

**This Happened Here**  
**Amerikaners, Neoliberals, and the**  
**Trumping of America**

**Paul Street**



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“Paul Street is one of the best social critics in the United States. His newest book, *This Happened Here: Amerikaners, Neoliberals, and the Trumping of America* is a fresh, critical, insightful and much needed analysis of the legacy of the Trump presidency and how Trumpism has morphed into an updated form of fascism. Street puts to rest the endless arguments claiming Trump is not a fascist and does so by drawing upon the resources of history, political theory, sociology, and the best type of investigative analysis. His writing is clear and lyrical throughout the book. His analysis of fascism in its post-Trump form and the Trump base is the best I have read. Street is a straight shooter and displays a courageousness and brilliance in the book that should be a model for every public intellectual in America, and a resource for every member of the public when it comes to holding truth to power. His interweaving of critique and hope collapses the false binary of either despair or denial occupying much of the debate about fascist politics. The book is an absolute necessary treasure for anyone concerned about the threats now facing the ideal and promise of American democracy. Give this book to all your friends and hope that every teacher in America assigns it to their students.”

**Henry A. Giroux**, *McMaster University*

“As the left’s foremost political historian today, Paul Street has been ringing the alarm bell against the rising threat of American fascism for years. His work is sorely needed in a time of mass denialism, when tens of millions of Americans have convinced themselves that fascism can never ‘happen here,’ despite rising rightwing extremism and the threat it poses to the republic. It’s no exaggeration to say that this is one of the most important works on fascism written in modern times. It provides a comprehensive guide for understanding fascism as a concept, and its rise in modern America as related to the politics of the Trumpian right and its enablers across the ideological spectrum. This book is a must read for anyone concerned with the future of American politics and democracy.”

**Anthony DiMaggio**, *Author of Rising Fascism in America*

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This book examines the Trump phenomenon and presidency as fascist. Fascism here connotes not generically “bad” politics or a consolidated political-economic regime (Mussolini’s Italy or Hitler’s Germany) but a set of political, movement, and ideological traits understood within the context of the neoliberal-capitalist era. While Trump’s election defeat is a respite, the nation is far from out of the neofascist woods. Defeating the menace will require political and societal restructuring far beyond what is imagined by Democrats. This argument is developed across seven chapters that recount Trump’s assault on the 2020 election, specifically define the meaning of fascism as it is used in this book, demonstrate the neofascist nature of the Trump presidency, engage intellectual class Trumpism-fascism-denial, analyze the Trump base, root Trumpism in a longstanding and indeed founding American white nationalism, examine why Trump rose to power when he did, and suggest paths for fascism-proofing the USA.

**Paul Street** is an independent progressive policy researcher, award-winning journalist, historian, and speaker. He is the author of nine books, most recently *Hollow Resistance: Obama, Trump, and the Politics of Appeasement*. Street writes regularly for *Counterpunch*.

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## Amerikaners, Neoliberals, and the Trumping of America

Paul Street



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*Dedicated to my friends and comrades in Refuse Fascism  
and to everyone who saw the Trump administration for what  
it really was and had the courage to say so and fight it in  
the streets.*

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# Introduction: “The Hell It Can't”

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“I think”, the Russian dissident expatriate and anti-authoritarian writer and activist Masha Gessen told the *Irish Times* in June of 2020, “that the word fascist is perfectly accurate when applied to Donald Trump. I also think it’s incendiary and pulls you down into an argument that I’m not always up for having”.<sup>1</sup> I thought at the time and still think that the description of Trump and the movement behind him as fascist was and is elementarily accurate, that it was and remains intellectually irresponsible to avoid the “argument” about it, however “incendiary” one (somewhat absurdly in my opinion) thinks it may be. I am very much “up for having” the argument, provided that the 45th US president (who could still possibly become the 47th US president) is understood within the broader social, historical, and politico-ideological context that brought him and the fascist menace he represents into being. Avoiding the full implications of the “argument” is cowardly and self-defeating in my view.

Like most left political writers and “expert” commentators in late 2015 and the first ten months of 2016, I considered the election of the fascistic presidential candidate Trump to be largely outside the realm of possibility. The lion’s share of the polling data and media commentary seemed reliably on the side of a resounding Hillary Clinton triumph over the dangerous but thankfully ridiculous Trump, who did not himself expect to win.

My first serious premonition that Trump might win came late in the game. It occurred on a sunny fall Friday afternoon just two days after the Chicago

Cubs baseball team had won their first World Series in one hundred and ten years. The night the longtime “lovable loser” Cubs triumphed in extra-innings of the seventh and deciding game, Iowa City’s downtown Ped-Mall, located just half a mile west of my house, filled with hundreds if not thousands of revelers, most of them students at the University of Iowa. While I’d grown up in a White Sox family on the South Side of Chicago, I decided to go watch the party. I briefly had and dismissed a dark thought as I approached the celebration: if the Cubs (whose owner Tom Ricketts was and remains a Trump-backing billionaire) could win the World Series, then maybe a long-shot right-wing freak like Donald Trump could become president. My mood grew darker as I beheld an ambulance and police on the mall, and a young woman in tears. A celebrating student had climbed up a lamppost and fallen to the ground, seriously injured. It was another bad omen.

Watching the World Series had been something of a respite from political activism for me. I had in previous weeks spent many afternoons with fellow environmentalists – water and climate protectors – resisting the construction of the environmentally disastrous Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) across 18 Iowa counties. The resistance included pickets and attempted blocking efforts at various locations across the state and protests in local outlets of big banks that were funding the “long black snake”. Also taking up some of my time before the election had been joining the Eastern Iowa Worker Justice Center in support of a recently passed new county minimum wage.

Political activism for me had meant social movements first and foremost, not electoral politics. While I had no wish to see the monstrous ogre Trump in the White House, I had little enthusiasm for the establishment Democratic Party candidate Hillary Clinton. And I, like most Left political writers and analysts at the time, expected Mrs. Clinton to prevail easily over the seemingly preposterous reality star Trump. I did not pay enough attention to warnings that a Trump victory was a real possibility. Along with the left commentator Doug Henwood, I “thought the establishment would...keep Trump from winning”.<sup>2</sup>

Call it the “It Can’t Happen Here” syndrome. *It Can’t Happen Here* was the ironic title of Sinclair Lewis’s widely read dystopian 1935 novel depicting the 1936 election and tumultuous presidency of a buffoonish American fascist named Buzz Windrip. Sinclair’s Windrip capitalized on

two forms of disbelief and denial among the nation's liberal and left elites: (a) that he could be elected and (b) that he would live up to his fascist campaign promises in office if he did somehow win. I was mired in the same complacent delusion that plagued Lewis' left-liberal journalist protagonist Dormeus Jessup, who learns the hard way: "The Hell it can't" happen here.

Three days before the 2016 election, I started to sense that I was wrong thanks in part to a local visit on Mrs. Clinton's behalf by her "democratic socialist" Democratic Party primary opponent Bernie Sanders. The progressive-populist Senator Sanders ("I"-VT) was honoring his day-one campaign promise to back the Democrats' eventual, practically foreordained nominee. He was doing so with special Lesser-Evilist vigor given the pernicious nature of the Republican contender. And he was doing so just three blocks west of my house in Iowa City's College Green Park, at a podium just yards from where a hardy band of local anti-plutocracy activists had built and kept a populist Occupy Wall Street camp in the fall and early winter of 2011.

As I joined a few hundred locals to hear Sanders (accompanied by the former longtime liberal Iowa US Senator Tom Harken) rail against how the racist and sexist Trump would work for the wealthy few against the working- and middle-class many, something was off. The park was barely half-full. The audience response to Sanders' applause lines was tepid. For those of us who had attended Sanders' raucous rallies during the Iowa Caucus contest between Sanders and Clinton the previous fall and winter, it was hard to miss the precipitous drop-off in numbers and enthusiasm from when "Bernie" had challenged the corporate Democratic establishment in fiery opposition to the rule of "the billionaire class". The Sanders for President gatherings were big, large, and loud affairs. This rally was small and quiet, full of fear and anxiety. It hit me for the first time in months that a Donald Trump presidency might well happen here.

I later found out that Sanders told one of his Iowa City champions (the late University of Iowa historian Jeffrey Cox) that Mrs. Clinton could well lose given the weak response he was getting on her behalf in Iowa and other Midwestern battleground states, including Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. "It's like this everywhere", Sanders reported. "She doesn't have any policies", Sanders said, meaning that Mrs. Clinton was running almost

completely on candidate character and quality – a critical mistake given voters’ low estimation of her character.

The following Tuesday night, Trump prevailed in the general election, much to his own gob-smacked amazement and the dismay of his tearful wife.<sup>3</sup> Three days later, I helped lead a march of hundreds of high school and university students and some junior faculty that began on the University of Iowa’s campus and ended up forming a human blockade across the eastbound lanes of Interstate-80, the “Main Street of America”.<sup>4</sup> We clearly had not gotten the memo from the nation’s fascism-appeasing president Barack Obama,<sup>5</sup> who had gone out into the White House Rose Garden after the election to tell Americans to give Donald Trump a chance to protect and advance “democracy” and “the rule of law” since “We are Americans first. We’re patriots first”.<sup>6</sup>

I’ve long since fallen out of touch with most of the people who joined that spontaneous November 2016 act of “primitive rebellion” north of Iowa City. No lasting movement of any sort emerged from the action. Halting the eastbound flow of traffic on I-80 was no revolutionary act. Still, we short-lived Interstate highway monkey-wrenchers were on to something. Our unplanned direct action emerged spontaneously from an awareness that something profoundly dangerous had just occurred – the ascendancy of a demented fascist oligarch to the world’s most powerful job. Our chants, including “No Trump, No KKK, no fascist USA”, were on point. The danger, we knew in part from our own local experience with racist, sexist, and nativists Trumpists and Trumpism, was a fundamentally homegrown menace and not simply a vicious import brought to us by the Clinton Democrats’ global *bete noire* and supposed Trump puppet-master, the dastardly Russian strongman Vladimir Putin. We knew also, in however crude and elemental a way, that the menace of a Trump presidency was too great to be met with the standard business-as-usual means of supposedly democratic citizen input: voting, writing letters to the editor, calling your Congressperson, signing petitions, and the like. We sensed correctly from the start, months before Trump’s inauguration, that he would be no “normal” bad president but rather an existential and fascistic threat who needed to be met with mass disruption – by a politics of the streets, so to speak, beneath and beyond the quadrennial big money-major party-big media candidate-centered quadrennial electoral

extravaganzas<sup>7</sup> that are sold to US-Americans as “that’s politics” – the only politics that matters.

Sadly, the militant spirit of anti-fascist direct action exhibited during the I-80 occupation did not last past that day in Iowa City (though it did experience a partial reawakening in the late spring and summer of 2020 during the remarkable George Floyd Rebellion. I would join young people facing off against riot police and get tear-gassed with a much larger group of protesters at the same location – the intersection of Dubuque Street and Interstate-80 in May of 2020).

I spent a fair part of the next four years trying to make up for my earlier insufficient appreciation of the Trump menace. This book is not written from the perspective of an academic Mandarin observing events from afar. Its author took to the classrooms, streets and public squares of Chicago, the Internet, and airways with fellow members of the organization Refuse Fascism to call for the removal of the fascist Trump-Pence regime long before the presidential election of 2020.

My efforts fell short. It was left to the nation’s deeply conservative and heavily compromised once-every-four electoral process to belatedly remove an apocalyptically reactionary president and replace him with a conservative, status quo Democrat in the same “Weimar” mold of the Clinton and Obama Democrats, who opened the door to “BuzzDon WinTrump” in the first place. The *fascist* Trump (the first three chapters of this book will justify the application of “the F-word” to the nation’s 45th president) might well have come back for a second term but (as will be shown in the present volume’s fifth chapter) for the related historical “accidents” of the COVID-19 pandemic and the George Floyd uprising – and his politically disastrous responses to both developments.

The election of Joe Biden was a welcome but partial and tenuous victory against white nationalist peril. It has left intact much of the dangerous societal and political rightward drift and the underlying *de facto* class dictatorship that gave rise to Trump and Trumpism-fascism – a drift that threatens to sharpen in coming years unless it is countered by a major progressive and popular rebellion, even revolution, to advance and secure democracy, environmental sustainability, social justice, and the common

good over and against the nation's combined and overlapping, unelected dictatorships of money, empire, class, race, patriarchy, and ecocide.

This book is among other things an effort to explain these deadly outcomes between 2016 and 2021 – and to advance solutions to help inoculate humanity from a 21st American fascism and from something even worse, strange as that feels to say: environmental collapse.

The first chapter, titled “One Night of Dancing, 77 Days of Fear and Death”, tells the chilling story of the final and darkest episode of the Trump presidency: Trump's failed attempt to overturn the 2020 presidential election, culminating in the Trumpist-fascist Attack on the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021.

The second chapter, titled “The Fascist Wolf Defined and Foretold”, offers a precise and detailed definition of the specific fascism under investigation along with a series of reflections on how the malady was evident in American politics and in Trump's history well before the 2016 election. The definition comes replete with 45 overlapping traits of fascist politics and ideology, sorted across eight mutually reinforcing folders of such politics and ideology.

The third chapter, titled “A Fascist in the White House”, uses the sorting mechanism advanced in the previous chapter to provide a detailed record and indeed a literal catalogue of the nonstop nightmare that was the presidency of a man who Noam Chomsky came by early 2020 to see as “the most dangerous criminal in human history”.

The fourth chapter, titled “The Anatomy of Fascism Denial”, tackles an equally depressing topic: the remarkable reluctance and often flat-out refusal of reporters, pundits, politicians, and intellectuals – including many on the nominal left – to properly understand Trump and Trumpism through the lens of fascism (and even in some cases, as authoritarianism). I pay special attention to the dogged stubbornness of this denialism among academics and progressives, many self-declared leftists included. This disturbing denial persisted even after Trump graphically revealed his fascist essence for all to see in the late spring, summer, fall, and early winter of 2020 and 2021.

The fifth chapter, titled “Amerikaners and Trumpenvolk”, examines the underlying proto-fascist base – a white-nationalist cohort that preceded and fueled the Trump phenomenon and that can be counted on to survive it. My investigation of the social, demographic, geographic, and ideological

composition and character of Trump's supporters busts the strangely durable and toxic myth of Trump's voters and militants as aggrieved proletarians who can be won over to progressive and even Left causes with the right sort of populist appeal.

The sixth chapter, titled "America was Never Great: On 'The Soul of This Nation'", tackles the widespread liberal and moderate claim that Trump's white nationalist neofascism was alien to the American historical experience. This chapter advances a very different perspective, treating Trump and Trumpism as "American as cherry pie" (to quote the 1960s Black Power advocate H. Rap Brown), firmly rooted in a long racist history that goes back to the nation's founding and expansion. It deepens the refutation of the fascism-deniers critiqued in Chapter 4 by demonstrating the white Eurocentrism implicit in their unfortunate habit of comparing Trump and Trumpism with the classic fascist regimes of 20th-century Europe but not with the "racial fascism" practiced in the USA before, during, and after the rise and fall of those regimes.

This is the ugly national history that American white nationalists are determined to wipe out of the American public memory and curriculum, claiming that people who tell dark truths about the nation's past are dangerous radicals who want to "destroy America". That whitewashing project is darkly consistent with a core part of fascist politics past and present: the "palingenetic nationalist" notion of a grand and glorious national past that has been betrayed by nefarious Left and liberal elites and needs to be restored in its full grandeur as part of the project of making the Nation Great Again.

The seventh chapter, titled "De-Trumping America", reflects on the specifically late 20th and early 21st-century circumstances that brought Sinclair Lewis's nightmarish vision from the 1930s shockingly close to reality between 2016 and 2021. It questions the naïve assumption that the corporate-oligarchic USA possessed a great "democracy" for Trump (and Russia) to attack in the first place. Based on the historical and social-scientific understanding advanced in the previous chapters, it advances a set of proposals for building a genuinely democratic, fascism-proofed polity and society. The recommendations here are ultimately systemic, reflecting the counsel of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and based on the understanding that fascism is ultimately rooted in capitalist class rule and the underlying

imperatives and operation of the profits system. The biggest and intimately related reason for transcending that system and undertaking what King called “the real issue to be faced” – “the radical reconstruction of society itself” – is environmental, this chapter argues.

## **Notes on Terminology**

A few comments on some terminology used in this book. I do not throw the words “*fascist*”, “*fascism*”, “*proto-fascist*”, and “*fascistic*” around loosely as a pejorative name to be hurled against everyone on the right and with whom I disagree. The meanings of these terms as they are used in this book are precise and historically specific. They will be fleshed out in the second chapter. I cast my definitional net widely and see fascism not as a simple narrow doctrine or political-economic regime but rather as an assemblage and patterning of multiple overlapping and mutually reinforcing characteristics that have congealed in diverse and toxic ways in different times and places since the rise and fall of classic consolidated European fascist regimes during the last century’s interwar years and World War II.

## ***Amerikaners***

As far as I am aware, I am the “inventor” of the term “**Amerikaner**” in left political discourse. It is a play on the name of the white Dutch-Anglo minority that imposed a savage “Third World Fascist” regime of racial apartheid and white minority rule on South Africa during the 19th and 20th centuries. Like the Afrikaners, I maintain, the USA hard right core Trumpist-Amerikaner base and white nationalist movement is heir to an earlier history of genocidal and imperialist white un-“settlement”. It is opposed to majority rule democracy, and committed to the imposition of racial and ethnic apartheid and inequality. White fears of coming minority status in the increasingly non-Caucasian USA are one aspect of the parallel, reflected in the adoption of the term by certain parts of the nation’s “alt-right”.

## ***“Trumpenleft”***



Another term used on occasion in this book is the author's invention: "*the Trumpenleft*". This refers to the surprisingly large number of avowedly left thinkers and activists I encountered who dismissed, mocked, and smeared leftists and progressives' concerns about Trump and Trumpism-fascism as "hysteria", childish "wolf-crying", stupidity, "virtue-signaling", "identity politics", "political correctness", and collaboration with the corporate-neoliberal Democratic Party. For the many open and (more commonly) *de facto* Trumpenlefties in my orbit during the Trump presidency, it was more important to "own the libs" and smack down the Democrats than it was to fight white nationalism and fascism. They spent the years under Trump reflexively deflecting to the undeniable sins and culpability of the Democrats the minute a Left or progressive thinker dared to mention the dangerous conduct and trajectory of the Trump White House and its backers. Even I, the author of at least four books and literally hundreds of critical essays on the deeply conservative corporate, capitalist, imperialist, and objectively white-supremacist nature of the Democratic Party and its leading standard bearers, had to receive innumerable lectures on the evil of the Democrats nearly every time I criticized the in-power Trump, his party, and/or his backers between 2016 and 2021. In some rare cases, I ran across "leftists" who actually embraced Trump's election and presidency, absurdly positing Trump as a pro-working-class populist and anti-imperialist. For the Trumpenleft, the bane of my in-box and "social media" accounts for four years, it was as if the Democrats were the only ruling class party that mattered even as Trump committed one new outrage after another with the open collaboration of the Trumpified Republican Party as well as the Democrats' pathetic politics of appeasement.

## ***Authoritarianism***

Another word that will recur in this book (and has in fact already appeared in root form) is **authoritarianism**, by which I mean, following common political science usage, "a way of governing that values order and control over personal freedom". An authoritarian government is commonly but not always headed by a dictator, with firm control over its subject population achieved through "military threats, suppression of a free press, and

disinformation to manage the people over whom it rules”.<sup>8</sup> Fascism is a form of modern authoritarianism, but it is not identical with it. The German Empire that fought to build a MittleEuropean Empire during World War I was monarchical, capitalist, and authoritarian but, unlike the genocidal German Third Reich that launched World War II, it was not fascist. Wal-Mart and General Motors are authoritarian and arguably pathological entities like other large corporations but they are not fascist. The USA today is an authoritarian corporate-financial oligarchy and empire, but it is not yet fascist even if it hatched a fascistic president (Trump) and has given rise to a now arguably fascist major party, the current day Republicans.

## ***Neoliberal***

By “**neoliberal**”, another term that will be used in in this book, I mean the dominant ideology of the capitalist West over the last forty plus years. An apt description of the phenomenon comes from the prolific left cultural and political theorist Henry Giroux, one among a minority of scholars who shared my early understanding of Trump and Trumpism as fascist:

an ideology marked by the selling off of public goods to private interests; the attack on social provisions; the rise of the corporate state organized around privatization, free trade, and deregulation; the celebration of self-interests over social needs; the celebration of profit-making as the essence of democracy coupled with the utterly reductionist notion that consumption is the only applicable form of citizenship. But even more than that, it upholds the notion that the market serves as a model for structuring all social relations: not just the economy, but the governing of all of social life.

As a mode of governance, it is dreadful because it tends to produce identities, subjects and ways of life driven by a kind of “survival of the fittest” ethic, grounded in the notion of the free, possessive individual and committed to the right of individual and ruling groups to accrue wealth removed from matters of ethics and social cost.

This is a particular political and economic and social project that not only consolidates class power in the hands of the One Percent, but operates off the assumption that economics can divorce itself from social costs, that it doesn't have to deal with matters of ethical and social responsibility, that these things get in the way. The consequences of these policies across the globe have caused massive suffering, misery, and the spread of a massive inequalities in wealth, power, and income.<sup>9</sup>

As careful readers will discern, this book will describe an intimate relationship of mutual reinforcement between neoliberalism, which has captured both the nation's dominant political organizations and contemporary fascism, whatever prefixes ("neo", "proto", "quasi", "para", etc.) one might wish to attach to the latter term. At the same time, readers who stay with this book through its conclusion will see that just as I see fascism (defined at length in this book's second chapter) as a subset and specific historical form of authoritarianism, I see neoliberalism as a subset and specific historical form of capitalism, understood as a longstanding enemy of democracy and taproot (in its 20th-century forms) of fascism.

This book's final chapter, "De-Trumping America", will give precise definitions of both **capitalism** and **democracy**, along with a discussion of how and why they are diametrically opposed to one another. Over-eager readers should free to jump ahead and review that discussion before going any further.

## ***Trumping***

The final phrase in the title of this book is meant to be flexible. The word "Trump" in the "Trumping of America" (and in "De-Trumping America", the title of the final chapter) refers not just to Donald Trump himself. It refers also to *Trumpism*, to the deeper undercurrent of American fascism that Trump rode and fanned and that lives on without or possibly with the continuing presence of Trump as a major force in the nation's political life. And it refers above all to the *literal trumping of American democracy* and social justice by the longstanding entrenched power of an authoritarian

American capitalist and imperial ruling class that stands atop a savagely unequal oligarchy torn by massive and interrelated divisions of class, race, ethnicity, gender, party, sexuality, religion, nationality, place, and jurisdiction. (I can assure “Trumpenlefties” that I include the Democrats among the entities captured by that ruling class.) Like white nationalist neofascism, this trumping does not require Donald Trump. It has a life that predates and postdates his personally poisonous imprint on American history.

### ***On NOT Using Totalitarianism and Populism to Describe Trumpism and Fascism***

Here are two words I will NOT be employing in relation to Trump and Trumpism in this text: **totalitarianism** and **populism**. The first term is my view has always been badly flawed in relation to fascism by (a) a failure to distinguish between the corporate-capitalist authoritarianism and militarism of fascism and the bureaucratic-collectivist authoritarianism of 20th- and 21st-century state socialism; (b) a drastic exaggeration of fascism’s success in winning the allegiance of the populations in countries under fascist control; and (c) a drastic underestimation of the extent to which fascism has relied on alliance and collaboration with “multiple social forces and economic interests”<sup>10</sup> within society and state.

While fascism certainly adopts “populist” – sounding rhetoric lifted from democratic and socialist traditions, I refuse to use this term in relation to Trumpism and other variants of white nationalist authoritarian proto-fascism. The dominant (“mainstream”) corporate media’s habitual reference to xenophobic, right-wing, white-nationalist, and neo-fascist politicians as “populists” is highly problematic in my view. Populism properly understood is about popular and democratic opposition to the rule of concentrated wealth. It emerged from radical US farmers’ fight for social and economic justice and democracy against the plutocracy of the nation’s Robber Baron capitalists during the late 19th century. It was a movement of the Left. As the Left author and journalist Harvey Wasserman has noted:

The Morgans, Rockefellers and their ilk had captured the industrial revolution that dominated the U.S. after the Civil War. The farmers of the South and West fought back with a grass-roots social movement... They formed the People's Party. Its socialistic platforms demanded public ownership of the major financial institutions, including banks, railways, power utilities and other private monopolies that were crushing the public well-being... they demanded an end to corporate and foreign ownership of land. They wanted a national currency based on food rather than gold and silver. They endorsed universal affordable medical care, free public education and a general guarantee of the basics of life for all humans. They demanded equal rights for women, including the vote... They also preached racial unity, especially among black and white farmers in the South, and between native and immigrant workers in the cities.<sup>11</sup>

Contemporary populists worthy of the label are leftists. They back “human rights, social democracy, peace and ecological sanity” (Wasserman). They support racial and ethnic equality and unity in the interest of working-class solidarity and struggle from the bottom up. They want government to serve the working-class majority and the common good, not the wealthy corporate and financial Few.

The dominant media sometimes has the decency to distinguish between the “left populism” (democratic socialism) of an Evo Morales (Bolivia's former Indigenous and eco-socialist president), a Jean-Luc Melenchon (the eco-socialist French presidential candidate), or a Jeremy Corbin (the onetime Left leader of the British Labor Party) on the one hand and the “right wing populism” of a Trump, Marine Le Pen (the French white nationalist leader), Viktor Orban (the neofascist president of Hungary), or Steve Bannon (the American white nationalist political strategist who managed the tail end of Trump's 2016 campaign and counseled Trump to try to reverse the 2020 election) on the other hand.<sup>12</sup> But the makers of this distinction fail to understand that “populists of the right” are fascists. “When they take power”, Wasserman writes, they “us[e] the government to enrich the corporations and the rich, rather than, [like] Democratic Socialists, or social democrats, using the state to serve the people. Fascists support enriching the rich and to hell

with the rest of us. They are racist, misogynist, anti-ecological, militaristic, and authoritarian. They hate democracy, freedom of speech and an open media. They take power by fomenting hate and division”. Trump, whose main legislative accomplishment as president was a giant tax cut for the wealthy Few and their giant corporations and financial institution, was and is no populist. Like Hitler in the early middle 1930s, Trump hoped and still hopes to use the scapegoating of demonized others and foreigners – Muslims, Mexican immigrants, “China”, and other targets (Canadian timber exporters!) – to divert attention from his service to the rich and powerful.

