; or worse he has started to make them relish it. He has habituated Americans to buffoonery and lies."³⁴ Most importantly, Trump's language of denigration does not merely serve to mistreat people; it is also code for eliminating them.³⁵ This is particularly true for those high-profile figures that Trump has designated as his "enemies." For instance, Trump wrote on his website, Truth Social, that under his presidency, Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley committed treason--"an act so egregious that, in times gone by, the punishment would have been DEATH!" The alleged treasonous crime for which Milley deserved "DEATH" was his "reassuring Chinese officials that the U.S. had no plans to attack [or go to war with China] during the waning days of the Trump administration."³⁶ As Brian Klass points out, the insinuated by a former president of the United States "that America's top general deserves to be put to ... would be unthinkable in any other rich democracy."³⁷ As Chauncey DeVega observes, what enraged Trump enough to float the idea that he should have been put to death was that "Milley attempted to stop his coup and other attack on democracy and civil society."³⁸

There is nothing shocking about this threat because Trump has accelerated both his lies and threats of violence for years. What is disturbing, if not dangerous, is how the mainstream press refuses to analyze such a high-profile threat and Trump's addiction to violence as a central element of fascist and authoritarian politics. We know from the study of history that such threats led to executions, torture, imprisonment, and death camps—think of Pinochet's killing of thousands of dissidents, Nazi Germany's camps, Stalin's trials, and Mussolini's fascist barbarous regime, among others. Rather than calling Trump out as a demagogue and fascist, mainstream media treat Trump as a normal candidate and give him air time to amplify his poisonous politics and incitements to violence. Moreover, as Paul Farhi notes in an article in *The Washington Post*, the mainstream media offers a muted response to Trump's repeated exhortations to violence, going so far as to downplay even his call "to execute suspected shoplifters. [and reflects] a tendency for the news media to ignore or downplay statements once considered shocking but which now, due to repetition, are taken more for granted."³⁹

Normalizing Trump's politics also takes place when mainstream media reports the violence he and his lackeys advocate as mere description, uncivilized rhetoric, or undignified political decorum. Ignoring the seriousness and danger of Trump's fascist politics allows the mainstream media to fixate on irrelevant issues such as "John Fetterman's hoodie instead of on stories about the relentless but predictable risk of Trump-inspired political violence." Silence on this issue by the mainstream press is a form of complicity with fascist politics that is reproduced through their tone-deaf reporting. Needless to say, there is more at stake here than a lack of journalistic responsibility and integrity; there is also a refusal to imagine what the end of democracy if not humanity, might look like if this culture of lies and violence continues unabated and unaccountable.

Indeed, under Trump's leadership, violence under the cover of systemic lies has become a mediating force in shaping social relations, particularly in eroding democratic values and social bonds. Put differently, violence has become the preferred weapon of the isolated, ignorant, bigoted, corrupt, and white supremacists. At work here is a cynical sneer at racial justice, equality, and freedom that Judith Butler calls a "righteous coldness."⁴⁰ Paralyzing hopes have given way to the historical moment that valorizes cruelty and suffering, which art has turned into a form of spectacle, political performance, and a poisonous set of policies, all of which are rooted in a long history of

systemic racism and violence. As the digital, aural, and visual right-wing media increasingly flood society with lies, hate, and bigotry, hyper-violence is presented as a legitimate source of news, if not entertainment; in actuality, it takes on the form of a representational politics linked to chaos, staggering levels of misery, militarized fear, and the death drive. In a culture of immediacy and short attention spans, violence is increasingly packaged in multiple spaces and platforms to further the unbridled monopolization of pleasure associated with extreme and sensational accounts and images of brutality and cruelty.

Words have consequences, and Trump's language echoes a fascist pedagogy of racial purity that enables people to think and act on the unthinkable and unactionable. He has not only called immigrants rapists; he has further suggested that they be shot in the legs in order to prevent them from crossing the border.⁴¹ Juan Cole notes that Trump's reference to some immigrants as "animals," "functions similarly in this regard to the Nazi technical term 'Untermensch' or underman, subhuman [and that] denigrating people as less than human is a step toward permitting their elimination."⁴² He has urged the police to engage in physical violence when arresting people and encourages violence both at his campaign rallies and in his online messages on both X (formerly known as Twitter) and his *Truth Social* platform. Michael Gerson sums up well some examples of Trump's legacy of threats, menace, brutality, and dehumanization. He writes:

Trump has made a point of encouraging violence against protesters at his rallies ("knock the crap out of them"), excusing violence by his supporters (people "with tremendous passion and love for their country"), and generally acting like a two-bit mob boss. He publicly supported Kyle Rittenhouse, the teenager charged with homicide in the killing of two people in Kenosha, Wis. (Rittenhouse has pleaded not guilty.) He embraced Mark and Patricia McCloskey for brandishing guns at peaceful marchers in St. Louis. He deployed federal security forces to break heads in Lafayette Square.⁴³

Not only do mainstream media pay little attention to the connection between Trump's serial lying and the growing violence emerging in the United States, but they also under-emphasize the racism and white supremacy at the heart of Trump's defense of his lies and the accompanying threats he has directed at Black politicians, lawyers, prosecutors, and election workers, all of which serve to give fascism a smooth edge. These threats are particularly worrisome in a climate in which Trump and his MAGA allies have convinced two-thirds of Republicans that the 2020 presidential election was stolen.