## **On Tragedy and Farce**

I expect this book to elicit criticism and even mockery from the considerable number of intellectuals and commentators who believed that warnings and observations about Trump and Trumpism were exaggerated and even “hysterical” – and who predictably responded to Trump’s defeat and removal as proof that he and his supporters and allies and enablers never posed a serious fascist or even authoritarian menace. These dismissive and denialist critics might want to consider the fate of Trump and Trumpism-fascism’s victims, including parents who had their children ripped from their arms at the southern US border and many hundreds of thousands of Americans killed by the deadly coronavirus pandemic that the Social Darwinian and pandemo-fascistic Trump administration helped fan across the land. Also worth dark reflection is what life in America today would be like under a second Trump administration – not a pretty thought.

I do not argue here that America became a fascist state under Trump. What I do assert is that fascism got an often farcical and incompetent but nonetheless serious and soul-chilling dry-run under Trump, that an at least instinctive fascist sat in the world’s most powerful and dangerous office for four years, that the fascistic Trump experience inflicted enormous harm on America and world, that the US populace and US elites (including intellectuals and others who dismissed the danger) failed to respond to the Trump menace with remotely proper resistance, and that Amerikaner proto-fascism remains very much a menacing force in American political life after Trump’s defeat and departure.

“Hegel”, Karl Marx wrote in 1852, “remarks somewhere that all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce. Caussidière for Danton, Louis Blanc for Robespierre, the Montagne of 1848 to 1851 for the Montagne of 1793 to 1795, the nephew for the uncle”.<sup>13</sup> Here we might turn Marx on his head and advance the possibility that authoritarian and fascist history might be appearing in the USA the first time as farce, the second time as tragedy.

I was reprimanded more than once during the Trump presidency with the parable the village boy who falsely “cried wolf” too many times and thereby demobilized the village when a wolf actually appeared. But when exactly has humanity been damaged by extreme vigilance in monitoring, warning, and preparing for authoritarian menace? And what shall we think of a village who observes a wolf that appeared and then ran away and takes that to mean that the community really doesn’t need to worry about wolves anymore? As the incisive observer Zeynep Tufucki reminds us, “Fortune favors the prepared; catastrophe awaits those who confuse luck with strength”.<sup>14</sup>

The entire world, humanity itself, had better hope the wolf of fascism never fully triumphs here. The awesome destructive power of the USA – a major factor behind Chomsky’s description of Trump as “the most dangerous criminal in human history”<sup>15</sup> – makes the classic historical fascist regimes of the 20th century (Hitler’s Germany, Mussolini’s Italy, and Hirohito’s Japan) look minor league by comparison. As Carl Boggs wrote four years ago: “The American warfare state alone dwarfs anything that Hitler, Mussolini, or Japanese elites could have imagined”.<sup>16</sup>

A final note on tense and the title of this book. “This Happened Here” is obviously in the past tense, but I do not wish to be misunderstood: the menace of fascism (the critical meaning of the “This” in Sinclair Lewis’s novel title) remains very much alive in post-Trump America. Drawing bitter “stabbed in the back” energy from Biden’s allegedly “stolen” election – according to the preposterous claim, a classically fascistic Big Lie fueled by Trump and his Republifascist allies and believed by tens of millions of Amerikaners (who live in what one public opinion expert calls “their own version of reality”)<sup>17</sup> – white-nationalist fascism is still very much alive in the USA today. “This”, understood as fascism (with or without prefixes and

qualifications), not only happened here; it *is* happening here. The nation remains in dire need of democratic de-T/trumping and fascism-proofing.

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12. Sometimes mainstream journalists made no effort to distinguish between “populism’s” right and left variants. In an April 2017 reflection titled “Western Populism May Be Entering an Awkward Adolescence”, *New York Times* reporters Max Fisher and Amanda Taub deleted the left version altogether. Fisher and Taub matter-of-factly proclaim that “a wave of recent elections seemed to offer contradictory evidence as to whether populism is advancing or receding. It triumphed in the British vote to leave the European Union [the ‘Brexit’ vote] and in the American presidential race [Trump’s victory], fell short in the Dutch elections [Dutch nationalist Geert Wilders’ defeat] and won its greatest-ever success in France’s first presidential round [Le Pen’s 21%]...” Max Fisher and Amanda Taub, “Western Populism May be Entering Awkward Adolescence,” *New York Times*, April 25, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/25/world/europe/populism-far-from-turned-back-may-be-just-getting-started.html?r=1>. Never mind that all the politicians and parties Fisher and Taub call “populists” are in reality neofascist. They combine loyalty to an ugly and authoritarian model of capitalism with white nationalism, nativism, racism, sexism, and an appeal to “traditional values”. Meanwhile the mainstream media writes off politicians closer to real populism – left leaders like Corbin and Melenchon – as “the extreme left”.
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## Chapter 1

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# One Night of Dancing, 77 Days of Fear and Death

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We have a Nazi problem in this country. Some 73 million people voted for it. Their leader is still in power and waging a battle to delegitimize the election he clearly lost. His followers maraud through the streets and raise \$2 million for a teenage killer's bail and destroy Black Lives Matter murals and chant "Say his name, Donald Trump," spitting on the anguished cries of Black people whose lives are so routinely cut down by police. They don't, for the most part, wave swastikas and salute Hitler, but we have a Nazi problem in this country...Their minds waterlogged with conspiracy theories, they take lies as truth, spread hate and bigotry, wrap themselves in several flags – American, Confederate, Blue Lives Matter – and use the Bible as a weapon of violence and repression. They are a grotesque expression of the worst of this country, of its ugly narcissism, its thuggish militarism, its ignorance and refusal to give a shit about the rest of the world. They carry the torch of slavery, genocide, and Jim Crow terror. Gunned up and mask-less,

they exalt above all the right to kill...they will not go away quietly into the night.

– Coco Das, December 10, 2020

I saw this crowd of people banging on that glass screaming. Looking at their faces, it occurred to me [that] these aren't protesters. These are people who want to do harm. What I saw in front of me, was home-grown fascism that was out of control.

– U.S. Rep. James McGovern (D-MA), January 8, 2021

## **The Celebration Four Years Later**

The 2020 presidential election and its aftermath was an emotional roller coaster for the many tens of millions of American liberals, moderates, and progressives who wished fervently to see their nation rid of Donald Trump. That's how I experienced it. It was strange, surreal even, to watch Election Night (November 3, 2020) on the American Public Broadcasting System (PBS). Much if not most of what mattered about the event being covered was off the table of serious discussion. Council of Foreign Relations member and PBS "NewsHour" host Judy Woodruff and her team of exceedingly polite and respectful, nonpartisan "experts" couldn't mention that Trump had promised in advance to steal the election by declaring victory before all the mail-in ballots required by the COVID-19 pandemic he had helped fan across the nation were counted – and then by challenging those ballots in court. The talking heads carried on as if it were a completely normal election, no different than any other, calling one state after another without the slightest reference to the coup Trump had essentially pledged to undertake. So what, if as the political scientist Laura K. Field noted three days before the election, in an article titled "The Trouble with the 'It's Not Real Fascism' Argument", Trump had "in recent weeks, refused to commit to a peaceful transfer of power, repeatedly claimed that the election outcome will be illegitimate because of massive voter fraud, and encouraged his supporters to 'go into the polls and watch very carefully'"? "By a wide margin", Field added, "most voters expect there will be intimidation at the polls – and indeed, it is already happening".<sup>1</sup>

It's not as if these were problems raised only by officially marginalized voices on the radical Left. Eleven days before the election, the mainstream liberal political scientists Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt issued a stirring warning in *The New York Times*:

The president has encouraged violent extremists; deployed law enforcement and other public institutions as weapons against rivals; and undermined the integrity of elections through false claims of fraud, attacks on mail-in voting and an apparent unwillingness to accept defeat...In this, he has been aided and abetted by a Republican Party that has fallen into the grips of white nationalism. The Republican base and its white Christian core, facing a loss of its dominant status in society, has radicalized, encouraging party leaders to engage in voter suppression, steal a Supreme Court seat in 2016 and tolerate the president's lawless behavior. As a result, Americans today confront the prospect of a crisis-ridden election, in which they are unsure whether they will be able to cast a ballot fairly, whether their ballots will be counted, whether the candidate favored by voters will emerge victorious and whether the vote will throw the country into violence.<sup>2</sup>

None of this was evident from the reporting, commentary, facial expressions, or body language of Woodruff and her panelists. The PBS talking heads had nothing to say about the distorting effect of the racist and partisan voter suppression, both legal and extra-legal, underway across the nation. There was no reference to Trump's clear intention of proclaiming victory before all the mail-in ballots were tabulated as the PBS "experts" boasted about the greatness of our "democratic elections". The commentators stayed silent about the open absurdity of the 18th Century Electoral College, under whose right-leaning reign Americans still don't elect their nation's president by a popular vote. There was no reference to the racist, sexist, eco-cidal, literally pathogenic, and even (as I shall argue in the next three chapters) fascist dreadfulness of the Trump-Pence regime, which was on pace to kill half a million Americans by the widely hoped-for end of its terrible reign. The talking heads proceeded as if the Trump presidency was just another "conservative" Republican administration, Trump was just another

Republican president, and November 3, 2020, was just another presidential election day.

Even though the final outcome was unclear at the end of the night, thanks as expected to the large number of uncounted mail-in ballots, it was evident already that Biden would not score the landslide victory many liberals and progressives had hoped for and in some cases expected. A second Trump electoral triumph seemed possible. And, sure enough, two and a half hours after “PBS” closed-up shop for the night, Trump proclaimed himself the winner and absurdly announced his determination to shut down the tally after Election Day. Along with millions of others who dreaded the menace of a second Trump term, I went to bed with a pit in my stomach.

Things got better the next day. Politically engaged Americans arose to learn that Biden could well win the constitutionally decisive Electoral College (EC) as well as the popular vote. By the end of Wednesday, November 4th, Biden was just six EC votes short of victory and many of the states still being counted were leaning his way. For many Americans, the election was playing out like the emotional inverse of Trump’s October 2020 COVID-19 infection. When Trump came down with the disease, millions quietly dreamed of the president being removed from office (and indeed from existence) only to see that he would survive (with the help of treatment available only to the privileged) and stay in office to continue his maddening war on truth, democracy, social justice, and election integrity. By contrast, millions went to sleep on election night 2020 afraid that the nation’s malignant president was going to come back stronger than ever and woke up the next day to learn that he might well be defeated and headed out the door in 77 days.

It took four more days for the Associated Press and other media outlets to call the election for Joe Biden. The news, broken late on the morning of Saturday, November 7th, elicited joyful mass outbursts across the nation. I arrived in Chicago around 8 pm that night, returning from Iowa City, where I had voted not so much “for” the corporate Democrat Joe Biden as for the removal of a cancerous tumor from the world’s most powerful office. I headed for the city’s downtown Trump Tower, walking down the middle of Michigan Avenue as cars filled mostly with young LatinX and Black people honked their horns in relief and celebration. Young people of all colors partied in the streets, “flipping the bird” at the building that bore the hated

president's name. Contrary to local radio news reports, who called the revelers "Biden supporters", few Biden-Harris banners were in evidence. There were dozens of American flags, Mexican national flags, and Black Lives Matter banners and flags on display. I didn't hear one person say "Joe Biden" but I heard hundreds say "Fuck Trump", "good riddance Trump", and the like. An older white man in tears gave passers-by the victory sign, pounding his steering wheel and horn. It was a wild and joyous public exhibition of relief and release.

Similar scenes occurred across the country. Masses of masked and multiracial young people in the nation's cities sang and danced in the streets. The carnival-like response was understandable. The first Trump term had been a seemingly nonstop, trauma-inducing, and Orwellian nightmare of racist, sexist, eco-cidal, and disease-spreading cruelty – a rolling fascistic festival of death, madness, and despair. A second sadistic and psychotic Trump term would have been a potentially terminal tragedy for humanity, possibly something from which the nation and world could never have recovered. We *seemed* to have dodged a bullet aimed at decency, truth, science, humanity, public health, the common good, and the last embers of American democracy. It was an exhilarating celebration, a moment and memory that I will cherish for the rest of my life – a stark contrast, to say the least, with the scene north of Iowa City four years before, when I had stood on Interstate-80 with a mass of frightened and angry young people dreading the next few years.

## **The Big Chill**

Then came the hangover, the big chill, as grim reminders set in. Trump and his team and Republican allies and demented hacks refused, as promised, to concede and mounted a sickening authoritarian challenge to the election's outcome, claiming without the slightest hint of serious evidence to have been cheated out of re-election by "massive voter fraud". Could Trump survive again, adding an election loss to COVID-19, an impeachment, a major Justice Department inquiry, and countless political fiascos to the long list of trials that had failed to knock him off his throne?

## ***Mass Death and Depression in “Neoliberalism’s Showcase”***

The party was over. There were at least seven reasons to stay off the dance floor and remain vigilant and determined as the nation slouched towards the hoped-for inauguration of the nearly octogenarian corporate Democrat Joe Biden. The first and most obvious blast of cold water was the relentless and growing terror of the deadly pandemic that Trump had done so much to fuel and fan. With COVID-19 deaths topping 2,000 per day and millions relying on food pantries and soup kitchens, government failing to adequately protect masses against joblessness, sickness, and homelessness, and families unable to gather during the holidays, it was hard to stay in celebration mode. I walked through Chicago’s downtown on Thanksgiving Eve to witness police cars stationed with flashing lights every two blocks to warn off potential “looters” from the city’s impoverished, pandemic-ravaged South and West Sides. Homeless people wrapped in plastic bags slept in doorways and bus stops, surrounded by boarded-up storefronts. It felt distinctly noir and dystopian, a sentiment underscored by knowledge that suburban white-nationalist activists were planning a march to celebrate Trump’s “victory” (and to claim that the rampaging COVID-19 virus was “a hoax”) in downtown Chicago the next morning.

Reflecting on my notion that the USA was being revealed as a “failed state”, the left historian and journalist Terry Thomas reminded me that “We are living in neoliberalism’s showcase: the state of unvarnished capitalism, the winners win, and the losers lose, and the winners decide if they want to take pity on the losers. They promised us this forty years ago, and they delivered”. The proof of this harsh reality was clear as day in the spectacularly unequal and race- and class-divided<sup>3</sup> city of Chicago.

## ***America’s “Nazi Problem”***

The second and arguably biggest reason to put away the party hats was what the left writer Coco Das rightly called America’s living “Nazi problem”. Between 2016 and 2020, after four years of turning the world’s most powerful office into a breeding ground of white nationalist proto-fascism, the



vicious and demented oligarch Trump had *added 11 million votes*. Trump *expanded his base* despite his nightmarish and mass-murderous, pandemic-spreading “presidential” performance (to be depicted in ugly detail in Chapter 3). This was no small matter, as the Black, Philadelphia-based civil and human rights lawyer Michael Coard reflected last December 8th:

*Those 74 million [Trump voters] are absolutely frightening. They want a moron to be a permanent dictator. That’s what they want. They want to go back to the Jim Crow era. They want to disenfranchise Americans. They want to go back to the anti-science era of the Dark Ages. They want to go back to or create the Handmaid’s Tale.*

This is not hyperbole. Now when I say stuff like that, people should think I’m exaggerating, but it’s real.<sup>4</sup>

It was a depressingly cold fact that 74 million Americans voted to give a second apocalyptic presidential term to a man Noam Chomsky identified as “the most dangerous criminal in human history”<sup>5</sup> even before Trump was clearly spreading the killer coronavirus whose lethality he privately understood in January 2020<sup>6</sup> but publicly denied for months afterward.

Worse, many of those 74 million Americans had been led by Trump, most of the Republican Party, right-wing media (FOX News, the One America Network, Newsmax, right-wing talk radio, and more) to falsely believe that the election has been stolen. Fully 70 percent of Trump voters<sup>7</sup> believed without proof that Democrats and anti-Trump election officials had denied their Fearless Leader victory through various forms of “voter fraud” including supposed nefarious voting machine software and “counterfeit” mail-in ballots. That was 51 million mainly white Americans holding an explosive political opinion based on the open defiance of evidence and laced with authoritarian implications. As the Sri Lankan coup-veteran Indi Samarajiva wrote in a chilling post-election reflection

Trump...and the Republican Party are *destroying trust in elections in general. This is catastrophic*. The tragic thing which you do not understand – which you cannot understand – is that you’ve already lost... Your Republicans have set forces into play they cannot possibly

understand and certainly cannot control. And they don't even want to. To them, chaos is a ladder...This is the point. They have taken an orderly system balancing a whole lot of chaos and fucked with it. I don't know how it's going to explode, but I can promise you this: it's going to explode...This is precisely why we have elections, and why both sides accept the results. To keep the chaos at bay. The whole point is that you have a regular, ritual fight rather than fighting all the time. Once one side breaks ritual then you're on the way to civil war. Once you break the rules then chaos ensues. What exactly happens? I don't know....*One side has stopped believing in elections. This is very bad...This year America had fascism on the ballot and nonwhite people mercifully said no. The fascists, however, are now saying fuck ballots. And enough of the population is like fuck yeah!..This is a major problem, and it won't just go away on a technicality.* I'm telling you, as someone that's been there, *you've already lost* (emphasis added).<sup>8</sup>

Four days after Samarajiva issued this warning, 20,000 fervent Trump supporters rallied in Washington DC behind their Dear Leader's bogus claim of a stolen election. Trump fans swarmed his limousine as he rode by the crowd, flashing his approval. Among the leading participants in this "Million MAGA March" were the openly neo-fascist and paramilitary Proud Boys, infamous for street violence – a group Trump had ominously told to "stand back and stand-by" during his first and unhinged "presidential debate" with Joe Biden the previous September. Among the speakers at this authoritarian gathering was Marjorie Taylor Greene, a conspiratorialist QAnon supporter recently elected to the US House, who expressed racist sentiments and told the assembled white nationalists to march on the Supreme Court to demand that it install Trump for a second term. By one account:

"You see, I'm not a politician – I'm a proud American woman," Greene said during her speech, shouting over a nearby "BLM sucks" chant. "The Democrat Party is no longer an American party. They're the party of socialism! The party of riots! The party of burning businesses! The party of AOC's Green New Deal!" The prospect of environmental progressive takeover prompted a loud chorus of boos from the crowd...I spoke with more than 20 attendees throughout the day. Almost all believed, perhaps

unsurprisingly, that Trump won the election. Many cited debunked conspiracy theories, a few believed that God had chosen Trump, and all were worried about a Biden administration implementing socialism.

“I’m here to support my president, I’m here because [the far-right conspiracy theorist and Trump ally] Alex Jones told me to be here,” said Joshua Sparks, who came to the rally from North Carolina. “You know, a lot of stuff they say about election fraud, voter fraud is true. But that’s been going on for years. This is really much deeper than that. This is something serious. It’s about the new world order.”...Sparks spent the next few minutes expounding on the Bilderberg Group conspiracy theory, which alleges that a cabal of elites – including George Soros and Bill Gates – are engaged in a plot to take over the world. He warned that “depopulation, slavery, communism, one world government,” and “globalization” will destroy our civilization if these elites get their way. “That’s why I’m here, because I believe President Trump is our best bet to stop that.” Satanism, he said, is at the core of the Democratic Party’s policy agenda.<sup>9</sup>

One month later, on the weekend before the Electoral College voted after dozens of failed and openly absurd Trump campaign and Republican lawsuits meant to stop Biden’s election, the Proud Boys were back in the streets of Washington with many thousands of their “conservative” allies in tow. They beat liberal and left counter-protesters, stabbing at least four people. They tore a Black Lives Matter flag down from the Asbury United Methodist Church, a majority-Black congregation founded in 1836 and located a few blocks from the White House. The fascists burned the flag, reminding the church’s pastor of racist “cross-burnings”, in the name of “real Americanism”. They made the “OK” hand gesture, adopted by those on the far-right as a signal of white supremacy.<sup>10</sup> At one point during their rampage, their president hovered overhead in Marine One,<sup>11</sup> the presidential helicopter, in a chilling sign of taxpayer-funded solidarity with his fascist supporters on the ground.

Samarajiva’s dark reflection merited serious consideration. Refuse Fascism’s Coco Das was right to issue a dire and eloquent warning three

weeks after the election:

We have a Nazi problem in this country...They don't, for the most part, wave swastikas and salute Hitler, but we have a Nazi problem in this country as deeply as the German people had a Nazi problem in the 1930s...They carry the torch of slavery, genocide, and Jim Crow terror. Gunned up and mask-less, they exalt above all the right to kill.

Trump lost the election. They lost. We poured into the streets to celebrate but they will not go quietly into the night. Fascists have and can come back from defeat, and when they do they are stronger, more prepared, and more filled with vengeance. With his unhinged audacity, Trump still dominates the airwaves, turning an election that was decisive into a debate. Every day that he remains in power is an unrelenting barrage of lunacy. Every day is another day of the unthinkable and unprecedented said out loud and acted upon. Every day is a thousand more deaths from COVID. The humanity and morality of a portion of the 73 million people who voted for Trump is so hollowed out they can't even mourn the dead. And what of the rest of us, who did not want this but learned to live with it?...America has a MAGA problem. Millions of them believe that people who are by their very existence criminal – Black people in the cities of swing states – stole this election from their leader with the help of a band of evil conspirators, and this will be their rallying cry as they regroup to exact revenge and return to power. Hiding from them when they show up in your town, refusing to call it what it is, humoring them or failing to condemn their bigotry will not make them go away...The people won a victory by voting Trump out of power. Imagine the nightmare if he had won. But we have to stand on this victory and go all the way to bringing this fascist program to a halt. They are fighting for a future of unchallenged white supremacy, misogyny and theocratic patriarchy, and America First xenophobia, enforced by terror and violence. There is no decency in what they want. We cannot cede the public square and public discourse to fascists to air their false grievances and spread their lies, death, and hatred.<sup>12</sup>

The USA's "Nazi problem" was being directly encouraged by one of the nation's two leading political organizations, not just by the recently defeated Republican president but also by 126 Republican House members who signed their names to an openly absurd and authoritarian lawsuit filed by 18 Republican state attorneys general asking the US Supreme Court to negate Biden's clear and clean election victory in early December. Including the majority of Republican US Senators who refused to acknowledge Biden's win, fully 88 percent of Congress's Republican delegates Republicans refused, in CNN's words, "to acknowledge the obvious: Biden won".<sup>13</sup> Even the nation's right-leaning Electoral College<sup>14</sup> was insufficiently reactionary for these federally elected Republicans.

One did not have to be an anti-fascist leftist like Samarajiva, Das, or the present writer to worry about how Trump and his fellow Republicans' sociopathic, cynical, and Orwellian war on the elementary fact of his 2020 electoral defeat undermined a core component of democracy: willingness to honor elections that don't go your way. As a centrist CNN commentator Chris Cilliza reflected last December 7th":

What Trump is doing is actively working to undermine one of the central tenets of democracy: the belief that – whether or not your preferred candidate won – the presidential vote was conducted fairly and safely, and accurately reflects the will of the American public. This isn't a minor thing. Because if some decent chunk of the population is so convinced – facts be damned – that Trump won and the election was stolen from him, it leads to events like we saw in Michigan on Saturday night: *A group of armed protesters surrounded the home of Democratic Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson demanding that she "stop the steal" of the election from the President.*

What's truly remarkable about all of this is that the vast majority of Republican elected officials know, of course, that Biden won. Witness this from Biden during an interview with CNN's Jake Tapper: "I say this tactfully. There have been more than several sitting Republican senators who've privately called me and congratulated me."

Why not say it publicly, then? Because they are afraid of a) Trump and b) their own party base. Silence is their best strategic course because it allows them to avoid provoking Trump while also not saying something (“Trump won”) that they know is false.

Here are the facts: Biden won 306 electoral votes to Trump’s 232. Biden has, to date, received 81,284,062 votes (51.3%) to Trump’s 74,221,849 (46.9%).

In the face of those facts, Trump and his allies...have offered up a series of conspiracy theories (Hugo Chavez!), debunked anecdotes (ballots being burned!) and frivolous lawsuit (Trump’s legal team has “won” one of the 39 lawsuits it has brought regarding the vote count).

The silence isn’t just deafening. It’s dangerous...220 House and Senate Republicans refused to take a position on who won the 2020 election. Which is 88% of all of the Republicans in Congress. Which is stunning. It’s stunning because, well, it’s not a hard question. Saying that we need to consider both sides of this argument equally is an utter farce. It’s as though one side is arguing that  $2 + 2 = 4$  and the other side is saying that  $2 + 2 = 5$ , and we have to act as though both arguments are equally valid.<sup>15</sup>

This was nothing to take lightly looking forward to life under Biden as November turned to December and the days grew short in late 2020. Contrary to the denialism of New York University political scientist Cory Robin, who ludicrously proclaimed in early December that Trump had no real lasting impact on the Republican Party,<sup>16</sup> nearly three-fourths of Republican voters (72%) saw the fascistic president Trump as *the model for their party* going forward<sup>17</sup> – this while the president was actively refusing to honor the outcome of an election he clearly lost and egging his most furious backers on to engage in violent resistance to the outcome.

Trump’s coup “plans” were ill-conceived. He failed to persuade the Republican leaders of the Michigan state legislature to violate the will of their state’s voters. The federal judge presiding over his preposterous challenge to the Pennsylvania tally wrote that the orange-faced criminal’s

“claim, like Frankenstein’s monster, has been haphazardly stitched together”.<sup>18</sup> The 6-3 right-wing Supreme Court created by his three high court appointments couldn’t put “Humpty Trumpty back together [as president] again”. But while most Americans were certainly relieved to see the malevolent president likely being compelled to depart, it dawned on some observers that Trump and his allies and followers would nurture and spread a toxic, classically fascistic “Stabbed in the Back” narrative that would help drive and animate future white-nationalist and authoritarian menaces going forward with or without Trump.<sup>19</sup> The Amerikaner base was not going to simply disappear because its cult leader got booted out of Washington. It was likely to expand in number and deadliness with Trump headed back to his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida. With Trump out of the picture, perhaps, white nationalists might gravitate to a new (fascist mafia) Don, likely one more serious than the old Don – or perhaps to some supposedly new and improved version of Trump, who was still the most powerful figure in the Republican Party by far and away.

### ***The Normalization of Authoritarian Madness***

A third dispiriting post-election consideration was the distressing normalization and trivialization of the defeated president’s authoritarian madness in defeat. It was demoralizing to behold US media normalize and naturalize Trump’s’ mad efforts to overturn the election. Responsible journalists and commentators would have been calling for the malignant head of state to be removed from office immediately. Thousands of Americans were dying every week from the ballooning, Trump-fanned pandemic, and the Trump White House was actively undermining efforts by the incoming Biden administration to develop a strategy to stem the body count. While the nation’s intensive care units and morgues were bursting at the seams, Trump was spending his “lame duck” time on the golf course and commanding his lackeys to figure out some last-ditch way to overturn a remarkably free and fair election. Impeachment and removal? Removal via the 25th Amendment? Send in the 82nd Airborne to take the pandemo-fascist to an undisclosed location? A call for millions in the streets demanding OUT NOW, the still relevant slogan of Refuse Fascism? The “liberal” media was mute on these

options as vulnerable Americans needlessly perished, but MSNBC brought on the arch-neoliberal conciliator Barack Obama to intone that Trump had a “flimsy relationship to the truth” – an extreme understatement – and to lamely tell Trump’s Republican enablers that “some things are bigger than partisanship”.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, National “Public” Radio hosts and guests talked about how it was “taking the president some time to absorb and grieve the fact that he lost”. Trump’s attempted coup was treated in the mainstream media like a television psycho-drama or soap opera, *as if Trump wasn’t an aspiring strongman determined to tear up the last shreds of American democracy*.

“Your media”, Indi Samarajiva wrote shortly after the election,

are covering this like a high school dance...See this headline in the New York Times: ‘Who’s Going to Tell Him? Republicans Shy From Asking Trump to Concede.’ It’s wildly irresponsible. All your coverage is. No, you fools, they’re supporting a coup....‘Who’s going to tell him’?... Who’s going to tell you?<sup>21</sup>

The Democratic Party, having just won the presidential election, resisted talking openly about the full authoritarian psychosis of what Trump was trying to do. By focusing almost solely on preparing for the Biden presidency the best they could under the insane circumstances, they became complicit in the madness. Their deafening silence about what the nation really faced with Trump, his party, and his base, continued the Democratic “politics of appeasement”<sup>22</sup> that had helped put Trump in the White House in the first place – and that might have helped him stay there for a second term but for the pandemic.

## ***How Close We Came to a Second Term***

A fourth blast of cold November-December reality came from the realization of how close we had come to a second Trump term. The nation had likely avoided a “constitutional” coup only because Biden’s victory margin was too great for Trump and his team and allies to pull it off. Had Biden won with closer margins, separated by just thousands instead of millions of popular



votes, by 20 instead of more than 70 Electors, by one or two states instead of several, Trump and his personal white-nationalist attorney general William Barr might well have had enough chess pieces in place to steal the contest or put it at grave risk. He would have pilfered the election with the support of most of the Republican Party and its voters. But then Trump might well have won re-election flat out, even without constitutional and extra-constitutional coup maneuvers, but for the historical “accident” – the historical-conjunctural intervention – of COVID-19. The fact that Trump had (as we shall see in Chapter 3) conducted his presidency in blatantly and shockingly corrupt, racist, sexist, nativist, authoritarian, narcissistic, eco-cidal, and fascistic ways may well not have been enough to ensure his defeat. He could very possibly have ridden his alleged “Trump economic boom” (the continuation of an expansion started under Obama) to victory.

### ***The Inauthentic Opposition Party and the Danger of Excessive Relaxation***

A fifth reason to refrain from further celebration during the election’s aftermath was, as already suggested, the passivity-inducing conduct of the dismal, dollar-drenched Democratic Party. A proto-fascistic politics had arisen and taken hold of the White House under Trump, thanks in no small part to the “neo-Weimar” role of the corporate-managed Democratic Party in the long neoliberal era stretching back from the Jimmy Carter administration through the Bill Clinton and Barack Obama presidencies.<sup>23</sup> Now the four-year national Trump nightmare had made much of the US populace understandably but dangerously relieved over the likely coming ascendancy of what promised to be another imperial and corporate-Democratic administration. Would the understandable sense of reprieve encourage popular passivity, atomization, and demobilization in ways that would undermine chances for the sort of sociopolitical movements required to stem and reverse the insidious rightward drift of American society and politics in the neoliberal age? Already before Thanksgiving, top Democrats were talking about “reaching out across the aisle” to “find common ground” with a Republican Party that had crossed into authoritarian and even fascist space during and before Trump’s election and presidency. Would corporate-captive

elites atop the “inauthentic opposition” party – the late political scientist Sheldon Wolin’s dead-on description of the neoliberal Democrats<sup>24</sup> – continue to dismiss and marginalize the Sanders and “Squad” Democrats, who had the audacity to advocate progressive policies in accord with majority public opinion? Would the corporate Democrats thereby grease the skids for the Republicans to take back Congress in 2023 and the White House in 2025? On November 19th, Obama went on liberal cable news to voice some of his standard conciliatory rhetoric of centrist and bipartisan compromise:

I think Joe Biden is right to say that we should all make an effort to do our best to lower the temperature and *listen to the other side*. But I think when you have a current president whose entire style is to fan division, that’s hard while he’s on the stage. In some ways, I think it will be useful for us to just get back to *the normal arguments between Democrats and Republicans. There are things that transcend partisanship*...I didn’t enjoy having to call Donald Trump and congratulate him for having won the night of his election four years ago, but I did it because that’s part of my job. And the same way that George Bush called me and invited me and facilitated my transition – you know, that’s part of the continuity of our democracy that allows us to have arguments, have differences, but at the end of the day, still be confident that this is a government of, by and for the people.<sup>25</sup>

It was depressing to hear the nation’s most popular political figure, his high approval ratings ironically fueled by the dreadfulness of a president he helped create,<sup>26</sup> say that the nation need to return to “normal arguments” with a Republican Party that had gone proto-fascist under his presidency – a white-nationalist party that was failing to speak up against Trump’s attempt to subvert a presidential election he had clearly lost by a significant margin and that was actively backing Trump’s fascistic Big Lie that the recent election has been “stolen”. Having learned nothing from his deeply conservative and accommodationist career,<sup>27</sup> apparently, here was Obama yet again and even now preaching sanctimoniously about the need to “reach out across the aisle” and “listen” to vicious, science-denying, white-nationalist Republifascists –

this while the corporate Democratic establishment engaged in ugly attacks on its own party's progressive (Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez et al.) wing,<sup>28</sup> which had to be punished for an unforgivable sin: running in accord with the citizenry's majority-progressive and anti-oligarchic sentiments in a corporate and financial plutocracy run by and for the elite capitalist Few,<sup>29</sup> not "we the people".

## ***The Constitutional Straight-Jacket***

A sixth reason for staying off the dance floor in the weeks and months after Trump's welcome defeat had to do with something many scholars and journalists prefer not to discuss: a deeply conservative US government charter and governmental structure that encourages minority right-wing rule. As Zeynep Tufekci reflected one month into Trump's rolling coup attempt:

What makes this moment deeply alarming – and makes Republicans' overwhelming silence and tacit approval deeply dangerous, rather than merely an attempt to run out the clock on the president's clownish behavior – is that Trump's attempt to steal this election builds on a process that has already *entrenched minority rule* around the country. In North Carolina, where I live...this year, the Democrats managed a meager increase in representation – five [U.S. House] representatives out of 13 – despite...receiving 48 percent of the vote....When voters try to contest *gerrymanders* or power grabs, many of the cases end up before the U.S. Supreme Court, where lifetime appointments are made by the president but approved by the Senate. The *Senate is so lopsided right now that 26 states containing just 17 percent of the U.S. population elect a majority of senators* – the smallest that proportion has ever been. That's the people in the smallest 26 states. The Republican Party's Senate majority in recent years has rested on its strength in these rural states... the United States has a House filled with gerrymandered districts, a Senate dramatically tilted toward rural states, some state legislatures controlled by electoral minorities or slim majorities who get to exercise power as if they were overwhelming, and a Supreme Court with three justices appointed by a president who lost

the popular vote. Is it any wonder that Trump thinks he can defy the results of the election and cling to power despite losing an election? Or that his party does not stand up for the will of voters?<sup>30</sup>

Biden's victory notwithstanding, the progressive policy reset required to meet the nation's social, public health, and environmental needs and to de-Trump America and inoculate the country from fascism was deeply challenged by the absurd overrepresentation of a Republican Party that had become an Amerikaner Party of Trump. American government still stood far to the right of public opinion thanks in great part to the brutal mismatch between the citizenry's needs and aspirations and the nation's 18th-century charter, crafted from the top down with the explicit intent of blocking the Founders' ultimate nightmare: popular sovereignty.

Meanwhile, two of the many absurd and authoritarian downsides of the nation's ancient founding document were on grotesque display in the days, weeks, and months after the 2020 election. One such downside was the clearly deranged Trump's fully constitutional right to stay in the world's most powerful office for seven weeks after having lost his bid for re-election. A second was Trump's king-like yet fully constitutional power to pardon criminal associates. Legal experts seriously debated whether Trump might even be constitutionally permitted to issue a blanket pardon for himself.

### ***People Still Wouldn't Take to the Streets...***

A seventh reason to put away the dancing shoes was the absence of discernible sentiment for popular action to remove Trump prior to Biden's inauguration. The passivity persisted even while the "lame duck" Trump tried to reverse the election through means both legal and extra-constitutional and as Trump did everything he could to undermine the orderly and decent transition required for the federal government to functionally address the mass death, joblessness, and poverty that stalked the land in the wake of the pandemic he had so viciously fueled and fanned. As Michael Coard observed in a Refuse Fascism forum on the night of December 8th, a day on which the pandemic claimed more than 2400 lives,

We all need to be running out into the streets. This shit is really happening. It's really happening. This guy lost, and he might not leave and he's telling people in coded language to get guns and to destroy America in the interests of promoting fascism. That's NOT hyperbole.<sup>31</sup>

As Tufekci wrote in *The Atlantic* the day before Coard spoke,

In English, only one widely understood word captures what Donald Trump is trying to do, even though his acts do not meet its technical definition. Trump is attempting to stage some kind of coup, one that is embedded in a broader and ongoing power grab.<sup>32</sup>

It was a mistake, Tufekci counseled, to write off Trump's blundering, doomed, and ill-conceived coup-attempt, for Trump was ominously meeting little resistance from his own party while setting a dangerous precedent for a future successful coup by a more capable authoritarian seeking to overturn an election lost by a smaller margin. In a thoughtful reflection well worth heeding, Tufekci turned Marx on his head while rightly reprimanding those who wrote off concerns about Trump's attempts to upend the election just as many of them had foolishly dismissed the menace posed by Trump in 2016:

In 1852, Karl Marx famously modified Hegel's observation that historical occurrences tend to repeat by adding that they may occur the first time as tragedy and the second time as farce. What starts as farce may end as tragedy, a lesson that pundits should already have learned from their sneering dismissal of Trump when he first announced his presidential candidacy. Yes, the Trump campaign's lawsuits are pinnacles of incompetence, too incoherent and embarrassing to go anywhere legally. The legislators who have been openly pressured by Trump don't seem willing to abide the crassness of his attempt. States are certifying their election results one by one, and the General Services Administration – the agency that oversees presidential transitions – has started the process of handing the government over to President-elect Joe Biden. If things proceed in their ordinary course, the Electoral College will soon vote, and then Biden will take office.

But ignoring a near catastrophe that was averted by the buffoonish, half-hearted efforts of its would-be perpetrator invites a real catastrophe brought on by someone more competent and ambitious. President Trump had already established a playbook for contesting elections in 2016 by casting doubt on the election process before he won, and insisting that he only lost the popular vote due to fraud. Now he's establishing a playbook for stealing elections by mobilizing executive, judicial, and legislative power to support the attempt. And worse, much worse, the playbook is being implicitly endorsed by the silence of some leading Republicans, and vocally endorsed by others, even as minority rule becomes increasingly entrenched in the American electoral system.

The next attempt to steal an election may involve a closer election and smarter lawsuits. Imagine the same playbook executed with better decorum, a president exerting pressure that is less crass and issuing tweets that are more polite. If most Republican officials are failing to police this ham-handed attempt at a power grab, how many would resist a smoother, less grossly embarrassing effort?<sup>33</sup>

The know-it-all intellectuals and lefties who laughed at those of us who had warned about a possible Trump coup missed the deeper point. As Tufekci wryly observed:

The boy who cried wolf is a familiar parable. But what of the boy who saw an approaching wolf scared off by a thunderstorm and decided that he didn't need to worry about wolves, instead of readying himself for its return? Fortune favors the prepared; catastrophe awaits those who confuse luck with strength.

For these and other reasons, including the coronavirus's deadly impact on my (adjunct) teaching income, the seven weeks between the 2020 election and Joe Biden's Inauguration were hardly conducive to the persistence of the mood of celebration I felt on the night of November 7th, 2020. The late season collapse of the promising and up and coming Chicago White Sox the previous October didn't help.

By the first week of December 2020, as the anti-science president Trump continued to hold unmasked hate rallies that promised to further expand the deadly pandemic he'd been madly spreading since the previous January, the coronavirus was killing more Americans every day than the number of US military personnel who died in the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Two days after the 79th anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack, on December 9, 2020, the daily US COVID-19/Trump Virus death count topped 3,000 for the first time.<sup>34</sup> But almost nobody took to the streets to call for Trump's immediate removal. Even a CNN talking head, Don Lemon, was moved on the night of December 7th to ask why Americans were putting up with Trump's post-election conduct.

## **“Home-Grown Fascism That Was Out of Control”**

And then the actual physical coup attempt occurred. The wolf came, too crippled to succeed, but not too weak to kill and wreak havoc on “American democracy” or what was left of it. As January 6, 2021, the date for Congress's certification of Joe Biden's Electoral College victory approached, fully 140 Republican US House Representatives<sup>35</sup> and 12 Republican US Senators<sup>36</sup> backed their Fearless Leader's openly Orwellian claim to have been cheated out of a “landslide” victory. They announced their determination to challenge the certification. Never mind that repeated lawsuits and expensive recounts failed to produce any serious evidence for the transparently absurd “Stop the Steal” narrative. The Republican Congressional challenge came even after Trump was caught red-handed in an extraordinary hour-long phone “conversation” in which he feloniously tried to bully Georgia's Republican Secretary of State into “recalculating” that state's vote in Trump's favor by “finding” (inventing for) Trump 11,780 votes.<sup>37</sup>

Meanwhile, Trump called for “wild protests”<sup>38</sup> against the mythical theft of the 2020 presidential election on January 6. As the Congressional certification date neared, the national capital's hotels filled with thousands of white supremacists primed to wreak proudly unmasked havoc in support of Trump's wild claims of voter fraud. The zealous white-nationalist House member Louie Gohmert (R-TX) encouraged mayhem, telling Republicans

that “violence” in the streets was their “only recourse”<sup>39</sup> after a federal judge dismissed his lawsuit Friday seeking to permit Vice President Mike Pence to upend the election.

And then a day that will live in American historical infamy transpired. On Wednesday, January 6th, 2021, with 14 days left in his presidency, after months of trying to subvert the 2020 presidential election, Trump sent thousands of his frothing minions to the United States Capitol to stop the certification of Joe Biden’s Electoral College victory. The animating idea behind the Trumpist rampage that broke into the Capitol complex was belief in the baseless lie that Biden and the Democrats had stolen the election from its supposed rightful winner, the demented oligarch Donald Trump.

Five people died in the assault while members of Congress hid for their lives. The body and casualty count could easily have been much higher. The overwhelmingly white male mob, including Proud Boys, Three Percenters, Oath Keepers, neo-Nazis, military veterans, and law enforcement personnel, spoke of lynching Congresspersons and Vice President Mike Pence. The marauders were equipped to kill and take hostages for the purpose of keeping Trump, in power. Explosives were discovered in the Capitol and various locations around Washington. Pro-Trump protests closed statehouses across the country.<sup>40</sup>

It is possible to be simultaneously unsurprised and jolted by an event. It was one thing to know that the aspiring dictator Trump and his increasingly unhinged team were going to pull some demented stunt in a last-ditch attempt to reverse the outcome of the 2020 presidential election. It was another thing to watch his frenzied, unmasked, and Confederate flag-carrying minions break into the United States Capitol, forcing House and Senate members and the Vice President to flee the congressional chamber while trying to fulfill their formerly routine quadrennial and constitutional duty of certifying the Electoral College victory of the nation’s next president. Some of the marauders came with zip tie handcuffs for taking Congresspersons hostage. Rioters chanted “Hang Mike Pence!”, calling for the right-wing Vice President to be killed for failing to act in accord with Trump’s command for him to refuse to play his constitutionally appointed role of overseeing the certification process.



In a video recorded by a *New Yorker* reporter during the siege, the bare-chested and fur-hatted Jacob Chansley, known as the “QAnon shaman”, delivered a prayer thanking God “for allowing the United States of America to be reborn”.<sup>41</sup> Other rioters fell silent during Chansley’s invocation.

A remarkable report from *The Intercept* one month later noted that Trump encouraged the hunting down and murder of Pence as punishment for the sin of doing his constitutional job:

After Sen. Tommy Tuberville, R-Ala., told Trump that Vice President Mike Pence had been rushed out of the Senate chamber, his security in question, Trump posted to Twitter, raging at Pence’s betrayal. That’s according to Tuberville, who stands by his account even as others, including Utah Republican Sen. Mike Lee, call it into question.

“Mike Pence didn’t have the courage to do what should have been done to protect our Country and our Constitution, giving States a chance to certify a corrected set of facts, not the fraudulent or inaccurate ones which they were asked to previously certify,” Trump posted. “USA demands the truth!”

The mob, meanwhile, was rampaging the building, chanting, “Hang Mike Pence!

That Trump, according to Tuberville, attacked Pence publicly after learning the former vice president was under threat *strongly suggests that Trump was eager to see the mob locate Pence and do what they would with him.* As the *New York Times* has reported, Trump also told Pence earlier that day that he’d “go down in history as a pussy” if he didn’t try to flip the election to Trump. *Trump clearly wanted the crowd to grab him.* If you’re famous, they let you do it.<sup>42</sup>

“I think it speaks to the former President’s mindset”, the Republican House member Anthony Gonzalez said later.

He was not sorry to see his unyieldingly loyal vice president or the Congress under attack by the mob he inspired. In fact, it seems he was

happy about it or at the least enjoyed the scenes that were horrifying to most Americans across the country.

At one point during the siege, House Republican Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA), who had strongly backed Trump's absurd claim to have won the election and was now hunkered down hiding from the attackers, begged Trump to go on television or Twitter and call off the assault. Trump refused. "Well, Kevin", Trump said, "*I guess these people are more upset about the election than you are*".

Some of Trump's thugs planted pipe bombs and had a truck full of weapons<sup>43</sup> at the ready. One putschist wore full military garb – Air Force Academy graduate and retired Lt. Colonel. Ret. Larry Brock, a decorated military veteran from Texas. He and his fellow Trumpist terrorists were out for blood.

"I saw this crowd of people banging on [the glass portion of doors to the Congressional chamber], screaming". US Rep. James McGovern recalled two days later. "Looking at their faces, it occurred to me [that] these aren't protesters. These are people who want to do harm. What I saw in front of me, *washome-grown fascism that was out of control*".<sup>44</sup>

It was no random act of lumpenproletarian looting. Political scientist Robert Pape and researcher Kevin Ruby's detailed analysis of the 193 people arrested in connection with the January 6th Capitol Riot shows that:

Two-thirds are 35 or older, and 40 percent are business owners or hold white-collar jobs. Unlike the stereotypical extremist, many of the alleged participants in the Capitol riot have a lot to lose. They work as CEOs, shop owners, doctors, lawyers, IT specialists, and accountants. Strikingly, court documents indicate that only 9 percent are unemployed.

The Capitol rioters' motives were fundamentally political, driven by Trump's "stop the steal" lie. As Pape and Ruby reported in *The Atlantic*:

The attack on the Capitol was unmistakably an act of political violence, not merely an exercise in vandalism or trespassing amid a disorderly protest that had spiraled out of control. The overwhelming reason for action, cited again and again in court documents, was that arrestees were

*following Trump's orders to keep Congress from certifying Joe Biden as the presidential-election winner. Dozens of arrestees, court records indicate, made statements explaining their intentions in detail on social media or in interviews with the FBI. "I am incredibly proud to be a patriot today," wrote a 37-year-old man from Beverly Hills, California, "to stand up tall in defense of liberty & the Constitution, to support Trump & #MAGAforever, & to send the message: WE ARE NEVER CONCEDING A STOLEN ELECTION"* (emphasis added).<sup>45</sup>

Trump fueled the Attack on the Capitol with his Hitlerian election theft story. For weeks, Trump had been telling his supporters to come to Washington to stop the certification. On December 19th he tweeted this: "Statistically impossible to have lost the Election" and "*Big protest in DC on January 6th. Be there...be wild!*" Nine days later, and *nine days before the bloody Attack on the Capitol, former Trump White House official Olivia Troye said that she was*

*very concerned that there will be violence on January 6th because the president himself encourages it. This is what [President Trump] does. He tweets. He incites. He gets his followers and supporters to behave in this manner, and these people think that they're being patriotic because they are supporting Donald Trump.*<sup>46</sup>

In the January 6th Constitution Avenue rally preceding and inciting the Capitol Riot, Trump's lawyer Rudy Giuliani called for "*trial by combat*". The neo-Confederate Alabama Congressman Mo Brooks told the mob that "*today is the day American patriots start taking down names and kicking ass*". Trump made inflammatory remarks that sent the frenzied mob over to the Capitol:

You'll never *take back our country with weakness*. You have to *show strength*, and you have to *be strong*...Something is wrong here, something is really wrong, can't have happened and *we fight, we fight like hell*, and if you don't fight like hell, you're *not going to have a country anymore*...we are going to...walk down Pennsylvania Avenue...to give our Republicans, the weak ones because the strong

ones don't need any of our help, we're try—going to try and give them the kind of pride and boldness that they need to *take back our country...I'll be right there with you.*

On a giant telescreen positioned next to the rally speakers' platform, Trump and his team showed a Trump propaganda film that depicted America as the victim and Biden and the Democrats as the tools of a mysterious conspiracy of globalist elites hellbent on crushing “the people”. The short movie was like something inspired by the master Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels. As the leading propaganda scholar and anti-fascist Yale philosopher Jason Stanley wrote one month later:

The video suggests it is a group that controls Hollywood and the Democratic Party, and seeks to use Black liberation movements to undermine the nation, and bring about world government. In Nazi ideology, as well as its US counterpart, this group is the Jews. And what are the costs? As a clip of Trump's inauguration speech continues, “The establishment protected itself, but not the citizens of this our country;” gunshots are fired and we are shown images of these citizens betrayed by a duplicitous establishment – mournful pictures of coffins of veterans, homeless encampments, and a series of slides varying between nostalgic images of white American families over dinner with rural destitution – a worn down home flying a large American flag with an old pickup truck in front. At the end of these grim scenes of the results of elite betrayal, Trump declares, “This all ends right here, right now.”...The message of the video is clear. *America's glory has been betrayed by treachery and division sown by politicians seeking to undermine and destroy the nation. To save the nation, one must restore Trump's rule.*<sup>47</sup>

As the attack unfolded, *The New York Times* learned, Trump was “initially pleased” by the events as he watched them on television. “He disregarded aides pleading with him to intercede”. White House aides said Trump was “delighted”, while “walking around the White House confused about why other people on his team [are]n't as excited”.

Trump rebuffed and refused requests to mobilize the D.C. National Guard. The Guard was belatedly mustered to defend Congress only after the

order came from acting Defense Secretary Christopher C. Miller. Vice President Mike Pence approved the command, not Trump. “Republican House Minority Leader Rep. Kevin McCarthy demanded that Trump make a statement denouncing the rioters. Trump refused, leading to a ‘screaming match’ between the two men”.

At 4:17 PM, President Trump consented to tweet out a recorded statement in which he told his fascist marauders to go home but reiterated his absurd charge of a rigged election and told the rioters that “We love you, you’re very special”. At 6:01 he tweeted “These are the things and events that happen when a sacred landslide election victory is so unceremoniously & viciously stripped away from great patriots who have been badly & unfairly treated for so long...*Remember this day forever!*”

Make no mistake, a delusional Trump wanted the events to spiral out of control to the point where he could declare a state of emergency and introduce martial law within and beyond Washington. There was little chance of that happening, but that was the hope and the intent, consistent with the counsel of his disgraced former National Security Adviser, fascist felon Michael Flynn. The Attack on the Capitol was Trump’s crime. As the *New York Times* Editorial Board reflected in the hours after the attempted putsch:

Mr. Trump sparked these assaults. He has railed for months against the verdict rendered by voters in November. He summoned his supporters to gather in Washington on this day and encouraged them to march on the Capitol. He told them that the election was being stolen. He told them to fight. He told them he might join them and, even as they stormed the building, he declined for long hours to tell them to stop, to condemn their actions, to raise a finger in defense of the Constitution that he swore to preserve and protect. When he finally spoke, late in the day, he affirmed the protesters’ anger, telling them again that the election was stolen, but asking them to go home anyway. It was the performance of a man unwilling to fulfill his duties as president or to confront the consequences of his own behavior.<sup>48</sup>

Remarkably enough, 147 Congressional Republicans, including 8 Senators and 139 House Representatives, voted against the certification of Biden’s

election on the evening and early morning of January 6–7,<sup>49</sup> deliberating after the Capitol had been cleared of Trump’s violent mob.

## Warnings

Cable news talking heads and newspaper pundits were stunned and horrified by the events of January 6, 2021. They had no business being surprised or feigning surprise, however. In a book titled *A Warning* and published under the pseudonym “Anonymous” in 2019, the senior White House official Miles Taylor predicted that Trump would violently resist an election loss.<sup>50</sup> The conservative American Enterprise Institute scholar Norman Ornstein agreed. “Members of Congress, governors and state legislators, leaders in civil society, lawyers, law enforcement figures and the military need”, Ornstein wrote in December of 2019, “to be thinking about how they might respond” when Trump refused to honor an election he lost. “Trump will do anything to stay” in power, Ornstein opined: “Suspension of the election, negation of the results, declaration of martial law”.<sup>51</sup> Nine months earlier, In February 2019, Trump’s longtime personal lawyer and fixer Michael Cohen told Congress that Trump would not leave office without violence. “Given my experience working for Mr. Trump”, Cohen remarked, “I fear that if he loses the election in 2020, there will never be a peaceful transition of power”.<sup>52</sup>

A year and a half later, as the 2020 election was just five weeks away, the liberal *Washington Post* columnist Dana Milbank issued a dire warning that made direct reference to fascism and to Hitler’s seizure of dictatorial power in 1933:

*America, this is not a drill. The Reichstag is burning. For five years, my colleagues and I have taken pains to avoid Nazi comparisons. It is usually hyperbolic, and counterproductive, to label the right “fascists” in the way those on the right reflexively label the left “socialists.” But this is no longer a matter of name-calling. With his repeated refusals this week to accept the peaceful transfer of power – the bedrock principle that has sustained American democracy for 228 years – President Trump has put the United States, in some ways, where Germany was in 1933, when Adolf Hitler used the suspicious*

burning of the German parliament to turn a democracy into a totalitarian state....Asked on Sept. 23 if he would commit to a peaceful transfer of power if he loses the election, President Trump said, ‘We’re going to have to see what happens.’...Trump, as he has done before, has made the villain a minority group. He has sought, once again, to fabricate emergencies to justify greater powers for himself. He has proposed postponing elections. He has refused to commit to honoring the results of the election. And now, he proposes to embrace violence if he doesn’t win (emphasis added).<sup>53</sup>

On the same day Milbank issued his strident alarm, *Huffington Post* commentator Paul Blumenthal reflected on “The Nightmare Scenario That Could Hand Trump a Second Term”:

Trump has the backing of a broad network of heavily-armed militia groups, far-right street-fighting gangs, white supremacists and a pseudo-religious cult that believes Trump is a demigod operating in secret to prevent the apocalypse. Trump has primed these supporters to potentially reject the election results with his false statements about voter fraud and absentee voting. He also routinely celebrates violence against his opponents, casting them as subversive, alien threats to the American way of life. The Republican National Convention featured a married couple as primetime speakers solely because they pointed guns at a peaceful protest that they imagined threatened their property. The calls for violence coming from some Trump supporters, such as Stone and disgraced Health and Human Services official Michael Caputo, likely will only increase as the election draws closer.<sup>54</sup>

Cohen, Ornstein, and Taylor were born out, to say the least. So, even more hauntingly and clairvoyantly, was Yale historian Timothy Snyder, who made a remarkably accurate and brilliant reflection during the following exchange with *Salon*’s Chauncy de Vega in *April of 2017*:

DE VEGA: you discuss the idea that Donald Trump will have his own version of Hitler’s Reichstag Fire to expand his power and take full control of

the government by declaring a state of emergency. How do you think that would play out?