In addition, the power of such threats is intensified in a society in which Trump, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, former Trump attorney Rudy Giuliani, and their allies spread the white supremacist conspiracy theory that whites are being "replaced" by immigrants and people of color (a lie used to fuel their calls for a U.S. that is white, indifferent to racism, massively unequal, and characterized by widespread human misery). While this racist discourse is not new, Trump and his colleagues have given racism and extreme violence a new visibility and legitimacy. They have deepened and expanded what Etienne Balibar, in his 2015 book *Violence and Civility*, has called "death zones of humanity" fueled by the capitalist machinery of social irresponsibility and zones of social abandonment.⁴⁴

This view of the past is part of the discourse of historical erasure and social amnesia. Not only does historical memory disappear in this resurging narrative, but history is also rewritten in the language of domination and repression, which reproduces an inchoate nostalgia for a time in which Black people, women, immigrants, and others considered disposable or deviant were imagined to have known and willingly accepted their place, and whiteness was not only a mark of privilege, but also a defining principle of power, citizenship, and governance.

The unchecked irrationality and threats that inform Trump's lies and his attempt to defend them reveal not only his authoritarian tendencies but also his deep-seated racism and his attempts to model politics as a form of governing through crime.⁴⁵ Governing through crime translates into the

criminalization of social problems, marginalized cultures, and dissent itself, all of which, as Angela Y. Davis notes in her 2005 book *Abolition Democracy*, provides “a haven for the inheritances of racism.”⁴⁶

Trump’s aggressive racist attacks on Black prosecutors and lawyers resurrect the language of Jim Crow and the Ku Klux Klan, which portrayed Black people as being not fully human. In part, Trump’s racist tirades and attacks, on display in the Georgia case against him, serve as a backlash against his attempts to disenfranchise people of color. It is no secret that Trump’s lies about voter fraud were largely aimed at major cities with substantial non-white populations: Milwaukee, Philadelphia, Detroit, Phoenix, and, of course, Atlanta. As Carol Anderson argues, Trump’s attack on voting rights in Georgia and other states was part of an attempt to say that “the votes of minorities were illegitimate, like they weren’t real Americans. It was the same kind of assault that we saw in the Jim Crow era, that those weren’t real Americans and their votes didn’t count.”⁴⁷ In the face of charges of racism, Trump has resorted to spewing lies and racist comments about a number of highly visible Black district attorneys, prosecutors, and electoral workers. Janell Ross provides examples of a number of these racist attacks on officials of color. He writes:

Trump has called Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, who is prosecuting him for allegedly paying hush money to an adult film star, a racist, an animal, and a thug.... He has characterized Judge Juan Merchan, the acting justice of the New York State Supreme Court overseeing the hush-money case, and Judge Tanya Chutkan, the federal jurist in Washington, D.C., overseeing the Jan. 6 case, as irreparably biased rule breakers with some flourishes suggesting incompetence and anger. He has deemed New York State Attorney General Letitia James, the official behind a civil probe of his business and charities, “a radical” and a “racist.” And on other occasions, he’s referred to Willis as “rabid” and reared by a family “steeped in hate,” an extreme description of her retired lawyer father who was also, for a time, a Black Panther.⁴⁸

It gets worse. Trump has made malicious claims about the Black prosecutors’ personal lives, “deployed terms that rhyme with racial slurs,” and called New York Attorney General Letitia James a “Racist A.G. Letitia ‘Peekaboo’ James, deploying a nickname similar to a term used to insult Black people.”⁴⁹ His attacks on Georgia Attorney Fani Willis have been so vicious that she was assigned increased protection at her home and office.⁵⁰ Trump’s long-standing practice of insulting, denigrating, and castigating officials prosecuting him, often in language that is inflammatory and personal, resulted in a gag order from Judge Engoron, who is presiding over Trump’s real-estate fraud trial in New York. The gag order was imposed after Trump posted a photo on social media, along with derogatory comments, about “Engoron’s law clerk, the attorney Allison Greenfield.” As noted in *The Guardian*, in the post, Trump “called her ‘Schumer’s girlfriend’ and said she ‘is running this case against me. How disgraceful! This case should be dismissed immediately.’”⁵¹ The comments were groundless and false on all counts.