SNYDER: I think it's pretty much inevitable that they will try. The reason I think that is that the conventional ways of being popular are not working out for them. The conventional way to be popular or to be legitimate in this country is to have some policies, to grow your popularity ratings and to win some elections. I don't think 2018 is looking very good for the Republicans along those conventional lines – not just because the president is historically unpopular. It's also because neither the White House nor Congress have any policies which the majority of the public like. This means they could be seduced by the notion of getting into *a new rhythm of politics, one that does not depend upon popular policies and electoral cycles* (emphasis added).

Whether it works or not depends upon whether when something terrible happens to this country, we are aware that the main significance of it is whether or not we are going to be more or less free citizens in the future. My gut feeling is that Trump and his administration will try and that it won't work. Not so much because we are so great but because we have a little bit of time to prepare. I also think that there are enough people and enough agencies of the government who have also thought about this and would not necessarily go along.<sup>55</sup>

Consistent with Snyder's prophetic analysis, Trump by the summer of 2020 seemed to have abandoned any serious effort to win the election in "conventional" ways, that is, by trying to develop and run on a popular policy record. He was openly flouting public opinion on the pandemic, civil rights, police-statism, and the rule of law, helping keep his approval rate in the low 40s and Joe Biden well ahead of him in national polls. This was nothing for his critics and opponents to celebrate however, for, when combined with his clear desire to stay in power, it suggested strongly that he was going to try to keep the presidency in undemocratic, anti-constitutional, and violent ("Reichstag") ways. Also consistent with Snyder's April 2017 take and especially with de Vega's, the terrible events of January 6, 2021,



were just the last in a long line of proofs that there was a fascist in the White House.

Judy Woodruff and a slew of other broadcasters on major US television networks were shocked, appalled, and disgusted by the frightful events unfolding before the nation's eyes on January 6th, 2021. Their astonishment and dismay were symptomatic of denial in the dominant media-politics culture of how authoritarian and indeed, as the present volume argues, fascistic the Trump administration was. As the terrorism expert Colin Clarke noted in *The New York Times* two weeks after the terrible event:

Bolstered by conservative cable news networks and radio as well social media, Mr. Trump has been laying the groundwork for political violence for years. The Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, VA, in August of 2017, should have been the alarm for this country to understand the sense of urgency required to address the threat from the emboldened far right. It wasn't. Attacks in Pittsburgh in 2018 and El Paso in 2019, and the plot to kidnap Gov. Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan last year, were all missed opportunities to take the threat seriously.<sup>56</sup>

Each of the incidents Clarke cited was inspired to no small extent by Trump. Trump encouraged "civic violence" as a presidential candidate in 2015 and 2016 and would not promise to tell his violent backers to honor the outcome of the 2016 election if Hillary Clinton prevailed.

## **Pandemicide**

Horribly enough, the Attack on the Capitol, for which Trump was promptly and rightly impeached, wasn't Trump's worst and most impeachment-worthy fascistic transgression during the 2020–21 election season and its aftermath. An even bigger crime, for which he was not impeached, could be termed "pandemicide" – the murder of hundreds of thousands of US-Americans through gross negligence linked to political calculation, racist and Social Darwinian coldness, political calculation, hostility to science and expertise, and megalomaniacal narcissism. The House of Representatives managers handling Trump's second impeachment

in January of 2021 should have added to Trump's indictment the charge of "pandemicide", which egregiously violated his requirement to "faithfully execute the office of president of the United States" and led to a loss of life inside the USA exceeding anything experienced since the Civil War and the 1918 "Spanish flu".

In the view of the celebrated infectious disease expert Laurie Garrett, Trump's COVID-19 criminality became "pandemicide" with the horrific expansion in cases and deaths that took off in the fall of 2020 and the winter of 2020–21, when the number of daily new US cases rose from 74,195 to 300,619 two days after the Attack on the Capitol, a COVID-19 spreader event. By Garrett's account:

Despite the summer surge in COVID-19 infections nationwide, Trump abandoned virtual campaigning in favor of crowded, largely maskless gatherings of his supporters, *knowingly risking that each rally would become a superspreader event*....18 campaign rallies held between June 20 and Sept. 22, 2020, spawned in excess of 30,000 COVID-19 cases, likely leading to more than 700 deaths. During the same time period, half of Trump's campaign rallies were followed by COVID-19 surges in the counties in which they took place...Even after Trump and the first lady contracted COVID-19, compelling emergency treatment that included, in Trump's case, hospitalization at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center and round-the-clock treatment from an army of physicians and nurses, the president refused to regularly don a mask. On the day of his hospital admission, Oct. 2, the United States had cumulatively logged more than 200,000 deaths to COVID-19—an undercount, as are all U.S. COVID-19 numbers, but an official data point that would more than double by the Jan. 20 inauguration of Biden. According to a new Lancet Commission report compiled by an international team of august scientists and public health leaders, some 40 percent of America's COVID-19 death toll during the Trump administration was needless, meaning it could have been averted with available nonmedical interventions.

By the time the election took place, Trump had ignored the pandemic, not attending a single COVID-19 White House meeting for at least five months, since late May. Behind the scenes in the fall, the Trump

administration lobbied Congress vigorously to block the movement of funds to states for vaccine rollout efforts, leaving them unable to efficiently execute mass immunizations.

And going forward from election night, on Nov. 3, to the inauguration on Jan. 20, Trump was fully fixated on overturning Biden's victory... As his much-touted Operation Warp Speed sputtered, unable to speed vaccines into the arms of Americans, Trump was silent. And the White House became COVID-19 central, with chief of staff Mark Meadows, four other White House staff, Secretary of Housing and Urban Affairs Ben Carson, and David Bossie, Trump's designated leader of efforts to challenge the election, all infected. In line with the president's mantra that COVID-19 wasn't all that serious—"Don't let it take over your lives"—none of these individuals regularly wore protective face masks in the White House or on the election-counting trail.<sup>57</sup>

As the nation's COVID-19 death toll rose from 225,000 on November 3 (Election Day) to 259,000 on November 30, 336,000 on December 31, 352,000 on the day of his failed "insurrection" (itself a coronavirus "super-spreader" event), and to 400,000 on his last day in office, Trump stayed viciously mute on the terrible plague he'd helped spread across the nation. Between Election Day and Biden's inauguration, with Trump consumed by the effort to overturn Biden's victory, the number of Americans with COVID-19 tripled from 9 to 24 million.

"In his absence from pandemic duty – his duty to protect the American people – 172,000 Americans died, nearly doubling the mortality toll since Election Day", Garrett wrote. While hospital coronavirus units bulged and coffins filled, fueled by holiday travel and gatherings that Trump made no effort to discourage, the pandemo-fascist president focused his public energy on trying to subvert and overthrow the election while arranging pardons for cronies and spending inordinate time on his golf courses. "I level the charge of pandemicide against Trump", Garrett wrote last February, "for his failure to say or do anything to halt the soaring burden of infection and death across the United States from Election Day to his departure from office".

In truth, however, Trump began committing this impeachment-worthy crime, intimately related to his fascism, from the very moment the virus first

hit American shores, as we shall see.

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## Chapter 2

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# The Fascist Wolf Defined and Foretold

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Trump...is the successor of a long line of fascists who shut down public debate, attempt to humiliate their opponents, endorse violence as a response to dissent, and criticize any public display of democratic principles...His presence should be viewed as a stern warning of the possible nightmare to come.

–Henry Giroux, September 2016

There is a simple formula for descriptions of Donald Trump: add together a qualification, a hyphen, and the word “fascist.”

–Adam Gopnik, May 2016

Intellectuals and activists who properly identified Trump and Trumpism as fascist encountered a standard objection. Fascism, “the F-word”, a common complaint ran, had been diluted of all relevant meaning by its common usage – mainly but not exclusively on the left – as a catch-all derogatory term, a shallow epithet used without precise definition to denounce anything and everything one didn’t like about politics, society, and/or one’s opponents.

The Left political sociologist Carl Boggs gave sophisticated academic voice to the criticism, along with a number of dubious assertions, in early 2018:

Given Trump’s brand of reactionary populism, scattered and incoherent as it might be, many political observers in the US and Europe have been quick to denounce him as a ‘fascist,’ others as either “neo-fascist” or “white supremacist”...One problem with such labeling is that Trump himself has never exhibited any *ideological* affinity with fascism of any stripe, nor has he or any of his most rabid supporters identified with the label. At the same time, the new president gives voice to political currents long associated with fascism, however lacking coherent political focus – above all an authoritarian leadership style that begs comparison with Juan Peron in Argentina or Benito Mussolini in Italy. The result has *been no shortage of “fascist” epithets – by early 2017 nearly a ritual discourse on the left – usually without, however, much effort to lay out specific criteria underlying a clear definition of “fascism....*In the aftermath of the election a group called “Refuse Fascism,” led by Sunsara Taylor, emerged to fight the Trump administration through direct action with hopes of delegitimizing the president or even driving him from office...[and] denouncing Trump as a “Nazi” operating “right out of Hitler’s playbook” (a scheme never defined)...No ambiguity here, nor is there any doubt regarding Trump’s Hitlerian madness leading inexorably to the most terrible crimes: the regime is already “feeding the logic of genocide” while “normalizing the road to horror” (claims still devoid of specificity). Indeed, Taylor argues that Trump is “more dangerous than Hitler,” an imminent threat to all humanity. As of early March 2017, “Refuse Fascism” had gotten endorsements from such left intellectuals as Cornell West, Robin D.G. Kelley, Henry Giroux, and Ted Sirota, while benefitting from a \$50,000 George Soros gift...Anti-Trump mobilizations...fed energetically off such broadsides: millions of activists were motivated by a belief that the electoral outcome signaled an unprecedented – and catastrophic – shift in American politics, a radical departure from national traditions and values.<sup>1</sup>

Much of this passage is problematic. Boggs fell for the oxymoronic phrase “reactionary populism” and felt strangely compelled to put the words “white supremacist” in quotation marks as a description of the longstanding white supremacist Trump. He exaggerated the extent to which “the left” described and decried Trump as a fascist, the extent of anti-Trump protest in 2017 and 2018, and the extent to which such protest as did occur “fed energetically” off Refuse Fascism’s (RF’s) rhetoric. The notion that Trump’s “most rabid backers” demonstrated no ideological affinity for fascism was simply false given the large number of open fascists who saw Trump as their champion and ally.

Refuse Fascism (RF) never got \$50,000 from the right-wing’s globalist and Jewish *bete noire* George Soros. Professor West spells his first name with one “l”, not two. There was no reason to put RF’s name in quotation marks. Ted Sirota was and is a smart leftist professional jazz drummer in Chicago; placing him alongside the distinguished professors West, Giroux, and Kelley was bizarre.

The charge of no specificity or definition on fascism was *egregiously false* when directed at the numerous RF activists with whom I collaborated during the second half of the Trump administration. Fleshing out and advancing specific and sophisticated definitions of the loaded term was precisely one of the organization’s core activities and accomplishments, much to its credit.

Boggs’ mocking tone on Taylor’s warnings was itself badly mocked by the Trump presidency. Trump as president conducted himself very much in accord with the fascist (and even the Nazi) political and ideological “playbook”, just as he did when running for the White House. Trump was in fact an “imminent threat to humanity” who richly deserved Taylor’s warning that he could be “more dangerous than Hitler” given the USA’s superpower status, the American and global nuclear arsenal, and the climate emergency that has emerged as the biggest issue of our or any time. Through budgetary rollbacks and racist, Social Darwinian neglect and cruelty, the pandemo-fascist in the White House killed a vastly larger number of Americans during his first term than the number of Germans killed by Hitler during his first four years in office.

Trump’s presidency would do precisely what Sunsara Taylor said: “feed the logic of genocide” by killing hundreds of thousands of Americans with a

vicious and Darwinian response to a pandemic and with other brutal policies that led to mass death and “normalize[e]...the road to horror”. It was marked by a dizzying series of actions and statements that richly justified Noam Chomsky’s following description of President Trump as “*the most dangerous criminal in human history*” – more menacing to humanity than even Hitler – in early February of 2020:

What might be debatable is whether he is indeed the *most dangerous criminal in human history (which happens to be my personal view)*. Hitler had been perhaps the leading candidate for this honor. His goal was to rid the German-run world of Jews, Roma, homosexuals and other “deviants,” along with tens of millions of Slav “Untermenschen.” *But Hitler was not dedicated with fervor to destroying the prospects of organized human life on Earth in the not-distant future (along with millions of other species)...Trump is. And those who think he doesn’t know what he’s doing haven’t been looking closely.*<sup>2</sup>

Thinking mainly of ecological threats and nuclear destabilization, Chomsky said this even before the Trump-fueled COVID-19 pandemic spread across the nation, destined to claim more than half a million US lives. It is unpleasant to imagine the extent of devastation that would have followed had Trump gotten a second term, a possibility that Chomsky rightly considered potentially terminal for humanity.

While Boggs was correct (as I shall argue in Chapter 6) to align Trump with US “national traditions and values”, Trump did in fact represent a “radical departure” when it came to American politics and governance: the ascendancy of an authoritarian fascist – however clumsy, undisciplined, and clownish – into the world’s most powerful office was no small deviation from the presidential norm, to say the least.

Still, Boggs’ criticism was and remains a useful point of departure in its call for serious definition. It has in fact long been a poor Left, liberal, and in some cases a conservative and right-wing habit to throw “the F-word” around too loosely and in “boy who cried wolf” ways, without precise meaning and proper delineation. It is in fact incumbent upon those who would describe Trump and his presidency not merely as “reactionary populist” (Boggs’ term for the 45th US president in 2018), authoritarian,

and/or white-nationalist but, more provocatively as fascist (without or without prefixes like “proto-”, “neo-”, “pre-”, “para-”) to advance a precise definition of “the F-word”.

This chapter is dedicated to providing a working if somewhat elaborate definition of what is meant by “fascism” in this study and how there were in fact good reasons to do some wolf-crying before Trump.

## What's in an F-Word?

“Fascism, ‘the F-word,’ seriously?” Yes, seriously, provided we have a reasonable working definition. In his important and incisive 2009 book *The Eliminationists: How Hate Talk Radicalized the American Right*, journalist and author David Neiwert rightly observed that “Fascism is not a single, readily identifiable principle but rather *a political pathology* best understood (as in psychology) as a constellation of traits. Taken individually”,

Many of these traits seem innocuous enough, even readily familiar, a part of the traditional American hurry-burly. A few of them...are present throughout the political spectrum. Only when taken together does the constellation become clear, and then it is fated to take on a life of its own.<sup>3</sup>

Bear in mind, we are not talking here about a specific historical political-economic regime or set of institutional arrangements along the lines of a fully fascist government or society but rather of the politics and ideology of a fascistic leader who held the White House and represented the control of his party by the far right between January 20, 2017, and January 20, 2021. Drawing on the chilling insights of Aldous Huxley, C. Wright Mills, Herbert Marcuse, Bertram Gross, and Sheldon Wolin, Boggs writes hauntingly about the potential gradual development of a “new type of fascist regime” in the USA that “would be driven by a tightening confluence of sectoral interests in American society: corporate, state, military, and cultural – interests favoring oligarchy, authoritarianism, the warfare system, and surveillance orders within an expanding globalized matrix of power”. That is naturally a worthy

topic for investigation and reflection, but it is not (for better or worse) the subject of the present volume, which is focused primarily on Trump and Trumpism as a form of neofascistic *politics* and the reflection of an Amerikaner-neofascist *movement* that predated Trump and is outliving his presidency. I am writing here about fascist politics, ideology, and presidential conduct, *not about a consolidated fascist regime* on the model of the classic historical regimes that arose in 1920s and 1930s Italy and Germany or a new version kind that Boggs rightly sees as possibly and incrementally developing in the 21st-century USA.

Readers interested in my own reflections on the American institutional and cultural power structure, what I consider an un-elected and considerably fascism-equivalent dictatorship of capital and empire, can read my previous Routledge study *They Rule: The 1% v. Democracy*.

## **The Fascist 45**

So what comprises the collection of fascist characteristics that have taken on a form of their own and moved to the top of the nation's rightmost political party, the Amerikaner-ized Republicans, in the second decade of the 21st century? My reading of the best academic and journalistic commentary<sup>4</sup> identifies eight core categories (one might think of them as hanging folders) and 45 specific sub-characteristics (analogous to files) of fascist movement politics and ideology. My typology here is constructed with the understanding that many of the sub-characteristics could be filed under more than one core category/folder and, furthermore, that all the files, folders, and flavors of fascism interweave with and reinforce each other like a (noxious) simultaneous equations system and a multi-ingredient (poison) recipe. They are all-of-a piece. The following list charts the critical components of the political pathology under examination:

### **A. Vengeful Palingenetic Racial-/Ethno-Ultra-Nationalism Including a Sense of Victimization and Betrayal, "Them and Us" Othering, and Promotion of Traditional Social Hierarchy**



1. Fairy tale and vengeful notions of a glorious, “golden age” national past of patriarchal racial purity betrayed – “stabbed in the back” – by selfish and evil liberal and Left elites.
2. A quest for national rebirth linked to “palingenetic ultra-nationalism” meaning, in historian Roger Griffin’s words, a drive “to regenerate the social, economic, and cultural life of a country by basing it on a heightened sense of national belonging or national identity”.
3. A dreaded sense of the decline of the nation and/or a once properly dominant ethnic or religious group under the destructive impact of left radicalism, class struggle, liberal tolerance, individualism, multi-culturalism, and outside/alien influences.
4. The passionate belief that one’s national, ethnic, and/or religious group is being unfairly victimized under the direction of nefarious elites and in dire need of redemption and revitalization.
5. A forcefully nationalist identity weaponized against adversaries both internal and external, intimately linked to and combined with *an obsession with borders*.
6. A fierce attachment to one’s national, ethnic, and/or religious group coupled with the belief that any action (without legal or moral boundaries) is defensible to *eliminate* perceived threats to one’s national, ethnic, and/or religious group.
7. Othering: chronic “Us and Them” scapegoating of demonized Others and foreigners, with singular, plural, and/or merged “Them”/Other groups accused of causing great harm.
8. The *dehumanization* and *degradation* of racial, ethnic, religious, cultural Others, and political enemies, intimately related to a cold willingness to abandon past normative legal and moral conventions when it comes to eradicating the threat these demonized Others are said to pose.
9. The right of the good “chosen people” (“Us”) to rule the bad Others (“Them”) without restraint from existing legal, moral, or religious rules since the “right” is granted by the “chosen” ones’ Darwinian and/or moral superiority.
10. An obsession with perceived intruders and outsiders, especially those seen as from outside the rightfully and naturally dominant

racial, ethnic, and/or cultural group.

11. A rustic, small-town fear, suspicion, and hatred of large, cosmopolitan cities, seen as swarthy and diseased hotbeds of demonized Others: racial and ethnic minorities (including Jews), intellectuals, liberals, leftists, feminists, labor activists, civil and human rights movements, “sexual deviants”, and race-mixers.
12. Hyper-masculinist sexist patriarchy attached to “traditional” oppressive gender roles.
13. The promotion and glorification of traditional social and political hierarchy beneath revolutionary and transformative claims.
14. An aggrieved sense that the Othered poor below and the nefarious and conspiring elites above the virtuous and victimized volk/People championed by the fearless Leader and his party are lazy, criminal, and corrupt “takers” who steal resources and power from the honest and hard-working volk of the “heartland”, “motherland”, and/or “fatherland”.

#### **B. Authoritarianism: Contempt for “Normal” Bourgeois Constitutional Democracy, Liberalism, Opposition, Rule of Law, Civility, Decency, and Difference**

1. A sense of tremendous national and social crisis that cannot be realistically dealt with through traditional solutions from liberals and conservatives and that must be addressed by drastic action on the part of a new, bold, male Leader and party under his command.
2. Obsessive anti-liberalism cojoined with obsessive anti-socialism/anti-communism and anti-conservatism but with an understanding that fascists are willing to engage in alliance with other sectors, especially the right.
3. The quest for a one-party state, requiring the defeat and elimination of opposition parties.
4. Cultivation of a direct connection between the Leader and his supporters beyond established political and media intermediaries.
5. Open contempt for and the ugly naming, shaming, mocking, and intimidation of perceived political opponents, rivals, and critics.

6. Promotion of a cult of personality reflecting the perceived necessity of a natural, always male and fearless Leader who alone is seen as capable of redeeming the greatness of the betrayed and victimized Nation and its legitimate People.
7. The recurrent purging of insufficiently loyal political operatives and the requirement that subordinate political functionaries and allies make expressions of fealty and obedience to the fearless leader.
8. Unceasing attacks on the rule of law while upholding the police and military state in the name of law and order: chronic “lawlessness in the name of law and order” (Jason Stanley).
9. Rampant corruption behind an outward accusatory obsession with other elites’ corruption.
10. Disdain for, and discomfort with, disagreement, debate, difference, and division.
11. The embrace of political violence and the cultivation of politicized paramilitaries.
12. Performative pomp, theatrical gatherings, recurrent menacing hate rallies, and an attachment to grandiose spectacles meant to promote a sense of greatness for the Nation, the Leader, and the favored and supposedly victimized racial, ethnic, national, and/or religious group.
13. Emotionally potent and extreme, often *hysterical* statements and language (the “greatest ever”, the “worst ever”, “amazing”, “horrible”, and so on) in defense of the favored Nation and “Us” group and in denunciation of demonized “Them”/Others seen as “enemies of the people”.

### **C. Personalized and Politicized Glorification of the Military, Hyper-Militarism, and Bellicose Nationalism**

1. Personalized and politicized glorification of the military, hyper-militarism, and bellicose nationalism.

### **D. Unreality, Lies, Magical Thinking, and a War on Truth, the Enlightenment, Facts, Expertise, Rationality, Difference, and a Free**

## Press

1. A relentless cultural and propaganda war on truth, facts, and the Enlightenment: constant assaults on the public's capacity to perceive reality. One of fascism's principal goals, historian Federico Finchelstein notes, is "to leave reason behind and return to prejudice".

Fascism does not merely include falsehoods but incorporates them into a distinct and irrational construction of "truth" meant to serve its antidemocratic project.

2. Big and extreme master lies that are repeated over and over to generate mass obedience to the Leader and his party and to undo the power of existing institutions to restrain his rule. (Examples include the Nazis' myth of an international Jewish-Marxist/Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy to destroy Germany and the white race and the Nazis' claim that Communists had burned down the German parliament [the Reichstag Fire] in a coup attempt, thereby supposedly necessitating Hitler's suspension of constitutional rule in the Enabling Act of 1933.)
3. Contempt for a free and non-regime press as an "enemy of the people", combined with the shaming and targeting of media operatives who do not serve the Leader and efforts to circumvent the establishment media with lines of communication linking the Leader directly to his base.
4. A discrediting of facts, science, truth, and law cojoined with the promotion of a mystical and magical bond between the people and the Leader, understood as the embodiment of the will of the volk/People.
5. Relentless attacks on intellectuals, expertise, and reasoned public discourse, linked to the promotion of magical and mystical thinking.
6. A predilection for bizarre, offensive conspiracy theories such as the notion that the Jewish Elders of Zion and George Soros are secretly controlling world events.
7. Belief in the superiority of instinct, will, spirit, faith, and action over reason and intellectual deliberation and the preeminence of

the Leader's instincts, will, strength, spirit, vision, and action over those of lesser mortals and abstract reason.

8. Constant propaganda to mask objectionable (authoritarian, racist, militarist, nativist, and sexist) goals with widely accepted ideals like democracy ("the will of the people") and social cohesion.
9. Fanaticism: excessive enthusiasm, unreasoning zeal, and wild and extravagant, hysterically stated beliefs.
10. "Reactionary modernity": an attachment to traditional national and social hierarchies and values combined with the magical glorification of modern technology, especially military, aviation, rocket, and space technology.

#### **E. Obsessive Fear and Hatred of the Radical Left**

1. Recurrent paranoid anti-socialism/-communism/-Marxism combined with the notion that only the Leader and his party can defeat the supposed menace of radical left revolution.
2. The recurrent false claim that liberal and moderate political opponents are closet radicals and the related constant charge that that liberals are too weak to stop Left radicals from "taking over the country".

#### **F. Fake Populism Combined with Service to the Capitalist Rich and Harm to the Poor and Working Class**

1. A false populist posture that obscures service to and alliance with capitalist elites and capitalism.
2. Appeals to an angry middle class that feels politically humiliated and squeezed by the pressure of supposedly inferior and dissolute social groups below them and arrogant elites above them.
3. The infliction of brutal enormous harm on the poor, the working-class majority, and the most vulnerable members of society more broadly.

#### **G. Social Darwinism**

1. A Social Darwinian call for robust fighting and struggle for superiority combined with fixation on false binaries like triumph vs. defeat, thriving vs. failing, strength vs. weakness, and “greatness” vs. inferiority.
2. Contempt for the elderly, disabled, poor, and infirm, seen as “weak” and worthy of premature death.

## **H. Cruelty and Hate**

Fascism in all its historical and national variants is imbued with an all-encompassing spirit of cruelty and hatred directed towards those deemed illegitimate Others and intruders, towards those deemed weak and inferior, towards those deemed enemies and obstacles of the “people” and their Leader, and towards democracy and the capacity of ordinary people to understand reality. “Fascism, at its base”, writes the prolific chronicler and critic of the American right David Niewert, “is fueled by hate and the pure objectification of an utter lack of empathy for other human beings. Confronting fascism...means first embracing humanity...”<sup>5</sup> I do not give this aspect of fascism any specific file numbers. It is a pervasive feeling the surrounds and permeates the fascist disease, an animating spirit that infests and draws strength from all 8 folders and 45 files.

There’s no absolute empirical standard or social scientific criteria for definitively assigning who and what does or doesn’t qualify as fascist, of course. A person, group, party, or other organization need not exhibit all those characteristics or any of them all the time to qualify as fascist. A reasonable number of them appearing in a more than just occasional fashion will suffice. Using this criterion, we shall see in the next chapter that the Trump presidency was (however clumsily and often instinctively) neofascist, checking off all the boxes, so to speak, and imbued with an insidious and persistent air of malice.

## **Fascistic Eliminationism: Reasons to Cry Wolf Before Trump**

No discerning observer should have been surprised to see Trump's presidency transgress in fascistic ways. Incipient neofascism had been rearing its head in American politics and society since well before "Donito Trumpolini" arrived to take the disease into the executive branch of the world's most powerful nation like never before. Speaking to *The New Yorker* editor's chief editor David Remnick on a campaign trip to North Carolina four days before the ill-fated 2016 presidential election, then US president Barack Obama said something ominous. "We've seen this coming", Obama told Remnick.

Donald Trump is not an outlier; he is a culmination, a logical conclusion of the rhetoric and tactics of the Republican Party for the past ten, fifteen, twenty years...we've seen it for eight years, even with reasonable people like [former U.S. House Speaker] John Boehner, who, when push came to shove, wouldn't push back against these currents.

As Neiwert, the leading chronicler of the American far-right, noted in his 2017 book *Alt-America: The Rise of the Radical Right in the Age of Trump*:

This [the Trump presidency] was no overnight phenomenon. The dumpster Donald Trump's campaign set on fire in the 2016 election had been slowly filling for years.<sup>6</sup>

People who have studied the extremist right as a historical and political phenomenon in depth are acutely aware of a simple truth: *America has been very, very lucky so far when it comes to fascist political movements. And now, with the arrival of the Donald Trump presidency, that luck appears to have finally run out.*

*This didn't happen overnight* – Trump is the logical end-result of a years-long series of assaults from the American alt-right, not just on American liberalism *but on democratic institutions themselves*. With Trump the long-term creeping radicalization of the American right has come to roost.

*Fascism is not just a historical relic. It remains a living and breathing phenomenon...Its constant enterprise...[is] to return white supremacism to the mainstream, restore its previous legitimacy, and to restore its own power within the nation's political system. With Trump as its champion, it has finally succeeded (emphasis added).<sup>7</sup>*

What had the “dumpster” been “filling” with all those years? Focused largely on the Bill Clinton and George W. Bush years (1993–2008), Neiwert’s 2009 book *The Eliminationists* described the malignant influence of right-wing hate talk on the American “conservative” movement and the Republican Party. Tracing vitriol to the dank recesses of an increasingly mainstreamed far-right, Neiwert documented the disturbing spread of racist, nativist, sexist, hyper-masculinist, anti-intellectual and authoritarian ideas, and rhetoric. “What motivates this kind of talk and behavior”, Neiwert showed, “is eliminationism: a politics and culture that shuns dialogue and the democratic exchange of ideas in favor of the pursuit of outright elimination of the opposing side, either through suppression, exile, and ejection, or extermination”. Eliminationists brand their opponents not merely as “the enemy” but as “scum”, subhuman, disease-laden vermin in need of eradication.

Eliminationism, Neiwert wrote, was “the desire to eliminate one’s adversaries, to purge from our midst those we deem our enemies”.<sup>8</sup> It was both a core ideational component, a “signature trait”, of classic historical fascism and deeply latent in the American national psyche thanks to the USA’s long genocidal and racist history of removing, murdering, dehumanizing, enslaving, and/or otherwise exploiting and oppressing non-white people, immigrants, overseas populations, and nature – a topic to be discussed at some length in the present volume’s sixth chapter.

As a result of this eliminationist discourse, picked up from the white supremacist far right and then moved into more conventional Republican politics by such media “transmitters” as Rush Limbaugh, Bill O’Reilly, Marc Levin, Lou Dobbs, Glenn Beck, and Sean Hannity, the nation’s “conservative” movement metastasized into something not genuinely conservative, but instead *radically right-wing and potentially lethal*.



Neiwert considered the new pathology to be “para-fascism” – not yet fully fascist but potentially part of a future transition to fascism:

I’ve devised a term to describe what’s taking place: para-fascism. Para-fascists are distinct from proto-fascists in that they lack certain traits of fascists in their nascent form, yet they stand as a constant threat in that they could find the means and motives to turn into the real thing – if not now, perhaps even years down the road. Fascism, in its previous manifestation often took root, like all pathologies, after years of subsisting on the margins of society. So while it would be incorrect to call modern conservatives “fascists,” the transformation of movement conservatism has created, in essence, the groundwork for the eventual outbreak of genuine fascism. You need look no further than the ugly eliminationism now ascendant on the Right to get a good view of this reality.<sup>9</sup>

The investigative reporter Max Blumenthal’s chilling 2009 book *Republican Gomorrah* depicted “a Republican Party fully in the grip of its right wing: almost exclusively white, overwhelmingly evangelical, fixated on abortion, homosexuality, and abstinence education; resentful and angry; and unable to discuss how and why it had become this way”. By Blumenthal’s account, far-right Christian white nationalist forces now had “a leash on the party”, compelling it to make the fanatically paranoid and anti-intellectual evangelical white supremacist Sarah Palin its 2008 vice-presidential nominee while pushing “moderate” Republicans like John McCain to the party’s margins and cultivating a mass Amerikaner base full of angry and anxious white volk seeking to “escape from freedom” by submitting to the rule of authoritarian and theocratic nationalists.<sup>10</sup>

With the 2008 presidential election victory of Barack Obama, a Black Democrat with a Muslim-sounding name, Neiwert figured that “para-fascist” and eliminationist rhetoric would escalate in the USA. He was born out. After Obama’s ascendancy, the “conservative” movement was hijacked by a racist and conspiratorial culture of para- to proto-fascist paranoia. Right-wing Websites and Tea Partiers absurdly denounced the center-right corporate-neoliberal Democrat Obama and his capitalist party as totalitarian

“communists”. The “conservative” movement went apocalyptic, with Glenn Beck depicting Obama dousing the American people with gasoline and Rep. Michelle Bachmann (R-MN) calling for “an orderly revolution” against the Democrats’ “socialism”. Radical right rhetoric went ballistic on the air, on the Internet, among many Republican leaders in Washington and among millions of more ordinary, mostly white and male Republicans, on the ground. Amerikaner neo-fascism found a major network home in the form of FOX News. There emerged what Neiwert described as a white-nationalist “Alt-America”: a mental space beyond fact or logic, where the rules of evidence were replaced by “paranoia”. In this “alternative universe” nurtured by a powerful right-wing media sector in radio, TV, and online:

- Not just supposedly radical socialist Democrats like Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton but most mainstream politicians were the corrupt agents of a malevolent New World Order (NWO) seeking to enslave humanity under the rule of a global government.
- The American government was a criminal, unconstitutional institution that overthrew American democracy in the Progressive Age and 1930s, controlling the nation’s currency for corrupt ends through the Federal Reserve system.
- White people were now the main targets of racial prejudice and oppression even as they were shamed for supposed racism by nefarious liberal and leftist “political correctness”.
- The Black Lives Matter movement was just another example of minorities’ false claims of victimization, cover for Black and other minorities’ parasitic reliance on government programs while homeless white military veterans starved.
- Global warming was a hoax perpetrated by global elites to cripple American industry, impose stultifying socialist regulations, and force noble white Americans off public lands and into slavery.
- The NWO and American government wanted to steal Americans’ guns to impose a dictatorship.
- Hordes of mainly LatinX “illegal” immigrants plagued America as part of a liberal and Democratic NWO conspiracy to swamp the nation with welfare-dependent parasites who would vote Democratic.

- Barack Obama was a Muslim terrorist born in Kenya and working with the NWO to impose Islamic “sharia law” in the USA.
- Hillary Clinton could defeat Donald Trump only if the 2016 election was “rigged” and good Americans were justified in planning for an armed revolution if the NWO succeeded in stealing the contest for her.<sup>11</sup>

These and other wild, far-right storylines helped enable Trump’s 2016 victory and were subsequently legitimized by that victory in the eyes of many of his adherents.

While such “paranoid-style”,<sup>12</sup> para-to-proto-fascist narratives went white hot under the nation’s first Black president, the alt-Right was the culmination of a far-right racist movement that had been growing since the early 1990s with roots far back in the American past. Neiwert’s narrative in *Alt-America* begins with the rise of a citizens’ Patriot militia and survivalist movement, fueled by fears of gun control and by hostility towards Mexican immigration under Bill Clinton. The Patriot movement of the 1990s was driven by conspiracy theories about shadowy global (NWO) elites. It had significant origins in the arch-reactionary white supremacist movements (including the White Citizens’ Councils and the Ku Klux Klan) of the Civil Rights era and the 1950s–1960s anti-communist John Birch society. It achieved public notoriety in a series of dramatic stand-offs between armed groups and federal agents, most notably in Ruby Ridge, Montana, and Waco, Texas. Meanwhile, academic racists like Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein (of *Bell Curve* infamy) devised neofascistic white-nationalist, and Social Darwinian theories of alleged Black and LatinX inferiority (and supposed white superiority) under a more “respectable”, fake-scientific guise.

Under George W. Bush, the Patriot movement declined in influence largely because many of its adherents fell prey to 9/11 conspiracy theories and opposed Bush’s initially popular war on/of terror. But the movement reemerged in response to the potential rise and then the reality of a first Black president. From Obama’s election on, the USA witnessed a significant rise in far-right terror attacks and a resurgence of 1990s-like stand-offs between armed right-wing white supremacists and the federal government in the West. Meanwhile, a new far-right media nexus arose with the emergence of the neofascist website Breitbart, headed by the future white-nationalist

Trump campaign manager Steve Bannon, and FOX News' emergence as a champion of the faux-populist Tea Party, with the wacky white-supremacist Glenn Beck in the lead. FOX's embrace of the Tea Party functioned, Neiwert finds, as "a mechanism to mainstream the far-right", joining Patriot conspiracists with FOX's more conventional Reaganite and Bush fan "conservatives". Against this background, a lethal and pseudo-conservative union of conspiratorialists, racists, Patriots, and Tea Partiers consolidated around the "alt-right" – an online gathering of younger white-nationalist males. The title was coined by the neo-Nazi "intellectual" Richard Spencer, who would celebrate Trump's inauguration by holding a November 19, 2016 press conference in which he called the USA "a white country, designed for ourselves and our posterity. It is our creation, it is our inheritance, and it belongs to us". Spencer then raised his arm in a Nazi salute and bellowed "Hail Trump! Hail our people! Hail victory!"<sup>13</sup>

It wasn't just about the right. It was also and more deeply about a corporate-managed society and culture under regular spiritual assault by movies, video games, sporting events, and television shows that glorified sadistic brutality, militarism, narcissism, and cynicism.<sup>14</sup>

An especially potent and historically new platform for the dissemination of previously unthinkable ideas and racist and sexist venom was the booming late and post-1990s Internet and its various unregulated so-called social media outposts. In his important book *Anti-Social: Online Extremists, Techno-Utopians, and the Hijacking of the American Conversation*, the investigate reporter Andrew Marantz chronicles how the supposedly free and democratic internet imagined by Silicon Valley titans became a vehicle through which cynical propagandists pushed the alt-right into the mainstream and led alienated white people down into the dark rabbit holes of online white nationalist conspiratorialism and radicalization – in a word, to fascism. "Alt-right" trolls went on Facebook and Twitter in a relentless campaign to nudge online discourse further to the far-right. "On Reddit and 4chan and 8chan, where the content moderation was almost nonexistent", Marantz writes, "the memes were...overtly vile. Many alt-right trolls started calling themselves 'fashy' and 'fash-ist.' They referred to all liberals and traditional conservatives as Communists, or 'degenerates'; they posted pro-Pinochet propaganda; they baited 'normies' into arguments by insinuating that

‘Hitler had done nothing wrong’”.<sup>15</sup> Marantz shows how formerly fringe and fascist ideas spread, making “the unthinkable thinkable” in ways that would feed the rise of Trump and Trumpism.

By early 2014, the noted and prolific left cultural critic and educational theorist Henry Giroux could describe the nation that had hatched this right-wing eliminationist movement in the following haunting terms:

America is descending into madness. The stories it now tells are filled with cruelty, deceit and lies and legitimate all manner of corruption and mayhem. The mainstream media spin stories that are largely racist, violent, and irresponsible – stories that celebrate power and demonize victims....A predatory culture celebrates a narcissistic hyper-individualism that radiates a near-sociopathic lack of interest in – or compassion and responsibility for others...Undermining life-affirming social solidarities and any viable notion of the public good, politicians trade in forms of idiocy and superstition that seem to mesmerize the undereducated and render the thoughtful cynical and disengaged.<sup>16</sup>

## **Pre-president Trump**

### ***Respect for Authority and Abusive Cops***

And then there was pre-president Trump himself. The future 45th POTUS gave abundant indications of how white-supremacist and even fascistic a Trump presidency would be long before he was elected. During the late 1980s he made a political mark for himself with harsh public comments about the Central Park Five, the five Black and Latino men who as teenagers were wrongly convicted of the rape of a white female jogger in New York City. They would be exonerated in 2002. Trump bought newspaper advertisements calling for New York State to “bring back the death penalty” in the aftermath of the attack. (Trump has never apologized for these actions despite the full exoneration of the falsely accused men). Trump took out a newspaper advertisement containing this chilling statement endorsing crude

police violence and the denial of urban citizenship to “the [predominantly Black and LatinX] criminal population”:

What has happened to our city over the past ten years?...What has happened to the respect for authority, the fear of *retribution* by the courts, society, and the police for those who break the law...? [New Yorkers are]...hostages to a world ruled by the law of the streets, as roving bands of criminals roam our neighborhoods...[enabled by a] reckless and dangerously permissive atmosphere which allows criminals to beat and rape a helpless woman...?...When I was young, I sat in a diner with my father and witnessed two young bullies cursing and threatening a very frightened waitress. Two cops rushed in, lifted up the thugs and threw them out the door, warning them never to cause trouble again. *I miss the feeling of security New York's finest once gave to the citizens of this City. Let our politicians give back our police department's power to keep us safe. Unshackle them from the constant chant of "police brutality" which every petty criminal hurls immediately at an officer who has just risked his or her life to save another's. We must cease our continuous pandering to the criminal population of this City. Give New York back to the citizens who have earned the right to be New Yorkers.*<sup>17</sup>

## ***Hitler's Speeches and the Big Lie Theory***

In 1990, we learned about some of the intellectual inspiration behind such sentiments. According to a 1990 *Vanity Fair* interview, Trump's first wife Ivana (married to Donald Trump from 1977 through 1990) told her lawyer Michael Kennedy that Trump kept a book of Hitler's speeches near his bed, regularly reading it.<sup>18</sup> The book, *My New Order* (1941), contained Hitler's orations from his earliest days up through the fall of 1939. Here is a sample of some of the hysterical, violent, authoritarian, and ethno-national passages that Trump studied as a rising real estate mogul with political ambitions:

(From a Speech in Munich on March 15, 1929): If men wish to live, then they are forced to kill others. The entire *struggle for survival* is a

conquest of the means of existence, which in turn results in *the elimination of others from these same sources of subsistence*. As long as there are peoples on this earth, there will be nations against nations and they will be forced to protect their vital rights in the same way as the individual is forced to protect his rights. One is either the hammer or the anvil. We confess that it is our purpose to prepare the *German people again for the role of the hammer... We confess further that we will dash anyone to pieces who should dare hinder us in this undertaking... Our rights will be protected only when the German Reich [country] is again supported by the point of the German dagger*.

(From a Speech in Nuremberg, September 14, 1935): Nothing is possible unless one will commands, a will which has to be obeyed by others, beginning at the top and ending only at the very bottom. This is the *expression of an authoritarian state – not of a weak, babbling democracy – of an authoritarian state where everyone is proud to obey, because he knows: I will likewise be obeyed when I must take command*.

(From a Speech Justifying the Annexation of Austria, April 9, 1938): When one day we shall be no more, then the coming generations shall be able to look back with pride upon this day, the day on which *a great Volk affirmed the German community*. In the past, millions of German men shed their blood for this Reich. How merciful a fate to be allowed to create this Reich today without a suffering. Now, *rise, German Volk, subscribe to it, hold it tightly in your hands!*<sup>19</sup>

Trump's lawyer, Milton Gould, said something very revealing to *Vanity Fair*'s Marie Brenner in 1990. "Trump", Gould told Brenner, "is a believer in the big-lie theory", his lawyer had told me. "If you say something again and again, people will believe you".

Who invented "the big lie theory?" It is often attributed to the German Nazi politician and Reich Minister of Propaganda of Nazi Germany from 1933 to 1945, Joseph Goebbels, one of Adolf Hitler's closest and most loyal associates. "If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it", Goebbels is purported to have said:

People will eventually come to believe it. The lie can be maintained only for such time as the State can shield the people from the political, economic and/or military consequences of the lie. It thus becomes vitally important for the State to use all of its powers to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and thus by extension, the truth is the greatest enemy of the State.

The real inventor may instead have been Hitler himself, about whom the US Office of Strategic Services, predecessor of the Central Intelligence Agency wrote this:

His primary rules were: never allow the public to cool off; never admit a fault or wrong; never concede that there may be some good in your enemy; never leave room for alternatives; never accept blame; concentrate on one enemy at a time and blame him for everything that goes wrong; people will believe a big lie sooner than a little one; and if you repeat it frequently enough people will sooner or later believe it.<sup>20</sup>

This was a perfect match for Trump's public conduct before as well during his presidency.

It is difficult, in light of his subsequent political career, to believe that the middle-aged real estate tycoon Trump was not influenced by Hitler's fascist rhetoric. "Trump's 'America First'", the Marxist economist Richard Wolff would write in March of 2017, "is not far removed from 'Deutschland Uber Alles'. The parallels between Hitler's strategy and Trump are too many and too close to ignore".<sup>21</sup>

### ***"Obama Needs to Get Off the Basketball Court"***

In 2000, Trump was fined for secretly funding ads opposing a Native American gambling proposal.<sup>22</sup> The ads included pictures of syringes and cocaine and asked, "Are these the new neighbors we want?"<sup>23</sup>

Trump's first public doubting of Barack Obama, the nation's first Black president, came in February of 2011, when Trump absurdly told the Conservative Political Action Council (CPAC) that Barack Obama's college



and law school classmates had never seen him in school.<sup>24</sup> One month later, Trump went on the talk show “The View” to say that “President Obama must show his birth certificate”.<sup>25</sup> A month later, in an interview with the Associated Press, Trump questioned how President Obama got into Columbia and Harvard and told reporters Obama should “get off the basketball court”.<sup>26</sup>

That same month, Trump told an Albany, New York, radio show “I have a great relationship with *the Blacks*”.<sup>27</sup>

In April of 2013, Trump tweeted that a documentary about the racist conviction and subsequent exoneration of the Central Park Five was “one-sided” and didn’t explain their “horrific crimes”.<sup>28</sup> One year later, he published an Op-Ed for the *New York Daily News* in which he claimed that the wrongly convicted men were “no angels” and that the city’s \$40 million settlement with them was a “heist”.<sup>29\*</sup>

\* From this point on, I will mention and list Trump’s voluminous fascistic and horrific actions, statements, comments, tweets mostly without annotation. Presidential candidate and then President Trump’s actions and rhetoric are richly documented matters of public record that can easily be searched and sourced online. The full annotation of Trump’s almost overwhelming and constant blitzkrieg of transgressions would require word count space beyond publication requirements. Recording each citation is also simply beyond the present author’s physical and mental capacities.

## ***Candidate Trump: “Our Country Needs a Great Leader”***

Trump’s opening campaign announcement at Trump Tower on June 16, 2015, was a sign of terrible things to come. Trump rode down an escalator preceded by his younger, onetime fashion model wife on display as a silent sex object, a supposed sign of Trump’s manliness, while his campaign blasted out Neil Young’s classic rock tune “Rock’n in the Free World”. Trump used the occasion to call Mexican immigrants “rapists” and drug-dealers and said “I would build a great wall, and nobody builds walls better than me, believe me, and I’ll build them very inexpensively, I will build a great, great wall on our southern border. And I will have Mexico pay for that wall”. Trump then gave his reasons for running for the White House, combining deception about the size of his assembled audience (much of which he hired) with brazenly narcissistic grandiosity, crude personal attacks

on political rivals, incoherent rambling, preposterous assertions, calls for national regeneration, hatred of foreign enemies, accusations of corruption and weakness, appeals to personal and national strength, promises of order and efficiency, arch-militarism, and a call for a great new national “leader” (Trump):

Wow...it’s an honor to have everybody here. This is beyond anybody’s expectations. *There’s been no crowd like this.* And, I can tell, some of the (Republican) candidates, they went in. They didn’t know the air-conditioner didn’t work. *They sweated like dogs.* They didn’t know the room was too big, because they didn’t have anybody there. How are they going to beat ISIS? I don’t think it’s gonna happen.

Our country is in serious trouble. *We don’t have victories anymore. We used to have victories, but we don’t have ‘em. When is the last time anybody saw us beating, let’s say, China....I’d beat China all the time. All the time. When did we beat Japan, at anything?...They beat us all the time. When do we beat Mexico at the border? They’re laughing at us, at our stupidity. And now they’re beating us economically...They are killing us economically...Our enemies are getting stronger and stronger by the way, and we as a country are getting weaker. Even our nuclear arsenal doesn’t work.*

I love the military, and I want to have *the strongest military that we’ve ever had...* Well, you need somebody, because politicians are all talk, no action. Nothing’s gonna get done. They will not bring us – believe me – to the promised land. They will not...So I’ve watched the politicians. I’ve dealt with them all my life...*They will never make America great again...Now, our country needs – our country needs a truly great leader, and we need a truly great leader now. We need a leader that wrote *The Art of the Deal*. We need a leader that can bring back our jobs, can bring back our manufacturing, can bring back our military, can take care of our vets...We need – we need somebody – we need somebody that literally will take this country and make it great again.* We can do that.

You know, all of my life, I've heard that a truly successful person, a really, really successful person and even modestly successful cannot run for public office. Just can't happen. And yet that's the kind of mindset that you need to make this country great again. So ladies and gentlemen...I am officially running...for president of the United States, and we are going to make our country great again.

It can happen. Our country has tremendous potential. We have tremendous people. We have people that aren't working. We have people that have no incentive to work. But they're going to have incentive to work, because the greatest social program is a job. And they'll be proud, and they'll love it, and they'll make much more than they would've ever made, and they'll be – they'll be doing so well, and we're going to be thriving as a country, thriving. It can happen. *I will be the greatest jobs president that God ever created. I tell you that. I'll bring back our jobs from China, from Mexico, from Japan, from so many places. I'll bring back our jobs, and I'll bring back our money.*

Right now, think of this: We owe China \$1.3 trillion. We owe Japan more than that. So they come in, they take our jobs, they take our money, and then they loan us back the money, and we pay them in interest, and then the dollar goes up so their deal's even better. We got \$18 trillion in debt. *We got nothing but problems. We got a military that needs equipment all over the place. We got nuclear weapons that are obsolete. We've got nothing. We've got Social Security that's going to be destroyed if somebody like me doesn't bring money into the country.* All these other people want to cut the hell out of it. I'm not going to cut it at all; I'm going to bring money in, and we're going to save it.

But all of these [Republican] politicians that I'm running against now, they're trying to disassociate. I mean, you looked at [Jeb] Bush, it took him five days to answer the question on Iraq. He couldn't answer the question. He didn't know. I said, "Is he intelligent?"

Then I looked at Rubio. He was unable to answer the question, is Iraq a good thing or bad thing? He didn't know. He couldn't answer the question. How are these people gonna lead us? How are we gonna – how are we gonna go back and make it great again? We can't. They don't have a clue. They can't lead us. They can't. They can't even answer simple questions. It was terrible.

*We have losers...people that don't have it. We have people that are morally corrupt. We have people that are selling this country down the drain...How are these people gonna lead us? How are we gonna – how are we gonna go back and make it great again?...There is so much wealth out there that can make our country so rich again, and therefore make it great again. Because we need money. We're dying. We're dying. We need money. We have to do it. And we need the right people....We have losers.*

I will find – within our military, I will find the General Patton or I will find General MacArthur, I will find the right guy. I will find the guy that's going to take that military and make it really work. Nobody, *nobody will be pushing us around.*

Rebuild the country's infrastructure, nobody can do that like me. Believe me. It will be done on time, on budget, way below cost, way below what anyone ever thought...Sadly, the American dream is dead. But if I get elected president I will bring it back bigger and *better and stronger than ever before, and we will make America great again.*

The passage above combined many of the fascism traits listed above: a sense of national crisis beyond traditional liberal and conservative solutions, vengeful and fairy tale nationalism, national regeneration/palingenetic nationalism, a sense of national decline, a sense of national/ethnic victimization, a fierce nationalism directed against foreign and domestic enemies, “Us” and “Them” scapegoating of demonized and dehumanized Others, a populist posture as a man of the people in their battle with nefarious elites, a Social Darwinian obsession with weakness and strength,

the cult of the heroic male Leader (Trump), action over deliberation, militarism, performative pomp, and grandiose theater, and emotionally evocative extreme statements. Along the way, Trump channeled the anti-intellectual war on truth with numerous *absurdly false claims*: the nation's gross domestic product (“a sign of strength, right?”) had fallen “below zero” under Obama; the nation's unemployment rate was 20 percent; the Islamic State and Iran “have the oil” that America was supposed to have gained from the invasion of Iraq; “there are no jobs” (because they were all taken by China and “the new China, Mexico”); the Obama Pentagon didn't know if its nuclear weapons technology worked; Obamacare was “virtually useless” (but didn't “kick in” until 2016), and so on.

The propagandistic untruths fitted to match a far-right agenda would multiply and go through the roof as Trump's campaign lied, threatened, and insulted his way to the presidency. Candidate Trump would go on to falsely and bombastically claim that:

- The USA was “the most heavily taxed nation in the world”.
- Muslims in New Jersey celebrated the September 11, 2001 terror attacks: “I watched when the World Trade Center came tumbling down. And I watched in Jersey City, New Jersey, where thousands and thousands of people were cheering as that building was coming down. Thousands of people were cheering”.
- “There is no drought” – said to a California rally in 2016 during a major drought ravaging that state.
- “We wouldn't be talking about illegal immigration if it wasn't for me”.
- There had been a call for “a moment of silence” in honor of the murderer of five policemen in Dallas in the summer of 2016.
- Republican presidential candidate Jeb Bush “has to like Mexican illegals because of his [Hispanic] wife”.
- President Barack Obama would have attended Supreme Court Justice Anton Scalia's funeral “if it had been held in a mosque”.
- Obama was “the founder of ISIS OK? He's the founder. He founded ISIS and I would say the co-founder would be crooked Hillary Clinton”.
- Obama was born outside the USA – a great nativist and racist lie Trump repeated through the summer of 2016.
- Republican presidential candidate Ben Carson was a “child molester”.