Trump has also unleashed this mix of lies and threats of violence against ordinary individuals who hold minor government jobs. For example, Trump and Giuliani spread vicious lies about Ruby Freeman and her daughter Shaye Moss, two Black election workers in Fulton County, Georgia. The false claims, endlessly repeated by Giuliani and later retracted, stated that the two Georgia women mishandled ballots while counting votes, passed around USB ports that resembled vials of heroin or cocaine, and helped swing votes in Georgia in favor of Joe Biden.

As Fintan O’Toole reported in *The New York Review of Books*, “Trump claimed that Freeman was ‘a professional vote scammer and hustler,’ that ‘she stuffed the ballot boxes,’ and that.... ‘Freeman, her daughter, and others were responsible for fraudulently awarding at least 18,000 ballots’ to Joe Biden.”⁵² Fintan notes that “It was no accident that many of the pro-Trump attacks on Freeman and Moss on social media not only used racist epithets but explicitly called for them to be lynched: ‘YOU SHOULD BE HUNG OR SHOT FOR YOUR CRIMES.’”

As a result of the false charges made by Trump and Guiliani, Georgia opened a criminal investigation into Freeman and Moss, greatly threatening their identities, jobs, and reputations. After two harrowing years, both women were completely exonerated. Freeman and Moss's lives were upended by these accusations, suffering emotional distress, hounded by a deluge of threats, and in constant fear of their lives. A jury eventually found Guiliani guilty of defamation and ordered him to pay \$148 million in damages.⁵³

Racism and violence are the core elements at work in Trump's endless barrage of lies. As Eli Zaretsky notes, "Trump's racism is linked to his willingness to deploy violence in order to foster identification."⁵⁴ Trump's lies became the vehicle for bringing "together large numbers of people who would have liked to lash out but didn't have the courage. He made them feel that their anger and contempt [especially toward people of color] – whatever its source – was legitimate. And, very importantly, he convinced people viscerally that the norms of civilized society were part of a rigged system."⁵⁵ Trump's cultivation of mob instincts and his repeated lies and violence now shape and define much of the Republican Party.

Trump has repeatedly claimed that his legal troubles are the fault of Black prosecutors, whom he has called "racists," "horrible people," and "mentally sick."⁵⁷ Riding the politics of white grievance, Trump has stoked white supremacist claims that "people of color...are taking power, and ...will exact revenge on white people." To fully understand Trump's claim "that there were fine people on both sides," regarding the 2017 neo-Nazi demonstrations in Charlottesville, Virginia, it's crucial to connect Trump's lies, white nationalist rhetoric, and call for violence to an earlier period in fascist history. To adequately address Trump's lies, it is crucial to understand how the culture of lying, racism, and violence sustain each other. This is both a historical and political issue.

Federico Finchelstein, in his 2020 book *A Brief History of Fascist Lies*, reminds us that "One of the key lessons of the history of fascism is that racist lies led to extreme political violence."⁵⁸ He argues persuasively that "If we want to understand our troublesome present, we need to pay attention to the history of fascist ideologues and to how and why their rhetoric led to the Holocaust, war, and destruction."⁵⁹

In the current historical moment, those in power have normalized lying in a way that closely resembles how previous fascist regimes adopted a racist language that targeted marginalized groups while unsettling the public's faith in both politics and democracy. Fascist lies, both historically and today, according to Finchelstein, "rest on the affirmation of the devotion to violence."⁶⁰

Under both previous fascist regimes and the Trump presidency, truth was reduced to what was supported by power, myth replaced history, and reason was relegated to a sneering contempt and degeneracy. In addition, reality collapsed into a form of willful ideological ignorance, and racist lies took direct aim at equality, social justice, and dissent. The merging of lying, racism, and violence in U.S. politics cannot be understood outside of a legacy of fascist lies, domination, and the destruction of democracy itself. Trump and the modern Republican Party couple their belief in absolute truth and the primacy of violence as crucial to their claim to power. At work is a radical renewal of the legacy of fascism and racial purity with its destruction of human values, critical education, and a collective collapse into the death-driven belief that equality and democracy are synonymous with decadence and must be eliminated. Trump and his allies represent a form of brutalizing education that legitimates lying and violence as part of a broader politics designed to subvert freedom, agency, and the formative culture that sustains a meaningful democracy.