- The nation’s real unemployment rate was 35 to 42 percent.
- A doctor told Trump that he had “the blood pressure of a great, great athlete who is 20 years old”.
- Ted Cruz’s father was linked to the assassination of John F. Kennedy.
- “Hillary wants to abolish, essentially abolish, the Second [right to bear arms] Amendment”.
- “I was totally against the war in Iraq”.

Candidate Trump suggested in one of his debates with Hillary Clinton that he might not accept defeat in the 2016 presidential election. He boasted to an Iowa rally in January of 2016 that “I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody, and I wouldn’t lose voters”. He told the 2016 Republican National Convention that “I alone can fix” the nation’s problems – a frequent theme in his campaign rallies. He suggested that voters didn’t care about candidates’ policy positions and that he would win because “the voters like me, they understand me, they know I’m going to do the job”. He openly asked the authoritarian white nationalist Russian government to intervene in the election on his behalf. He praised Russia’s authoritarian head of state Vladimir Putin by saying this to MSNBC in December of 2015: “He’s running his country and at least he’s a leader”.

He told an Iowa rally that he “kn[e]w more about ISIS than the generals do. Believe me”. Candidate Trump said this when asked by MSNBC hosts in March of 2016 who he got foreign policy advice from: “I’m speaking with myself, number one, because I have a very good brain and I’ve said a lot of things”.

He said this at an Arizona rally in June of 2016: “I feel like a supermodel except, like, times 10, OK? It’s true. I’m a supermodel”. He asked a Pennsylvania rally “how handsome am I? How handsome?”

Candidate Trump openly encouraged political violence at his raucous campaign events, saying this at a rally in Cedar Rapids, Iowa:

They said, “Mr. Trump, there may be someone with tomatoes in the audience.” So if you see somebody getting ready to throw a tomato, knock the crap out of them, would you? Seriously. Okay? Just knock the hell — I promise you, I will pay the legal fees.

Trump said this at a rally in Las Vegas:

There's a guy, totally disruptive, throwing punches; we're not allowed to punch back anymore. I love the old days. You know what they used to do to guys like that when they were in a place like this? They'd be carried out on a stretcher, folks.

Candidate Trump complained that it took too long to remove protesters from his rallies “because *nobody wants to hurt each other anymore*”.

Candidate Trump encouraged right-wing gun violence against the government by saying this at an August 2016 rally in North Carolina: “By the way, and if [Hillary] gets to pick her judges, nothing you can do, folks. Although the Second Amendment people—maybe there is, I don't know”.

After two white men indicated Donald Trump inspired them to beat and urinate on a homeless Hispanic man in August of 2015, Trump said it was “a shame”, but that his supporters were “passionate”.

After a Black protester chanting “Black Lives Matter” at his November 2015 Alabama rally was pushed and punched, Trump tweeted false and provocative statistics about the percentage of white people killed by Black people.

In December of 2015, Trump favorably compared his proposed Muslim immigration ban to the infamous racist internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. In an interview with ABC, he said his Muslim proposal was no different than that notorious policy.

On May 5, 2016, Trump tweeted a photo of himself eating a taco salad, with the message “I love Hispanics” and “Happy #CincoDeMayo”.

Declaring himself the “law and order candidate” in July of 2016, Trump said that “It's time for our hostility against our police and against all members of law enforcement to end and end immediately right now”.

Candidate Trump threatened to undo First Amendment free speech protections, saying this at a rally in Texas:

If I become president, oh, do they [the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*] have problems. They're going to have such problems... I'm going to open up our libel laws so when they write

purposely negative and horrible and false articles, we can sue them and win lots of money.

Candidate Trump demeaned, degraded, and menaced women opponents and critics again and again. He referred to news broadcaster Megyn Kelly's menstruation as follows: "You could see there was blood coming out of her eyes, blood coming out of her wherever". He insulted Republican presidential candidate Carly Fiorina's looks, saying "Look at that face! Would anyone vote for that?" He said this to the *New York Times* about a celebrity model: "Heidi Klum. Sadly, she's no longer a 10".

He physically stalked Hillary Clinton on a debate stage, behaving like a boorish and unprepared adolescent during his not-so-presidential debates with Mrs. Clinton, whom he called "a nasty woman" and threatened (to the applause of his white nationalist campaign rally attendees) to "lock up". He called Hillary Clinton "the devil". He said this during a December Michigan rally about Hillary Clinton being late to a Democratic primary debate stage after using the bathroom during a commercial break: "I know where she went, it's disgusting, I don't want to talk about it. No, it's too disgusting". He said that Hillary Clinton "got schlonged" by Barack Obama during the 2008 Democratic presidential primary. He led campaign rallies in the chant "Lock Her Up, Lock Her Up!", calling for the incarceration of his female opponent in the 2016 presidential election.

Combining racism with sexism, candidate Trump mockingly labelled US Senator Elizabeth Warren "Pocahantas" because of her claim to possess Native American ancestry.

Candidate Trump called for the "punishment" of women who have "illegal abortions". He not so stealthily bragged about the purported grand size of his genitals. He denied twice in October 2016 that he had sexually assaulted women by suggesting that neither of two accusers were attractive enough to merit rape. Jessica Leeds said Trump groped her when they sat next to each other on a plane. Trump's responded by saying this at a rally: "Believe me, she would not be my first choice...That would not be my first choice". He dismissed reporter Natasha Stoyloff's charge in the same way: "You take a look. Take a look at her". Trump said at a rally. "You tell me what you think".



Candidate Trump refused to disavow racists like David Duke and his followers. He brought on as his chief political strategist the neofascist racist Stephen Bannon, the editor of the popular white-nationalist Website Breitbart News. He told a Republican luncheon in Baltimore that Black youth “have no spirit”. He called for the banning of Muslim migration to the USA “until our country’s representatives can figure out what is going on”. He said this at a June 2016 rally in New Hampshire: “That could be a Mexican plane up there. They’re getting ready to attack”. He suggested that a distinguished federal judge hearing a case involving Trump’s fraudulent Trump University was biased against Trump because the jurist was “Mexican”.

He spotted a Black person at a June 2016 California rally and yelled “look at my African-American here”. He embraced racial profiling in a June 2016 CBS interview. He called for a “national stop-and-frisk law” (which would have created a national regime of *de facto* racist martial law) in the name of “law and order”.

Candidate Trump gave his fellow presidential contenders juvenile and nasty nicknames (“Little Marco”, “Low Energy Jeb”, “Crooked Hillary”, “Crazy Bernie”). He said this about Republican presidential candidate Rand Paul: “I never attacked him on looks and believe me there’s a lot of subject matter there”. He mocked Republican presidential candidate Marco Rubio for “sweat[ing] more than any young person I’ve seen in my life”. He told a Pennsylvania rally in May of 2016 that Republican presidential candidate John Kasich “is a stubborn guy who eats like a slob”. He even divulged Republican presidential candidate Lindsey Graham’s cell phone number at a campaign rally.

He openly mocked a disabled reporter (the *New York Times*’ Serge Kovalski) in the juvenile fashion of a vicious grade-school bully. He mocked Asians in front of hot microphones. He called an ABC reporter “a sleaze” in a May 2016 press conference.

He embraced the foreign policy slogan “America First”, which began as an antiwar isolationist slogan and then “morphed into an explicitly xenophobic and fascist slogan”<sup>30</sup> in the 1940s.

He said this about the US military triad (land, air, and sea-based nuclear weapons): “I think — I think, for me, nuclear is just the power, the devastation is very important to me”. He added this when asked on the white

nationalist FOX News show “The O’Reilly Factor” if he would use nuclear weapons in Europe: “Europe is a big place, I’m not going to take cards off the table”. He asked why the USA had nuclear weapons if it couldn’t use them and insanely advocated the nuclear weaponization of arch-reactionary and absolutist Saudi Arabia.

He embraced torture (“it works”) and called for the murder of alleged Islamic terrorists’ families. He said in a February 2016 Republican presidential debate that “I would bring back waterboarding. And I’d bring back a hell of a lot worse than waterboarding”.

Candidate Trump went on the radio show of the far-right conspiracy theorist Alex Jones.

As the venerable liberal-left commentator Harold Myerson observed three days before Trump was formally nominated by the Republican Party,

Trump’s racist, xenophobic, and nationalist appeals; his division of the nation into valorous and victimized native-born whites and menacing non-white interlopers; his constant employment of some Big Lies and many Little ones; and his scant regard for civil liberties make him *the closest thing to a fascist of any major party presidential nominee in our history* (emphasis added).<sup>31</sup>

## **Addressing the National “Crisis” With “Law and Order”**

Students of authoritarian rhetoric and ideology would have done well to listen closely to Trump’s speech accepting the Republican Party’s presidential nomination at the Republican National Convention in July of 2016. Trump promised to lead Americans back to “safety” and “security” from a “crisis for our nation”. The crisis was urban crime and terrorism that “threaten[ed] our way of life”. The enemies of America were found in the nation’s disproportionately Black and LatinX cities, “illegal” non-white and often “Islamic radical” immigrants and refugees, and nefarious foreign powers like Iran and the Islamic State.

These evil Others were being permitted to menace virtuous US citizens, Trump absurdly claimed, by “radical” proponents of “mass lawlessness” and

“mass amnesty” like Obama and his opponent Hillary Clinton, who Trump accused of “rolling back criminal enforcement”.

Trump promised to stop the supposed “liberal” and “left” insanity with a new emphasis on “law and order”. Along the way, he posed as the populist champion of virtuous and hard-working and middle classes – as a champion of ordinary Americans. He promised to reject “corporate spin” and restore “prosperity” for the poor, economically insecure, and jobless “forgotten men and women of this country”. He promised to advance “Americanism, not globalism”, with a manly presidency that would “Make America Great Again” by cracking down on urban and immigrant criminals and external foes. It was a classic strongman pitch.

In an especially ironic part of his acceptance speech, Trump accused President Obama of having “irresponsib[ly]...used the pulpit of the presidency to divide us by race and color”, thereby “ma[king] America a more dangerous environment for everyone”. That took some real chutzpah. The neoliberal race-accommodationist Obama had spent his administration in abject dread of stirring any more racial division than had already been provoked by his status as the nation’s first Black president.<sup>32</sup> Trump’s speech was a monument to barely veiled racial oppression and division behind the cloak of nationalist unity.

## **Some Warned Early of “The Nightmare to Come”**

Writing during the interregnum between Trump’s 2016 election and 2017 inauguration, David Neiwert listed six classic “fascist traits” that “Trump’s campaign and post-election messages” had channeled: eliminationism, palingenetic ultranationalism, contempt for both liberalism and establishment conservatism, white victimhood, the myth of the lone male Leader (“man of destiny”), and contempt for weakness. Neiwert wrote that “the movement [Trump] has unleashed” was “potentially dangerously fascistic”. Most ominously of all, Neiwert judged that Trump:

has proved to be more dangerous than an outright fascist, because such a figure would be far less appealing and far less likely to succeed in the current milieu. What Trump has succeeded in doing, by exploiting the

strands of right-wing populism in this country, has been to make the large and growing number of proto-fascist groups in America larger and more vicious. *In other words, he is simultaneously responding to and creating the conditions that could easily lead to the genuine growth of fascism*<sup>33</sup> (emphasis added).

Other observers, including conservatives, were less reserved and bashful about the stating the obvious much earlier on. In November of 2015, after Trump retweeted a graphic from #WhiteGenocide, Max Boot, a neoconservative Ted Cruz adviser wrote that “Trump is a fascist. And that’s not a term I use loosely...he’s earned it”.<sup>34</sup> That same month, the future *New York Times* columnist Jamielle Bouie wrote a *Salon* commentary titled “Donald Trump is a Fascist” and emphasizing seven strong parallels between Trump’s campaign rhetoric and Umberto Eco’s concept of “Ur-Fascism”: the masculinist cult of action for action’s sake, intolerance for disagreement and rational debate, a deep “fear of difference” expressed by leaders raging against “intruders”, appeals to a “frustrated middle class” suffering from “feelings of political humiliation” and “frightened by the pressure of lower social groups”, a “nationalist identity set against internal and external enemies”, aggressive celebration of violent masculinity, a “populist elitism” combining “contempt for the weak” with the notion of legitimate white citizens as “the best people of the world”.<sup>35</sup> Also in November of 2015, *The Week*’s correspondent Ryan Cooper warned about what he called “Donald Trump’s alarming skid toward outright fascism”:

Donald Trump is a sort of *fledgling Mussolini, nurturing an incipient fascist movement*. As the first primaries approach, and Trump’s lead in the polls is actually widening, his development toward *outright fascism* is progressing faster than I feared.

As of August, Trump had most of the ingredients for *a fascist movement*: the victim complex, the fervent nationalism, the obsession with national purity and cleansing purges, and the cult of personality. He was missing the organized violence, a left-wing challenge strong enough to push traditional conservative elites into his camp, support for wars of

aggression, and a full-bore attack on democracy itself. He's made much progress on all but the last one.

It's clear now that the Paris [Islamist-terrorist] attacks [of November 2015] enormously energized the Trumpist movement. He's now speculating openly about invading Syria. Trump's proposals have gone *from overt prejudice to things literally taken out of late Weimar history – closure of mosques and a national Muslim database*. The rank-and-file have both fed off and stoked this behavior. When a lone protester started chanting "black lives matter" at a Trump rally, Trumpists jumped him (he was luckily not badly injured). Trump later said, "Maybe he should have been roughed up." Hours later he lied about witnessing Muslim crowds celebrating 9/11, and *retweeted nonsense racist garbage from a literal neo-Nazi*.

Conditions are clearly fertile to start organizing a Trumpist paramilitary wing, a key fascist institution. A pack of heavily armed white nationalist militants recently popped up at a mosque in Irving, Texas, announcing their intention to intimidate local Muslims. Trump's personal security squad is already made up of goons, assaulting people and threatening reporters.

*Violent white nationalism has not been so effectively mainstreamed since the 1920s*. If Trump wins the nomination and the economy turns down next year, I'd give him a decent chance of victory. Even if he is only a sort of "fascist idiot savant" without much true organizing ability or program, he clearly *has a good instinct for the basic psychological impulses underlying previous fascist success. It's time to start taking this seriously* (emphasis added).<sup>36</sup>

In May of 2016, the liberal *New Yorker* commentator Adam Gopnik issued what turned out to be a prophetic warning seven months before Trump's victory over Mrs. Clinton:

There is a simple formula for descriptions of Donald Trump: add together a qualification, a hyphen, and the word "fascist"...his

personality and his program belong exclusively to the same dark strain of modern politics: an incoherent program of *national revenge led by a strongman; a contempt for parliamentary government and procedures; an insistence that the existing, democratically elected government...is in league with evil outsiders and has been secretly trying to undermine the nation; a hysterical militarism designed to no particular end other than the sheer spectacle of strength; an equally hysterical sense of beleaguerment and victimization; and a supposed suspicion of big capitalism entirely reconciled to the worship of wealth and "success."*...*The idea that it can be bounded in by honest conservatives in a Cabinet or restrained by normal constitutional limits is, to put it mildly, unsupported by history* (emphasis added).<sup>37</sup>

Two months before Gopnik's eloquent reflection, I published a *Counterpunch* commentary titled "The Donald Can Happen Here: The Trumpenstein's Neo-Weimar Creators"<sup>38</sup> – a commentary that did not use the F-word but didn't really have to given the literary and historical references embedded in its title. Around the same time, my fellow former *Truthdig* commentator and the former US Secretary of Labor Robert Reich was less bashful. He published a blog post on Trump titled "The American Fascist", arguing that Trump had already reached a point where "parallels between his presidential campaign and the fascists of the first half of the 20th century – lurid figures such as Benito Mussolini, Joseph Stalin, Adolf Hitler, Oswald Mosley, and Francisco Franco – are too evident to overlook". Reich was especially distressed by Trump's evident determination to direct the anger of white Americans against Mexican immigrants and Muslims, Trump's embrace of violence, Trump's apparent readiness to violate international law against torture, Trump's treatment of the media as an enemy, Trump's effort to connect mass followings directly (without political parties or other intermediaries standing between him and his supporters), and Trump's effort to create a cult of personality taking on "the trappings of strength, confidence, and invulnerability – around himself". To make matters worse, Reich noted that Trump had recently quoted Mussolini and began "inviting followers at his rallies to raise their right hands in a manner chillingly similar to the Nazi 'Heil' salute".

“Trump’s tweets and rallies”, Reich noted, “circumvent all filters. The Republican Party is irrelevant to his campaign, and he considers the media an enemy. (Reporters covering his rallies are kept behind a steel barrier.) Viewing Donald Trump in light of the fascists of the first half of the 20th century – who used economic stresses to scapegoat others, created cults of personality, intimidated opponents, incited violence, glorified their nations and disregarded international law, and connected directly with the masses – helps”, Reich wrote, “explain what Trump is doing and how he is succeeding. It also suggests why Donald Trump presents such a profound danger to the future of America and the world”.<sup>39</sup>

Also prescient before Trump’s ascendancy was Henry A. Giroux, who wrote the following in his 2016 book *America at War With Itself*:

Trump is not an aberration. Rather, he is the *successor of a long line of fascists* who shut down public debate, attempt to humiliate their opponents, endorse violence as a response to dissent, and criticize any public display of democratic principles. The United States has reached the endpoint with Trump, and his presence should be viewed as a *stern warning of the possible nightmare to come*.<sup>40</sup>

Riding the neofascistic and alt-right white nationalist wave that existed before his candidacy, Trump went on to be precisely the terrible, corrupt, right-wing, racist, and savagely sexist, fascist president he warned the world he would be. “When people show you who they are”, the famed novelist Maya Angelou once wrote, “believe them the first time”.

## Notes

1. Boggs, *Fascism Old and New*, 196–7.
2. Chomsky, “Sanders Threatens the Establishment.”
3. David Neiwert, *The Eliminationists: How Hate Talk Radicalized the American Right* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 111.
4. Among the countless books I have consulted, these have been especially influential even when I have not always shared all of many of the authors’ different takes on the Trump phenomenon and presidency: John

Bellamy Foster, *Trump in the White House: Tragedy and Farce* (New York: Monthly Review Press, October 2017), Neiwert, *The Eliminationists*; David Neiwert, *Alt-America: The Rise of the Radical Right in the Age of Trump* (New York: Verso, 2017); Jason Stanley, *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them* (New York: Random House, 2018); Henry Giroux, *The Terror of the Unforeseen* (Los Angeles, CA: LARB, 2019); Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Vintage, 2005); Henry Giroux, *American Nightmare: Facing the Challenge of Fascism* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2018); Leon Trotsky, *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1971); Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995); Roger Griffin, *Fascism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America* (New York: Crown, 2019); Federico Finchelstein, *A Brief History of Fascist Lies* (University of California Press, 2020); Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914–1991* (New York: Vintage, 1996); Mark Bray, *Antifa: The Anti-Fascist Handbook* (Blackstone Audio, 2017); Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Strongmen: Mussolini to the Present* (New York: WW Norton, 2020). Among the many useful journalistic, essay, and online reflections I have consulted, these stand out: Ryan Cooper, “Donald Trump’s Alarming Skid to Outright Fascism,” *The Week*, November 24, 2015, <https://theweek.com/articles/590497/donald-trumps-alarming-skid-toward-outright-fascism>; Robert Reich, “The American Fascist,” *RobertReich.org*, March 8, 2016, <https://robertreich.org/post/140705539195>; Harold Myerson, “Bernie, Hillary, and the Ghost of Ernst Thalmann,” *American Prospect*, July 13, 2016, <https://prospect.org/power/bernie-hillary-ghost-ernst-thalmann/>; Curt Guyette, “Is Trump a Fascist? The F-Word,” *Detroit Metro Times*, September 11, 2019; Robert Reich, “Trump’s 2020 Election Strategy in 25 Steps,” *Inequality Media*, June 30, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HD2BhCjbId0>. In *Trump in the White House*, Bellamy Foster properly identified Trump “for who and what he is: a neo-fascist” embodying “the authoritarian rule that oversees decreasing wages, anti-science and climate-change denialism,



a dying public education system, and expanding prisons and military—all powered by a phony populism seething with centuries of racism that never went away.”

5. Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 369–70.
6. Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 48.
7. Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 355–6.
8. Neiwert, *The Eliminationists*, 148.
9. Neiwert, *The Eliminationists*, 27–8.
10. Max Blumenthal, *Republican Gomorrah: Inside the Movement That Shattered the Party* (New York: Nation Books, 2009).
11. These nine bullet points are adapted from Neiwert’s eight-point description of 21st-century alt-right beliefs in Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 33–4.
12. Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* (New York: Vintage, 1967).
13. Neiwert, *Alt-America*, passim, press conference comments on 327–8.
14. For my own take on virulent and fascistic media (movie) content in pre-Trump America, see Paul Street, “Hollywood’s Service to Empire,” *Counterpunch*, February 20, 2015, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2015/02/20/hollywoods-service-to-empire/>; Paul Street, “Where American Sniper Fails,” *ZNet Magazine*, February 5, 2015, <https://www.paulstreet.org/where-american-sniper-fails/>
15. Andrew Marantz, *Anti-Social: Online Extremists, Techno-Utopians, and the Hijacking of the American Conversation* (New York: Penguin, 2019), 5–6.
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<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/326962250143371264>  
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## Chapter 3

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# A Fascist in the White House, 2017–21

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Danger, danger there's a fascist in the White House, it's up to us to drive him out.

–Slogan of Refuse Fascism, 2017–2021

What Arpaio brought to Maricopa, and what the president of the United States has just endorsed, was fascism, American style... There's a word for people who round up members of ethnic minorities and send them to concentration camps, or praise such actions.

*New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman, August 28, 2017<sup>1</sup>

This man's cruelty is boundless.

–Sasha Ambrasky, December 6, 2019

With your help, and with your devotion, and your drive we are going to keep on working, we are going to keep on fighting, and we are going to keep on winning, winning, winning. ..

–Donald Trump, speaking to his backers in Hershey,  
Pennsylvania, December 2019

For many millions of Americans, the presidency of Donald Trump has been a kind of transgression, an endless assault on dignity, decency and decorum... an unparalleled offense against the values of American democracy.

–Janelle Bouie, *New York Times*, November 2, 2020<sup>2</sup>

These aren't bad people, they don't have prior criminal history... they were subjected to four-plus years of goddamn propaganda the likes of which the world has not seen since fucking Hitler.

–Albert Watkins, defense attorney of “QAnon Shaman”  
Jacob Angeli Chansley, on the January 6th Capitol  
Rioters<sup>3</sup>

## **Sinclair Lewis in the 21st Century: The End of the Frontier and “the Choice Between Barbarism and Socialism”**

In the long hot summer of 2020, the University of London humanities professor Sarah Churchwell found her excellent scholarship on “America First” US fascism during the 1930s feeling “proleptic, a time-lapse montage of a *para-fascist order slowly willing itself into existence over the course of nearly a century*”.<sup>4</sup> It was an understandable sentiment given the large number of strong parallels between Donald Trump’s transgressive presidency and Sinclair Lewis’s 1935 novel warning of a fascist takeover in Great Depression America. *It Can’t Happen Here* describes the rise of Berzelius “Buzz” Windrip, a bombastic and “populist” – in reality fascist – demagogue-elected president of the USA in 1936. Windrip’s campaign combines a pledge for sweeping social reform with calls for a return to patriotism and “traditional” values. It is crafted by a shrewd and sinister newspaperman named Lee Sarason. Sarason believes in propaganda, not science, facts, and truth. He argues that real information “is not fair to

ordinary folks – it just confuses them [and tries]...to make them swallow all the true facts that would be suitable to a higher class of people”.

There are haunting and uncanny similarities between Windrip and Trump, and between Windrip’s movement and Trumpism. As with Windrip, the dangerous and malevolent nature of the Trump candidacy and presidency was cloaked to no small extent by a clownishness and buffoonery that encouraged many Americans not to take Trump or his backers seriously.

Like the fictional Windrip and other real-life fascist-style politicians past and present, Trump used brutish tactlessness and contempt for liberal political correctness and established norms of civic decency to distinguish himself from his political opponents – and to win a special place in the hearts of his followers.

Like Windrip, the real-life creeping fascist Trump built his campaign and much of his rhetoric around the stoking and tapping of white and male resentment of supposedly undeserving racial and ethnic minorities and women perceived as having stepped outside their proper roles.

Like Windrip, Trump made a political punching bag out of Mexico.

Like Windrip, Trump diverted white citizens’ attention and anger away from the oligarchical wealth and power concentrations created by modern state capitalism and on to racial, ethnic, foreign, and cultural scapegoats: minorities, feminists, intellectuals, immigrants, socialists, environmentalists, and various perceived foreign state adversaries.

Like Windrip, Donald “Make America Great Again” Trump appealed to the myth of an elite-betrayed past of racial, ethnic, patriarchal, and moral purity – a glorious “homeland” history to which the revered “blood and soil” nation needed to return.

While he has never allowed anybody to become as influential in his campaign and presidency as Lee Sarason was for Windrip, Trump’s campaign success in the late summer and fall of 2016 relied heavily on the direction he got from the fascist strategist Steve Bannon. By late 2018, Trump appeared to have given over much of his domestic political program to the noxious white nationalist Stephen Miller, a Bannon-acolyte.

Like Windrip, Trump tapped rural and small-town white resentment of an urban and comparatively educated, cosmopolitan, and multiethnic “liberal elite” seen (with some good reasons) as having snubbed its snooty nose at a

sullen and “silent majority” of ordinary white people – white men without college degrees and professional classifications especially.

Like the fictional Windrip and real-life fascists past and present, Trump appealed to his white “heartland” base’s sense of having been victimized and disrespected by arrogant and politically correct left and liberal elites.

Like Windrip’s frothing backers, Trump’s Caucasian base lusted for retribution against immigrants, minorities, lazy “bums”, and uppity women, all of whom were thought to have unjustly gotten ahead of the virtuous white male citizenry – and against sneering “know-it-all” elites accused of letting unworthy “line-cutters” advance ahead of the nation’s hard-working white majority. Trump promised his resentful base payback against undeserving and disproportionately non-white Others and the stuck-up big-shots who allegedly promoted them over “real Americans”.

Windrip’s base enjoys big rallies where their hero mocks and lambasts liberal elites and demonizes the “Radical Left” and other nefarious scapegoats, promising jail and violence to those who oppose him and thereby threaten the greatness of the white nation. The threat of violence against his and hence America’s perceived enemies at home and abroad hangs constantly over the Windrip campaign and presidency.

In a similar vein, Trump’s fascist-like rallies and many of his comments and Tweets communicated much the same angry, ominous, and atavistic message. Real and threatened violence against his and hence “America’s” perceived adversaries and critics was a consistent theme in the Trump phenomenon and presidency. Trump suggested that attempts to remove him from office might spark “civil war”, an outcome he seemed ready to support if he felt it necessary to stay in power.