The language of fascism, as several scholars have argued, cannot be comprehended outside of the machinery of capitalism and its basic structures of economic and ideological oppression, which reinforce the conditions of exploitation, privatization, violence, and inequality.⁶¹ Unable to satisfy the human needs it produces, it eventually adopts a political and ideological position in which it no longer attempts to legitimate itself with promises of social mobility, well-being, equality, and social justice. Since neoliberalism can no longer offer the public a better future and merely claims that "the future is just more of the present," it increasingly aligns itself with a culture of fear, doom, and an appeal to

endless threats, activating the potential for fascist politics.⁶² In order to cover its legitimation crisis, it blames the growing destabilization of social institutions, precarity, alienation, misery, and collective anxiety on those it labels as America's enemies: Black peoples, foreigners, immigrants, refugees, dissidents, Jews, and other marginalized groups. In doing so, it aligns itself with fascist politics that creates a formative culture for the likes of Trump and his allies and followers. As Pete Dolack observes,

... violence is now funded by corporate billionaires, and what has emerged politically both looks and acts like fascism. He writes that times and conditions can change, and the very fact that a fascist movement exists--one that Trump currently heads but Florida governor Ron DeSantis wishes to assume the leadership of--should be taken with utmost seriousness, especially as it is a movement that shows no sign of dispersing.⁶³

Understanding how the current politics of lying, racism, and violence echoes both the failure of neoliberal capitalism and a fascist history is crucial in order to mount an effective opposition to far-right attempts to erase history, impose mass ignorance, destroy democratic institutions, and normalize an updated version of fascist politics. Such a political and historical analysis should make clear how Trump and most of the Republican Party embody fascist politics that pose a danger to the future of democracy and the rest of the globe. Like earlier fascist demagogues in Italy and Nazi Germany, Trump's eruptions and displays of anger and rage against his alleged enemies both sanction violence and encourage his neo-Nazi followers, the police, and others to use violent behavior, as Mussolini once justified it, "for the good of the nation."⁶⁴ The dark side of history is with us once again, and with it comes a warning about the present--a warning captured by Primo Levi in his 2005 book *The Reawakening*. He writes:

In every part of the world, wherever you begin by denying the fundamental liberties of mankind and equality among people, you move toward the concentration camp system, and it is a road on which it is difficult to halt ... A new fascism, with its trail of intolerance, of abuse, and of servitude, can be born outside our country, and be imported into it, walking on tiptoe and calling itself by other names, or it can lose itself from within with such violence that it routs all defenses. At that point, wise counsel no longer serves, and one must find the strength to resist.⁶⁵

Central to the current fascist culture of lying, racism, and violence is a cult of demagogues, growing inequalities of wealth and power, a tsunami of class, gender, and racial injustices, and philosopher Hobbes' war of all against all. All of these forces are choking "the arteries of democracy," as Tony Judt writes in his 2011 book *Ill Fares the Land*.⁶⁶ As the language of democracy is hollowed out by neoliberal fascism, we are witnessing an emerging terror of the unforeseen and inexorable force of history ripe with mass anxiety and unimagined catastrophe--produced by fascist politics governed by lies, myth, and a perpetual fear and crisis machine. If we cannot grasp that such a history is with us once again, the struggle to resist will wither, and the seeds of fascism will bury existing democracies with ashes.

Those with mouths full of blood will usher in a history filled with the smell of genocidal violence, suffering, and death. Under such circumstances, it is crucial for the broad left and progressives to release the potential for justice, freedom, and equality. That is, it is crucial to address not only historical remembrance and moral witnessing but also the political and pedagogical necessity to merge memory, civic values, and social responsibility with the power of mass movements and aggressive collective action in the fight against burgeoning fascism. In the contemporary U.S., we need a new language and politics to fight against the nightmare of fascism. We need a language that rejects an era of foreclosed hope, refuses to address the present as a

model for the future, and condemns the rhetoric of fear and violence that contains the present in the nightmarish shadow of a fascist past. What is crucial for progressives and others to acknowledge is that the G.O.P. culture of violence, lies, and manufactured ignorance that led to the attack on the Capitol is now being continued as a war by other means, and the object of that counter-revolutionary war is the destruction of democracy itself.

Needless to say, there is more at work in the fight against fascist politics than the recast of the public conversation about the meaning of democracy; there is also the necessity to reject a politics of normalization in which capitalism and democracy are equated. Fascism and capitalism cannot be separated. Any viable mode of collective resistance must begin by exposing how capitalism is the breeding ground for fascism. Only by developing an anti-capitalist consciousness can the brutalizing forces of neoliberal fascism be made visible and resisted. Only then will it be possible to redefine the language of power, critical education, direct action, and cultural politics to develop the collective forces necessary to think and act differently as part of a wider collective struggle for a socialist democracy.

The legacy of fascism may have shown us what the future and end of humanity would look like. But such a future is not inevitable. As Alain Badiou once noted in his 1998 book *Éthics*, “the space of the possible is larger than the one assigned,” suggesting that history is open, making the call for building solidarity and social change all the more urgent, and the demand for mass resistance all the more necessary.⁶⁷ The times in which we live are too dangerous to be giving up on civic courage, critical education, the radical imagination, and a vision of a society that is never just enough.

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