Like fictional president Windrip, real president Trump appointed unqualified political hacks to sensitive political positions because of their perceived loyalty to him.

Trump may not be much of a Christian, but the organized Christian-fascist right has been a key part of his collation and movement, as it is for Windrip.

Like Windrip and like other real-life fascists past and present, the “Great God Trump” became something of a strangely “charismatic” cult figure – a supposedly all-powerful champion who could do no wrong – for his fervent and frothing fans.

Like Windrip's Depression and New Deal-era economic populism (modeled largely on Louisiana governor Huey Long), Trump's far less robust economic populism was deceptive and manipulative. The real beneficiaries of his administration's policies were the wealthy corporate and financial Few.

Like Windrip, Trump made grandiose promises on behalf of ordinary working people while governing on behalf of the nation's unelected dictatorship of money – its corporate oligarchy.

Like Windrip and nonfiction fascists past and present, Donald “Drain the Swam” Trump regularly accused his political opponents of corruption even while he and the people around him were monumentally corrupt.

Like Windrip, Trump was belligerently nationalistic and glorified the military.

Another Trump theme shared with Windrip was contempt for journalists and press freedoms. Trump repeatedly called the media and its personnel “the enemy of the people”, describing reporters as “some of the worst people in the world”, among other insults. Trump encouraged violence against journalists, as does Windrip, who jails media operatives who don't follow his line.

Like Windrip, Trump glorified ignorance and repudiated intellectual rigor and expertise. He idiotically doubted the overwhelming scientific consensus on global warming and its causes.

Like the fictitious Windrip, nonfiction Trump lied and misrepresented facts habitually, launching an open assault on truth. With Trump as with Windrip and with real-life fascist and non-fascist authoritarians across the ages, constant mendacity in service to political propaganda was the name of the game. The aim isn't merely to manipulate opinion around specific charges and issues, but to undermine citizens' capacity to trust their own ability to understand truth and reality.

Like Windrip, Trump exhibited contempt for the rule of law and the power of Congress while packing the federal judiciary with right-wing toadies and challenging the legitimacy of elections that didn't go his way.

Like fictional Depression-era Windrip, 21st century nonfiction Trump rose to power thanks in no small part to weak political opponents who failed to resist him with sufficient speed and force partly because of the false belief that the blustering and buffoonish demagogue's popularity would dwindle



once he was properly exposed as an outrageous lout and charlatan. That's how many US liberals and leftists (myself included at times) reacted to the rise of Trump in 2015 and much of 2016. The Hillary Clinton campaign even worked to promote Trump in the primaries because they assumed his clownish conduct and personal and cultural offensiveness would render him unviable in the general election. They called it their "Pied Piper" strategy.

The American liberal and intellectual class's existential ineffectuality in the face of Windrip is an especially rich parallel between Lewis's 1935 novel and the real-life Trump nightmare. In ways that Lewis would certainly appreciate, this failure was based to no small degree on the fatal American-exceptionalist miscalculation that a fascist regime just "can't happen here" – not in what is supposedly the world's leading example and headquarters of "freedom, democracy, and the rule of law". Even avowedly Left intellectuals and activists had, as we shall see in the present volume's next chapter, their own version of denialism, running narratives claiming that "it" wasn't happening. The "Trumpenleft" thereby became complicit in the forward march of neofascism while almost ritually claiming that it wasn't "*real fascism*" *a la Hitler and Mussolini*.

But America during the Great Depression went in a very different direction than the one Lewis warned about in the mid-1930s. Lewis's novel ironically resonated with the USA's political reality far more in 2016–2021 than it did when it was published. It is an understatement to say that Lewis's dystopian vision of a fascist America was not realized in 1935 and 1936. As Germany descended further into the grip of fascist dictatorship under Adolph Hitler, the USA under Franklin Delano Roosevelt moved into its leftmost historical moment of political and social democracy with the rise and consolidation of the "second" New Deal, accompanied by the emergence and early victory of the militant industrial unionism of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). The passage of the Wagner Act (which legalized collective bargaining for industrial unions), the Social Security Act (old age pensions partially funded by the federal government), the Fair Labor Standards Act (establishing a federal minimum wage), and other progressive New Deal measures including significant new public works and relief programs marked a new highwater mark of left-liberal and progressive, social-democratish policy in US history. After crushing his Republican opponent (Alf Landon) with a giant wave of working- and middle-class votes

in 1936, Roosevelt stood atop a New Deal Democratic coalition that ruled all three branches of the federal government. The USA shifted portside to some degree, moving towards expanded popular sovereignty while Germany fell under the iron heel of the racist and warmongering Nazi state. “There was”, the distinguished liberal historian Ira Katznelson notes, “no American Enabling Act. Productive legislation proceeded to grapple with the largest issues of the day in familiar democratic terms”. It did so in a way that Katznelson calls “painfully ironic”, because the New Deal depended on a northern liberal and labor political alliance with southern Jim Crow forces whose white-supremacist regime helped inspire Hitler. Still, “the New Deal secured [what Katznelson calls] democracy, perhaps against the odds”.<sup>5</sup>

Trump and Trumpism represented a kind of nationalist, racist, patriarchal, authoritarian, and fascist politics that was hardly unique to US history. But, as the left historian Greg Grandin suggests in his Pulitzer Prize-winning 2019 book *The End of the Myth: From the Frontier to the Border Wall in the Mind of America*, both this kind of noxious far-right politics and the related but very different and genuinely egalitarian politics of “socialism” had heretofore been consigned to the fringes of US political history. Until the end of the Obama administration, that is, when these previously contained tendencies – the barbarism, even fascism of the white-nationalist right and the “socialism” or social democracy of the Bernie Sanders left – come to dominate the 2016 national political contest. What happened? “Trumpism”, symbolized above all by the border Wall, “becomes nationalized”, Grandin told the *Real News Network’s* Paul Jay in February of 2019, “after the empire falls. *Trumpism is what happens after empire*” – after the “escape valve” of endless growth is closed off:

The border wall has supplanted the frontier as the national myth. I link it to a number of things that have foreclosed on the possibility of growth. One is the disaster of 9/11, the response to 9/11. The endless, unwinnable wars that the United States threw itself into. [Then there’s] the financial catastrophe of 2007–2008... Even during the recovery it’s kind of revealed an entrenched inequality. And of course the—perhaps the biggest limit to growth is the ecological crisis; the fact that the world stands on the precipice of collapse. All of these things help explain the

ascension of Trumpism...The myth of the frontier...allowed for the maintenance of a centrism – the idea of a vital centrism in which extremism was marginalized. Two kinds of extremism. The extremism of the white supremacist, but also the extremism of socialism, of property-claiming social movements. As long as the U.S. had that option towards moving out in the world, it could respond to those two politics by marginalizing them. And now what we're seeing, and we saw it in the 2016 campaign, is that the United States is finally being forced to confront an option that other countries were forced to confront in the past, but that the United States deferred and deflected because of its unique prerogative of expansion and growth, and that's *the choice between barbarism and socialism...political tendencies that frontier universalism marginalized in the past.*<sup>6</sup>

Both Trumpism-fascism and Sanders-style “socialism” reflected, in Grandin’s view, the loss of the USA’s breathing room in an age of imperial, economic, and ecological decline. The safety valve of endless expansion that previously permitted US capitalism to escape its inner driving class-race contradictions has been sealed off. The global, military, and economic “Open Door” that replaced the literal Western North American frontier in the late 19th and early 20th centuries has closed. The world is too full now – full of capital, technology, carbon, and pollution. A giant new rising economic and military power, China, is contending for global Superpower status. Quantitative growth is no longer sufficient to displace and dilute the nation’s deep internal and qualitative contradictions. A reckoning has come due. The center cannot hold: America will now either (a) redistribute wealth and power downward and democratically and eco-sustainably restructure society or (b) speed faster and further down the path of tyranny and ecocide. It’s white-nationalist “barbarism” (Grandin curiously did not use “the F-word”) or “socialism” (admittedly too strong a word<sup>7</sup> for Sanders’ progressive Democratic Party politics).

## **“Time to Say the F-Word”**

*“Donald Trump...is indeed a fascist – an authoritarian willing to use violence to achieve his racial nationalist goals. So are many of his supporters. If you had any doubts”, New York Times columnist Paul Krugman wrote one day after the January 6th coup attempt, the Capitol Riot “should have ended them”.*<sup>8</sup>

This was too kind. *The doubts should never have existed in the first place.* It was never complicated. As Max Berger wrote in a smart *Daily Beast* reflection two days before Trump boycotted Joe Biden’s inauguration, “The argument that Trump is a fascist has always been straightforward: it is that we should take his words seriously and literally. He has told us time and again that he opposes democracy and that only white people should be considered fully American”.<sup>9</sup>

“Almost all the things that [fascism denier and *New York Times* columnist Ross] Douthat mused would be tell-tale signs of fascism”, Laura Field noted three days before the 2020 election, “have come to be. Trump has rallied a movement of far-right intellectuals. He has mobilized paramilitary forces to take to the streets...The GOP is a hollow cult of personality beholden to Trump. The party literally has no other platform”.<sup>10</sup> And by Sarah Churchwell’s observation in mid-June of 2020:

*Recognizably fascist violence is erupting in the United States under Trump, as his attorney general sends troops to the national capital to act as a private army, armed paramilitary groups occupy state capitols, laws are passed to deny the citizenship and rights of specific groups, and birthright citizenship as guaranteed under the Fourteenth Amendment is attacked. When the president declares voting an “honor” rather than a right and “jokes” about becoming president for life, when the government makes efforts to add a new question of citizenship to the decennial census for the first time in the nation’s history, and when nationwide protests in response to racial injustice become the pretext for mooting martial law, we are watching an American fascist order pulling itself together (emphasis added).*<sup>11</sup>

We have seen in the previous chapter that Trump fits the definition of a political and ideological fascist well before he became president, something

that was well understood in real time by a number of incisive and responsible commentators. The presidency that followed the campaign should have sealed the deal in the minds of most of the reporters, pundits, commentators, intellectuals, and academics. It did no such thing, as we will see in the next chapter. There were important exceptions to the rule, however, like MSNBC's Mehdi Hasan. Reflecting on Trump's paramilitary deployments in Portland and Seattle in late July of 2020, Hasan knowingly told his liberal and progressive audience that "it's time to say the F-word, fascism". As Hasan explained:

When it comes to the coronavirus, there is no federal response, it's every state for themselves. But when it comes to fighting vandalism or protecting statues, he's ready to send 75,000 agents of the federal government. And Seattle is next on the list...Now, I've worked around the world. I've interviewed prime ministers and government officials, dictators, despots, authoritarians, and I think it's time in America that we finally had a proper conversation about the F-word. No, not that one. Fascism. I know, I know. It's really controversial. People get really uncomfortable when you mention it. But, to borrow a line: "if not now, when?" And it not us, the free press, then who? For far too long, we have shied away from saying the F-word. For a lot of people, calling Donald Trump a "fascist" was just ad hominem, a lazy political insult. It was the liberal who cried wolf. And yet, look what happened the moment he took office. There was the Muslim ban. And the "very fine people" in Charlottesville. And the kids he threw into cages and camps. But it's not stopped. Those were not isolated incidents. Just last month, the president had protesters as well as reporters outside the White House tear-gassed and beaten so that he could have a stroll and have a photo op holding up a Bible outside a nearby church. And we were told not to call that fascism either. Now the president is ordering a surge of federal agents into cities, and talking about Chicago the same way that George W. Bush once talked about Fallujah. *The Daily Beast* reports that the president envisioned an ostentatious, camera-ready show of force in Chicago. He wanted to go after those he saw as violent gang leaders, flush them out of hiding in ways that would have them "shaking in their boots like they never have before" and have alleged perpetrators marched out in front of

the news cameras. Are we still saying this is not at all reminiscent of fascism?<sup>12</sup>

Robert Reich beat Hasan to the punch, albeit in a less widely seen venue, opining on YouTube in late June of 2020 that “there is no longer any honest alternative” to calling Trump “a fascist”. Reich detailed 25 ways<sup>13</sup> in which Trump deserved to be tarred with “the F-word”:

1. “Declare yourself above the law”.
2. “Cast...[anti-racist] civil rights protesters as rioters, looters, and anarchists”.
3. “Incite violence by unleashing chemical agents on protesters...a tactic banned in war, and then lie about it. Try to look tough by bragging about the ability of the Secret Service to turn ‘vicious dogs’ and ‘ominous weapons’ on protesters”.
4. “Appoint a Secretary of Defense more loyal to you than to America, and try to politicize the Department of Defense...”
5. “Appoint an Attorney General more loyal to you than to America, and politicize the Department of Justice so it goes easy on your loyalists and comes down hard on your enemies”.
6. “Pack the federal courts with justices more loyal to you than to the Constitution”.
7. “Stifle investigations into your corruption and fire inspectors general who are supposed to hold federal agencies accountable to the public”.
8. “Encourage armed militias to liberate states from elected officials who disagree with you”.
9. “Reward donors and cronies with tax breaks, subsidies, contracts” and regulatory rollbacks.
10. “Purge your political party of anyone disloyal and turn it into a mindless cult”.
11. “Coddle dictators”.
12. “Demonize immigrants and lock up asylum seekers even if they are children...and put a white nationalist [Stephen Miller] in charge of immigration policy”.
13. “Malign the poor, Black people, brown people, Muslim people, and Chinese people. Mock the disabled”.

14. “Intimidate and ridicule all critics. Describe your political opponents as ‘human scum’”.
15. “Attack mainstream media as purveyors of ‘fake news’ and ‘enemies of the people’”.
16. “Lie about your accomplishments”.
17. “Conjure up conspiracies against yourself and fabricate a ‘Deep State’ of career public servants out to get you, fueling your supporters’ distrust of government”.
18. “Downplay real threats to the nation, such as a rapidly spreading pandemic, lying about your efforts to contain it”.
19. “Bribe other nations to investigate your political opponent and flood social media with lies about him”.
20. “Use right wing propaganda machines like FOX News and conspiracy peddler One America News to inculcate the country with your lies”.
21. “Have the morally bankrupt founder of Facebook allow your lies to be amplified incessantly on the most powerful media giant in the country”.
22. “Suppress the vote of people who are likely to vote against you... attempt to prevent mail-in ballots, even during a pandemic...threaten to close the post office”.
23. “Try to postpone the election”.
24. “If you are voted out of office notwithstanding all this, refuse to leave, contest the election, claim massive fraud, say it’s a conspiracy, get your political party to back your lies, get your propaganda machine to repeat them”.
25. “Proclaim victory”.

Reich anticipated Trump’s coming attempt to subvert the 2020 election, no particularly difficult thing to predict, as did Hasan at the end of his July 2020 comments on MSNBC. But so, with a far greater degree of difficulty, did historian Timothy Snyder three year before, *in the spring of 2017*<sup>14</sup> and columnist Paul Krugman in the spring of 2019. “If you’re not terrified”, Krugman told CNN’s nonplussed anchor Anderson Cooper with good reason in mid-April of 2019, “you’re not paying attention”.<sup>15</sup>

## **410 Trumprocities, 2017–21**

Documenting Trump's relentlessly horrific and often fascistic behavior as president has been an exhausting exercise, like playing a seemingly endless game of Whack a Mole or trying to fill tea-cups from a high-pressure water-hose. "The enormity and variety of Mr. Trump's misdeeds", *The New York Times'* Editorial Board observed in October of 2020, "can feel overwhelming. Repetition has dulled the sense of outrage, and the accumulation of new outrages leaves little time to dwell on the particulars".<sup>16</sup> Indeed. Recording those transgressions can be both incredibly exhausting and dangerously depressing (annotating all of them here is textually prohibitive).<sup>17</sup> In what follows, I file *more than 400* of Trump's presidential "misdeeds" under the eight main fascism-defining folders advanced in the previous chapter. The exercise comes with two pitfalls. First, like many of the 45 fascism traits listed in the previous chapter, many of Trump's actions registered here could easily be filed under more than one folder. Take his terrible response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which disproportionately killed poor people, sick people, and people of color. It was simultaneously racist, nativist, sexist, authoritarian, anti-intellectual, anti-scientific, xenophobic, Social Darwinian, anti-poor, and anti-worker, and cruel, meriting inclusion under all but one of the folders.

Second, when seen just on their own, removed from the overall fascist matrix, many of Trump's transgressions were not specifically fascist and are consistent with the conduct of previous and subsequent US presidents.

I have addressed the first problem by making judgement calls on which of the eight master folders of fascism is most pronounced for a given transgression. Some of these filings may strike some readers as arbitrary and even mistaken but the bigger point is that the files and folders presented below are *all of a piece, each part consistent with and often overlapping with and sharing "Venn diagram" space with the others*. They are all woven into the same garments of cruelty and neofascism.

The second problem is more difficult to resolve but I deem it less than fatal for this project because Trump's travel from "normal" authoritarian space for a capitalist and imperialist US president into a qualitatively new and fascistic space for the US executive branch is evident from the sheer number and intensity of his fascistic transgressions. Other modern US presidents past and present have certainly engaged in numerous fascistic and



fascist-like actions and policies, but none have come remotely close to Trump when it comes to entering and occupying fascist political and ideological space.

## **Racial Palingenetic Nationalism, Them and Us Othering, and the Promotion of Traditional Social Hierarchy**

As President of the USA, Donald J. Trump:

- Hired as his initial chief political strategist the neofascist Stephen Bannon, who in January of 2016 referred to Europe's refugee crisis as a "kind of global Camp of the Saints". Then as in previous and subsequent statements, Bannon referenced an obscure, shockingly racist, and right-wing 1973 French novel, *The Camp of the Saints*. The novel imagined the takeover of white Europe by waves of sex-crazed poor Black and brown people, who literally overrun Western civilization at the invitation of culturally "cuckolded" white leftists and liberals. The novel's white hero murders a radical hippie and leads a new bloody Crusades on behalf of the Christian white West against the poor Black and brown world and white "traitors". Republished and distributed in the USA by the far-right heiress Cordelia Scaife May in 1983, *The Camp of the Saints* garnered a cult following among US anti-immigration activists.<sup>18</sup>
- Hired as his chief domestic policy and politics advisor the white nationalist Bannon acolyte Stephen Miller, another *Camp of the Saints* enthusiast. Unlike many if not most of Trump's aides, the nativist neofascist Miller stayed for the full Trump reign, putting his imprint on many of the administration's transgressions. In February 2017, Miller made the rounds of the nation's Sunday political talk shows to advance Trump's view that, as Miller said on CBS's "Face the Nation": "Our opponents, the media, and the whole world will soon see, as we begin to take further actions, that *the powers of the president to protect our country are very substantial and will not be questioned*".<sup>19</sup> In November 2019, the anti-racist website *Hatewatch* published hundreds

of Miller's old emails showing him advancing propaganda and talking points produced by white-supremacist groups. The disclosures showed that Miller's draconian immigration policies were rooted in white-nationalist ideology. While the Southern Poverty Law Center and dozens of Democratic Congresspersons and civil rights groups called for his resignation, Miller boarded Air Force One to join Trump at a nativist anti-immigrant campaign rally in southern Florida.<sup>20</sup>

- Suggested moral equivalence between neo-Nazis and other white supremacist marchers and liberal and progressive civil rights and social justice counter-protesters after the horrible events in Charlottesville, Virginia in August of 2017. Trump faced backlash from both political parties over remarks blaming “both sides” for the deadly violence that occurred at the white power gathering – and for claiming that there were “good people” among the white nationalists who marched under the openly fascist slogans “blood and soil” and “Jews will not replace us”.
- Actively fueled far right white supremacy and racist violence (including racist massacres and murders in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, El Paso, Texas, and Kenosha, Wisconsin) across his presidency.
- Repeatedly and absurdly portrayed white Americans as the real victims of American racial bias.
- Marked his seventh day in office and sparked protests across the nation by suspending the Refugee Admissions Program and denying US entry to citizens of Iraq, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen.
- Said this to a group of white county sheriffs during his first weeks in office: “if you ran Chicago, you would solve that nightmare. I’ll tell you” (This was a not-so subtle racist and fascist statement, expressly calling for largely rural white law enforcement officials to be put in charge of a giant majority non-white city, seen as a nightmare of crime and violence).
- Spent four years attacking and trying to undo anything and everything the nation's first Black president Obama did and blaming countless national and global problems on that president – a habit clearly driven largely by racism.

- Introduced the infamous Stephen Miller-drafted immigrant family separation policy, sold to the public as a “zero tolerance” approach to deter illegal immigration. From the spring of 2017 through the fall of 2019, Trump’s immigration officers separated children from parents or guardians with whom they had entered the US at the US-Mexico border. The adults were incarcerated in federal jails and the children were placed under the supervision of the US Department of Health and Human Services. The policy included no measure to reunite the families.
- Ordered the mass detention of immigrants under unsafe conditions in for-profit concentration camps.
- Called for the electrification of the southern border and the building of a wall equipped with deadly spikes to skewer would-be immigrants.
- Told Border Patrol agents to shoot asylum-seekers and to otherwise break the law, suggesting that he would pardon them for their crimes.
- Told border agents in southern California to ignore federal laws by forbidding all immigrants entry to the nation. “If judges give you trouble”, Trump told the agents, “say ‘Sorry, judge, I can’t do it. We don’t have the room’”.
- Ordered repeated military-style Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Raids to round up and deport “illegal” immigrant workers across the country.
- Enacted Homeland Security Secretary rules aimed at ending the decades-old *Flores* settlement agreement, which prevented the government from holding immigrant children indefinitely, in prison-like conditions, with no hope for a timely release and no mandate for proper care.
- Viciously claimed that migrants seeking to escape violence and poverty in Mexico and Central America for a better life in the US were dangerous drug dealers and rapists.
- Abrogated internationally recognized asylum rights in various ways including: a Justice Department ruling that fears of domestic or gang violence were not grounds for asylum in the USA; a Homeland Security ruling that blocked people from claiming asylum if they enter the USA outside legal ports of entry; a move to end asylum protections for most Central American migrants [by] deeming anyone who passes through

another country ineligible for asylum at the U.S. southern border; the appointment of Board of Immigration Appeals judges with high rates of denying asylum claims; suspension of the longstanding right of migrant families seeking asylum to remain in this country while their asylum applications were pending.

- Threatened to criminally deny federal funding to cities that provide sanctuary for so-called illegal immigrants.
- Denied emergency Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for different non-white groups (Haitians, Salvadorans, Hondurans, Nicaraguans, Nepalese, Bahamians) residing in the US.
- Ordered the U S. Citizenship and Immigration Services office to send out letters stating that the USA would *no longer consider most deferrals of deportation for people with a serious medical condition and telling people in extreme medical need to leave the country within 33 days.*
- Introduced the Department of Homeland Security's "public charge" rule, under which immigrants who applied for a green card or visa could be deemed a "public charge" and therefore deported if they earned below 250 percent of the federal poverty line and used any of a wide range of public programs.
- Suggested that immigrants at the border could be summarily deported without any hearing to determine if they merited asylum.
- Tried to rescind protective status from DREAMers, the young adult children whose parents came "illegally" to the USA when their children were very young.
- Claimed he would end "birthright citizenship" – the Constitutionally protected granting of US citizenship to people born in the USA – by executive order.
- Approved a Department of State regulation meant to deny poor pregnant women of color visas to the USA.
- Delayed and distorted the 2020 Census by insisting on the inclusion of citizenship questions, guaranteed to lead to an under-reporting of the nation's poor and non-white population.
- Falsely claimed that "caravans" of Central American and Mexican immigrants seeking asylum and respite from violence, poverty, and

terrorism in their home countries constituted an attempted hostile invasion of the USA.

- Ordered a maniacal 35-day shutdown of the federal government over Congress's refusal to fund his highly unpopular US-Mexico border wall in the winter of 2018–2019.
- Issued an unconstitutional February 15, 2019 declaration of a “National Emergency Concerning the Southern Border of the United States”, ordering the diversion of billions of dollars of funds that had been appropriated to the US Department of Defense for military construction to the building of his nativist Wall.
- Absurdly and repeatedly claimed that Mexico would “pay for the wall”.
- Threatened to unilaterally close all ports of entry to the USA.
- Threatened to round up detained immigrants with criminal records and drop them on the streets of so-called sanctuary cities as a way of retaliating against his domestic political enemies.
- Instructed aides to aggressively take private land and ignore environmental rules to expand southern border barriers.
- As part of a “campaign of intimidation against state and local governments that chose not to collaborate with ICE, ordered the deployment of Border Patrol's special forces-style unit, known as BORTAC, and other Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents – dressed in plainclothes – into Chicago, New York City, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Houston, Boston, New Orleans, Detroit, and Newark...[and also launched]...Operation Palladium, enlisting 500 special agents for an ‘enhanced arrest campaign’ designed to ‘flood the streets’ of these same cities”.<sup>21</sup>
- Pardoned the fascist Maricopa, County Arizona Sheriff Joe Arpaio, found guilty of defying a federal judge's order to stop racial profiling in the arrest and incarceration of individuals suspected of being in the USA illegally. Convicted of contempt for failure to comply with a court order in a case charging him with racial discrimination, Trump's hero “Sheriff Joe” set up a prison that he himself called a “concentration camp”. It had a high death rate with deaths often unexplained. Arpaio enclosed Latino prisoners with electric fencing. “What Arpaio brought to Maricopa, and what the president of the United States has just

endorsed”, *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman wrote after the pardon, “was fascism, American style...there’s a word for people who round up members of ethnic minorities and send them to concentration camps, or praise such actions”.<sup>22</sup>

- Told a political rally that he enjoyed the image of large German Shepherds chasing Mexican immigrants away from the southern US border.
- Used the COVID-19 pandemic to deepen his nativist immigration restrictions.
- Had his Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency announce that international college and university students would have to leave the country or risk deportation if their universities operated with online-only courses in the fall of 2020.
- Responded with tacit approval after a demented Trump fan in Florida shouted “shoot them” when the president asked how America should stop immigrants from crossing the southern US border.
- Made the shockingly racist and incendiary June 2019 statement that four progressive Congresswomen of color – Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Ayanna Pressley, and Rashida Tlaib – should “go back to the crime-infested countries they came from”.
- Responded in coldly racist fashion to Hurricane Maria, which decimated LatinX Puerto Rico in the late summer of 2018. (After terrible delays in coordinated federal emergency response, Trump falsely claimed to have ordered a quick and effective emergency response. He lied about the number of dead, engaged in a running feud with San Juan’s mayor, and staged an insulting photo-op that involved him throwing paper towels at storm victims.)
- Opposed letting Bermudan victims of Hurricane Dorian enter the US.
- Slashed the number of hurricane refugees the US would accept.
- Retweeted anti-Islamic videos from a virulent far-right British racist.
- Hired a senior staffer who cited the nonexistent “Bowling Green Massacre” to justify banning Muslims.
- Employed a press secretary who claimed that Nazi Germany never used chemical weapons even though the Third Reich used gas to kill millions of Jews and others.

- Called an African-American Congresswoman (Maxine Waters) a “low IQ person” at a 2018 hate rally in Ohio.
- Declared white culture war on Black athletes like Colin Kaepernick for protesting racist police brutality against Black Americans. Trump referred to these athletes as “son[s] of bitches” before white racist fans at a September 2017 hate rally.
- Fueled attacks on Asian-Americans by calling COVID-19 the “Chinese virus”.
- Appointed a billionaire white-supremacist enemy of the nation’s disproportionately non-white public schools (Betsy DeVos) as his Education Secretary.
- Reversed an Obama executive order (issued after the original Black Lives Matter uprisings of 2014) suspending the shipment of surplus military equipment from the US military to local US police departments for use in the suppression of urban protests against racist police violence.
- Referred to Haiti and African nations as “shithole countries” and asked why more people didn’t try to immigrate to the US from (white) Norway.
- Ended temporary protected status for 59,000 Haitians, giving them 18 months to pack their bags and go back to their deeply impoverished and violence-torn home country.
- Appointed federal judges who opposed affirmative action, civil rights, immigrant rights, and non-white voting rights.
- Reinstated the federal death penalty, disproportionately imposed on Black prisoners.
- Called for the nation’s police to “take the gloves off” (code words for “crack down violently”) on urban “criminals” (mainly Black and Latino).
- Claimed that Chicago’s police could end gang violence “in one day” – a not so veiled call for racist police-state executions in the street.
- Denied that systemic racism is a problem in the systemically racist USA, including its deeply racist criminal justice system.
- Repeatedly defended public monuments honoring the racist and secessionist US slaveowners’ 1861–1865 Confederacy as valuable parts of America’s shared historical legacy.

- Spoke repeatedly with disdain about Chicago and other majority non-white cities, calling (for example) 61% Black Baltimore “the worst city in the nation” and a “rat-infested mess”.
- Called Massachusetts Senator Liz Warren “Pocahontas”, mocking her claims of Indigenous ancestry.
- Insulted reporters of color.
- Absurdly claimed to have “done more for African Americans than any president since Lincoln”.
- Spent countless hours daily watching the white-nationalist television network FOX News.
- Said that the Japanese would sit back and watch their “Sony televisions” if the US were ever attacked.
- Ridiculed NASCAR for banning the Confederate flag and called on its only Black driver to “apologize” for reporting a racist hate crime.
- Banned anti-racist racial sensitivity training in the federal government.
- Responded with savage denial and indifference to a pandemic that disproportionately killed Black, LatinX, and Indigenous Americans.
- Originally scheduled a 2020 Trump campaign rally on June 19th, a day that many Black Americans celebrate as marking the end of slavery, in Tulsa, Oklahoma, a town whose Black business and residential district was mass-murderously assaulted and burned down by white racists in the spring of 1921.
- Used his Tulsa speech to raise the specter of Latino “hombres” raping unprotected white women.
- Told voters in disproportionately white Minnesota that Biden had an “extreme plan to flood your state with an influx of refugees from [Black/African] Somalia” – this after complimenting his mostly white audience on their “good genes”.
- Engaged in racist dog-whistling by telling a cheering racist crowd in Midland, Texas in July of 2020 that he had just “ended the rule on suburbs. You know, the suburbs, people fight all their lives to get into the suburbs and have a beautiful home. There will be no more low-income housing forced into the suburbs....I just rescinded the rule. It’s been going on for years...It’s been HELL for suburbia. We rescinded the rule three days ago, so enjoy your life, ladies and gentlemen, enjoy your life”. (The policy change referenced in this rant was Trump’s repeal of



the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing [AFFH] rule, established by the Obama administration in 2015. The rule required any locality that receives block-grant funds from the federal department of Housing and Urban Development to produce an assessment showing how it would guarantee equal housing access without racial and other forms of discrimination.)

- Vetoed the 2020 Pentagon funding bill because it included name changes for military bases previously named after Confederate War heroes.
- Despoiled lands held sacred by Native Americans.
- Refused during the 2020 election season to disavow the arch-racist white-nationalist and mystical neo-fascistic conspiracy cult QAnon, lauding it for “liking me” and refusing to criticize its claim that Trump was “saving the world from a satanic cult of pedophiles and cannibals”. The neofascistic and racist character of QAnon was captured well in a September 9, 2020 commentary by Gregory Stanton, former Research Professor in Genocide Studies and Prevention at George Mason University, Arlington, Virginia, and the James Farmer Professor of Human Rights at the University of Mary Washington:

A secret cabal is taking over the world. They kidnap children, slaughter, and eat them to gain power from their blood. They control high positions in government, banks, international finance, the news media, and the church. They want to disarm the police. They promote homosexuality and pedophilia. They plan to mongrelize the white race so it will lose its essential power.

Does this conspiracy theory sound familiar? It is. The same narrative has been repackaged by QAnon. The plot, described above, was the conspiracy “revealed” in the most influential anti-Jewish pamphlet of all time. It was called *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. It was written by Russian anti-Jewish propagandists around 1902. It collected myths about a Jewish plot to take over the world that had existed for hundreds of years. Central to its mythology was the Blood Libel, which claimed that Jews kidnapped and slaughtered Christian children and drained their blood to mix in the dough for matzos consumed on Jewish holidays.

The Nazis published a children's book of the *Protocols* that they required in the curriculum of every primary school in Germany. The Nazi newspaper, *Der Stürmer* (derived from the German word for "Storm") spread the Blood Libel. Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, his narcissistic autobiography and manifesto for his battle against the Jewish plot to rule the world, copied his conspiracy theories from the *Protocols*.

The Nazis worshiped Adolf Hitler as the Leader who would rescue the white race from this secret Jewish plot. Nazi "storm troopers" ("storm detachment" – Sturmabteilung) helped bring Hitler to power. Nazi Germany went on to conquer Europe and murder six million Jews and millions of Roma, Slavs, LGBTQ and other people.<sup>23</sup>

- Chose judges for US courts who are dismissive of reproductive rights, including three Supreme Court justices.
- Ordered regulations that reduced access to abortion and contraception within and beyond the USA.
- Falsely and privately claimed that his initial United Nations Ambassador Niki Haley had performed oral sex on him to get her position.
- Mocked US Senator Liz Warren, calling her "Pocahontas".
- Mocked and spoke with disdain about the four progressive female Congresspersons known as "the Squad".
- Mocked an accomplished woman who accused his right-wing Supreme Court appointee Brett Kavanaugh of rape.
- Said this to one his many hate rallies in explaining why he denied E. Jane Carroll's charge that he raped her years ago: "No 1, she's not my type".
- Called former White House staffer Omarosa Newman: "a crazed, crying lowlife" and "a dog".
- Referred to his former adulterous lover Stormy Daniels as "Horseface".
- Called a female MSNBC morning host "crazy low IQ Mika" and tweeted about her "badly bleeding from a face-lift".

- Told the visiting Clemson football team that the First and Second ladies would go into the White House kitchen to “make you some salad”.
- Called the British princess Meghan Markle and the Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris “nasty”.
- Called Ms. Harris “a monster” and “unlikeable”.
- Referred to a stern Nancy Pelosi speech as an emotional “meltdown”.
- Said in October 2020 that “America can’t let a woman president happen”.
- Reversed the Obama administration’s policy of letting transgendered individuals be openly employed by the US military.
- Approved a Department of Health and Human Services rule permitting health workers to cite religious or moral objections to deny care to patients, a serious threat to women and transgender patients.
- Mocked and criticized European female heads of state (British Prime Minister Teresa May and German president Angela Merkel).
- Tried to stop transgender students from being able to use school bathrooms.
- Appointed remarkably few women to positions of responsibility in his administration.
- Referred to a distinguished career diplomat Marie Yovanovitch, the former ambassador to Ukraine, not by name, but as “the woman”.
- Asked some of his female supporters if their husbands had approved their attendance at Trump rallies.
- Referred to the #MeToo movement – the rising outrage against sexual assaults on women – as a “very scary time for young men in America”.

### ***The Racist Response to the George Floyd Rebellion***

- Responded to the anti-racist George Floyd Rebellion with an at once racist, authoritarian, and fascist barrage of repressive and reactionary comments and actions that are bullet-pointed in the next sub-section of this chapter. “Rather than focus on protesters’ grievances – such as systemic racism and police brutality – Trump”, NBC News reported, “turned his focus to squelching the civil unrest that has accompanied the

national demonstrations and has taken a hardline stance to restoring order”.

- Tweeted this in an early response to the remarkable anti-racist George Floyd Rebellion: “When the looting starts, the shooting starts”. Those words were first spoken by Walter Headley, the racist white chief of Miami’s police, in 1967.<sup>24</sup> (The Floyd protest wave – a remarkable surge of civil rights and social justice activism from coast to coast – arose after George Floyd, a 42-year-old Black man, was murdered by white police officers in Minneapolis in late May of 2020. Caught on cell phone video, the horrific lynching of Floyd sparked a mass, largely youthful uprising, which police met with tear gas and other violent anti-protest tactics in more than one hundred US cities and towns.)
- Rolled out a severely limited “police reform” agenda, including a “choke-hold ban” that preserved cops’ right to use chokeholds, after the murder of the young Black man Rayshard Brooks by a white police officer in Atlanta.
- Absurdly referred to the painted slogan Black Lives Matter on Fifth Avenue in New York City as “a symbol of hate”.
- Absurdly claimed that whites were as subject to police brutality as Blacks.
- Put up a Tweet approving a video of a Florida senior yelling “White Power”.
- Responded with a revealing racist double-standard to COVID-19 and the anti-racist George Floyd Rebellion in 2020: when it came to a pandemic that was disproportionately killing Black and brown people, Trump’s position was that “it’s up to the states”. When it came to Black people and their allies making their voices heard in the nation’s cities and towns from coast to coast, however, Trump was eager to flood the streets with militarized federal agents and advocated the declaration of federal martial law and the deployment of the US military to suppress domestic “sedition”.
- Posted an approving Tweet showing a video of a wealthy white St. Louis couple defending their mansion against Black George Floyd protesters with an assault weapon and a pistol.

- Signed an executive order to create the “1776 Commission” to promote a “patriotic education” by which he meant history promoting the greatness of the nation’s white founders and “settlers” and deleting white America’s crimes against humanity and nature at home and abroad.
- Denounced efforts to re-examine American history with a deeper emphasis on slavery and racism, calling for the prohibition of critical race theory and the banning of the *New York Times* 1619 Project, an effort to put slavery and racial oppression at the center of the American historical experience.
- Continued through the George Floyd Rebellion to defend the many statues of Confederate leaders standing across the US South. The monuments celebrate the South’s treasonous secession from the USA in defense of Black chattel slavery. “You don’t want to take away *our heritage and history, and the beauty*”, Trump said, indifferent to the sentiments of Black Americans fed up with seeing public symbols *honoring those who fought to preserve slavery*. When asked what he had to say to such Black Americans, Trump said this: “My message is that *we* have a great country: *We* have the greatest country on Earth. *We* have a heritage”.
- Tried to make racist campaign hay out of the George Floyd Rebellion with summer 2020 campaign ads using provocative racist “urban nightmare”<sup>25</sup> imagery and tropes, telling (white) “suburban housewives” that the Democrats wanted to send angry urban (Black and brown) mobs out to destroy peaceful white communities. “They want to abolish the suburbs”, Trump claimed. A Trump campaign commercial showed an older white suburban woman looking at terrifying pictures of urban protesters on her television while a voice-over of the fascist FOX News talk show host Sean Hannity reported falsely that Democratic Party presidential nominee Joe Biden wanted to “defund the police”. A mysterious dark invader breaks into her house and presumably murders her. As National Public Radio reported: “President Trump has a message for suburban voters. And it’s not a subtle one: Be afraid, be very afraid”.<sup>26</sup> The racist dog whistle was unmistakable.

- Defended Kyle Rittenhouse, the teen fascist who used his illegally owned assault weapon to kill two anti-racist activists in Kenosha, Wisconsin in August of 2020.
- Went on the very last night of the 2020 campaign season to Kenosha, Wisconsin.

## **Authoritarianism: Cult of Personality Combined With Open Contempt for “Normal” Bourgeois Constitutional Democracy, Rule of Law, Civility, and Opposition**

- Held many dozens of political hate and self-/cult-promotion rallies during his presidency – 40 just in 2018 alone.<sup>27</sup>
- Encouraged violence against protesters and opponents at these rallies, where he gave long and rambling “speeches” loaded with lies, shaming, boasts, and threats.
- Openly flirted with embracing extra-legal political violence by calling (in March of 2019) for “tough guys”, meaning cops, “bikers”, and soldiers to wage “civil war” if and when Democrats tried to use constitutional processes like impeachment and elections to remove him from power.
- Warned that his impeachment for UkraineGate could spark “Civil War”.
- Engaged in record-setting deception, lying, and misstatement, including extreme master lies repeated over and over again (see below).
- Repeatedly attacked the legitimacy and respectability of one of the two major US political organizations – the Democratic Party, which he regularly denounced and demonized as “Radical Left” and an “enemy of the people” and their Nation.
- Repeatedly and absurdly claimed that the US electoral process was biased against him and his party.
- Told Americans to take their facts from him and “don’t believe what you see and hear” from other sources.
- Encouraged (in historian Timothy Snyder’s words) his followers to think “in terms of mystical unities and direct connections between the mystical leader and the people”.<sup>28</sup>

- Repeatedly and absurdly claimed to know more about critical policy issues than leading subject area experts and to trust his own “gut” and “Stable Genius” mind over the counsel of professionals, experts, and scientists.
- Fired his acting Attorney General when she refused to go along with his Muslim travel ban.
- Berated and belittled his first Attorney General, the notorious racist Jeff Sessions, for recusing himself from the Justice Department’s probe into Trump’s relationship with Russia.
- Fired Sessions for failing to protect him from the federal investigation into his relationship with Russia.
- Invited FBI Director James Comey to a private dinner where he requested a personal pledge of loyalty.
- Fired Comey for investigating Trump’s mysterious ties to Russia, and then bragged about firing Comey on television.
- Repeatedly considered firing special counsel Robert Mueller, head of the Russia probe.
- Hired as his second Attorney General the right-wing Christian nationalist William Barr, who argued that Trump’s executive powers were essentially unlimited<sup>29</sup> and advocated rolling back the constitutional separation of church and state.<sup>30</sup> (In a fall 2019 speech at Notre Dame University, Barr argued that the true basis of modern law is fundamentalist Christianity as laid out in the *Holy Bible*.)
- Tried to enlist Barr as his own personal attorney.
- Sent Barr to Europe on a mission to find “evidence” for bizarre conspiracies.
- Repeatedly called the media and reporters “enemies of the people”.
- Made repeated reference to the media beyond FOX News and other right-wing outlets as “Fake News”.
- Repeatedly called the centrist and mainstream *New York Times* and *Washington Post* “failing” newspapers that were opposed to him because of “left” and “liberal” bias.
- Tweeted out an Internet cartoon showing him beating up a person called “CNN” at a World Wrestling Federation event.

- Publicly dressed down and tweeted insults aimed at reporters, pundits, and television commentators who didn't write and speak about him in flattering ways.
- Ejected reporters who asked tough questions from the White House briefing room.
- Revoked the press credentials of reporters who asked questions he didn't like.
- Consistently acted to go around and over the heads of establishment media to directly propagandize his white-nationalist base through his own far-right communication channels: his Twitter feed and other "social media" outlets, FOX News, and his rallies.
- Relentlessly turned current events and news into opportunities and pretexts for propagandizing and rallying his base. The Trump propaganda machine churned constantly, trying to turn everything it could into an opportunity for white nationalist politicization.
- Forced Cabinet members and advisors to praise him in public.
- Responded to even slight breaks with him by fellow Republicans with public shaming and calling out.
- Crassly violated the US Constitution's emoluments clause by using his presidency to enrich his personal and family fortune.
- Preposterously called the emoluments clause "phony".
- Locked Congress out of its right and duty to confirm Cabinet officials.
- Hired his unqualified daughter and son-in-law to key White House posts, handing off giant policy portfolios to the corrupt sociopath Jared Kushner, who squashed a plan for national COVID-19 testing after determining that the pandemic was going to mainly target urban, Democratic-voting regions of the country.
- Told FOX News ("Trump television") in June of 2018 that he wanted Americans to react to him in the same way that North Koreans responded to their "Dear Leader" head of state: "Hey, he's the head of a country, and I mean, he's the strong head, don't let anyone think anything different. He speaks and his people sit up at attention. *I want my people to do that*".
- Repeatedly praised dictators, autocrats, and strongmen around the world.



- Called the murderous Philippine strongman Rodrigo Duterte to congratulate him for doing “an unbelievable job on the drug problem”. (As was well known at the time, Duterte’s “war on drugs” involved the openly terrorist slaughter not only of drug dealers but also of drug-users and innocent bystanders caught up in raids. Duterte openly boasted of killing criminals with his own hands, likened himself favorably to Adolf Hitler, bragged about his genitals, called president Barack Obama “the son of a whore”, and threatened “son of a bitch” journalists he didn’t like with assassination. Touring Asia in 2017, Trump appeared with Duterte, affirming his “great relationship” with the Philippine dictator.)
- Tweeted out an image of his head atop the hyper-masculine “ripped” torso of the boxing movie actor Sylvester Stallone in the 1980s movie “Rocky”.
- Called Republicans who opposed him “human scum”, echoing the genocidal language of Adolf Hitler.
- Called the lead F.B.I. officials who had investigated him the “scum on top” of the agency.<sup>31</sup>
- Identified long-serving government professionals who dared to question his commands and policies as evil agents of a mysterious “deep state” conspiracy to subvert the will of the American people.
- Consistently aligned himself with the neofascistic National Rifle Association, which threatened liberal and left activists, politicians, and public personalities with assassination.
- Chose judges for US courts who were dismissive of democratic voting rights.
- As punishment for opposing his actions, stripped national security clearances from former CIA Director John Brennan, former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, former FBI Director James Comey, former CIA Director Michael Hayden, former Acting Attorney General Sally Yates, former National-Security Adviser Susan Rice, and former Deputy FBI Director Andrew McCabe.
- Ordered the Environmental Protection Administration Agency and other executive branch agencies to close down informal and much formal communication with journalists.

- Refused to provide basic public documents, leading to a massive increase in Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) lawsuits to obtain these documents from agencies that reported to Trump.
- Fired his insufficiently loyal (he felt) Secretary of State (former ExxonMobil CEO and leading ecocide perpetrator Rex Tillerson) by Tweet in March of 2018.
- Repeatedly insulted and humiliated insufficiently loyal (he felt) Cabinet ministers on Twitter.
- Shamed and fired federal officials who did not do his bidding, who questioned his policies and wisdom, and who blew the whistle on his outrageous conduct.
- Insulted numerous members of Congress and the media with vicious and infantile nicknames.
- Falsely claimed to have been “exonerated” by the *Mueller Report* on his compromised relationship with Russia.
- Made repeated references to proper legal and congressional investigations into his criminal conduct and corrupt connections as a nefarious “witch hunt”.
- Insanely claimed that the Second Article of the US Constitution “let’s me do whatever I want”.
- Accused Democrats of “treason” for not applauding his 2018 State of the Union address.
- Politicized the federal judiciary to an extreme degree. This included threatening judges who didn’t do what he wanted, appointing dozens of far-right justices, and referring to judges constitutionally appointed by his predecessor and approved by Congress as “Obama judges”. (“We do not have Obama judges or Trump judges, Bush judges or Clinton judges”, Chief Justice John Roberts felt compelled to say: “What we have is an extraordinary group of dedicated judges doing their level best to do equal right to those appearing before them. The independent judiciary is something we should all be thankful for”.)
- Attacked the Supreme Court whenever it ruled against him.
- Tried to trade US military assistance to Ukraine for political dirt on Joe Biden, an offense for which he was impeached in December of 2019.
- Released a deranged, rambling, and rage-filled six-page letter loaded with absurd statements and unproven claims and charges the day before

he was impeached on two counts – Abuse of Power and Obstruction of Congress – by the US House of Representatives in mid-December of 2019. Trump feigned expertise on Constitutional law even though it was well known that he'd never read the US Constitution. “The Articles of Impeachment introduced by the House Judiciary Committee”, Trump(’s lawyers) wrote, “are not recognizable under any standard of Constitutional theory, interpretation, or jurisprudence. They include no crimes, no misdemeanors, no offenses whatsoever. You have cheapened the importance of the very ugly word, impeachment!” It was a preposterous statement. Trump’s attempt to extort assistance from Ukraine in his political campaign against his Democratic Party presidential rival Joe Biden was straight out of the US Constitutional Convention’s case for the impeachment clause. Why not rely on the quadrennial elections alone to remove a terrible president, the US Founders asked? Because, the framers answered,<sup>32</sup> a US president might one day use his office to connive with foreign leaders to corruptly perpetuate his position atop the republic. Trump’s Ukraine gambit and his relentless obstruction of Congress’s effort to investigate it were richly impeachable under “standard Constitutional theory” tracing back to the literal origins of the republic. “You dare” Trump wrote, “to invoke the Founding Fathers in pursuit of this election-nullification scheme – yet your spiteful actions display unfettered contempt for America’s founding and your egregious conduct threatens to destroy that which our Founders pledged their very lives to build”. This ludicrous charge contradicted the US Founders’ case for impeachment and absurdly suggested that the Founders would have been horrified that the US House didn’t wish to let him rule like a king or a dictator.

- Argued in his first Senate impeachment trial (via the right-wing defense attorney Alan Dershowitz) that he did not deserve removal for his outrageous UkraineGate crime because presidents can do whatever they want to get re-elected.
- Called efforts to impeach him “unpatriotic”, projecting himself and not the US Constitution as the real embodiment of the Nation.
- Worked to politicize the armed forces and national intelligence apparatus on his own behalf.

- Broke a long-time presidential norm by giving openly partisan, explicitly political, and highly personalized speeches to US intelligence and military forces at home and abroad
- Took his first Senate impeachment acquittal to mean that he had permission to do whatever he wanted to get re-elected.
- Made repeated false claims of voter fraud on the part of Democrats, minorities, and immigrants. These absurd charges were clearly meant to (among other things) seed the narrative that he couldn't be fairly unelected in November 2020.
- Recurrently defied Congressional subpoenas
- Denounced elementary Congressional oversight as "treason".
- Fired departmental inspectors general for investigating matters that could have caused him embarrassment.
- Fired Geoffrey Berman, the US Attorney for the Southern District of New York as punishment for pursuing cases that caused Trump embarrassment.
- Made "jokes" about wanting to be "president for life".
- Praised (at a January 2019 hate rally) a right-wing Congressman who had viciously body-slammed a liberal reporter in 2017. "Any guy who can do a body slam", Trump roared to the loud cheers of his fans, "he's my kind of guy".
- Proclaimed himself the "Chosen One" and "the world's greatest person".
- Boasted at campaign rallies that the beloved right-wing racist Republican president Ronald Reagan could never have attracted crowds the size of the ones who attended his gatherings.
- Absurdly said that he had a special aptitude for science.
- Absurdly claimed to have "brought back" the phrase "Merry Christmas".
- Absurdly claimed to deserve a Nobel Peace Prize
- Absurdly claimed that other countries laughed at America before he became president (this while several world leaders at the United Nations were literally laughing at him and the nation that let him become its chief executive)
- Falsely claimed to have turned down *Time* magazine's offers to make him its "Man of the Year".

- Tried to get the Pentagon to stage a Nazi-style military parade in his honor.
- Used soldiers and the military as crass campaign and public relations props.
- Politicized the civil service.
- Suggested that police officers should rough up suspects, telling them to “not be too nice” to people in their custody.
- Repeatedly praised police officers in gushing terms, identifying himself with “law and order” even while he repeatedly broke laws.
- Tried to use the Federal Trade Commission to punish Amazon because the Jeff Bezos-owned *Washington Post* wrote negative stories about him.
- Treated the Justice Department as his private legal service.
- Tried to get the federal government to defend him in a libel lawsuit from a woman who accused him of sexual assault.
- Claimed to have the absolute right to pardon himself.
- Held private meetings with Vladimir Putin without staff present and refuse to disclose the content of these meetings.
- Tried to stop the publication of books about him that he didn’t like.
- Fumed that he was a victim of “political persecution” when even the right-wing US Supreme Court ruled that his status as president did not grant him blanket immunity from the legal investigation of his financial records.
- Called the nation’s system of immigration judges “corrupt” and said, “Whoever heard of a system where you put people through trials? Where do these judges come from?”
- Told his commissioner of Customs and Border Protection Kevin McAleenan that he would grant him a presidential pardon if he was convicted of breaking federal laws for abusing immigrants.
- Ceased holding press briefings for months at a time.
- “Ordered” US companies to leave China even though he had no such power.
- Approved a 2019–2020 Senate impeachment trial defense claiming that a president could do anything he wanted if he thought it would help his re-election.

- Absurdly charged that the Democrats took “talking points from Iran” for questioning the reasons he gave for his reckless assassination of Iran general Qassim Soleimani.
- Led a political party that couldn’t bother to draft a policy platform and just said that it supported Donald Trump’s “America First Agenda” in 2020.
- Directed law enforcement, including the Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, to investigate and prosecute political adversaries and others – and to not prosecute political allies – for improper purposes.
- Decimated the nation’s professional diplomatic corps, which he saw as a barrier to his personal power.
- Conducted a corrupt foreign policy on behalf of his own economic and political self-interest.
- Absurdly denounced longtime nonpartisan intelligence and diplomatic staff who testified to the US House about that corruption vis a vis Ukraine as “Never Trumpers” and “partisan Democrats”.
- Criminally intimidated witnesses and whistleblowers, calling them “traitors”.
- Called his longtime personal lawyer Michael Cohen a “rat” and threatened Cohen’s family, openly employing the language and tactics of a mafia boss as Cohen testified to Congress about Trump crimes.
- Introduced loyalty tests for the nation’s public health officials, asking them if they were sufficiently devoted to the president, as COVID-19 ravaged the nation.
- Forced through reckless and undeserved national security clearances for his family.
- Upon returning to the White House after his brief COVID-19 hospitalization, Trump tore off his facemask for a bizarre, fascist-style, Mussolini-like photo-op on a White House balcony. His face was painted full and bright orange, giving him the appearance of a demented comic book villain before he went back inside, unmasked, to menace White House employees.

## ***“The Word Is Dominate”: The Response to the George Floyd-Brionna Taylor-Jacob Blake Rebellion***

- Responded in authoritarian and fascistic ways to the summer 2020 George Floyd rebellion, including: referring to anti-racist protesters as “terrorists”, threatening to charge protesters with “sedition”, threatening to deploy US military and combat units to suppress civil rights protests, telling governors to respond to the unrest with “total domination”, shaming governors for not using enough armed repression, using military police to violently clear out Washington DC’s LaFayette Square to enable a Christian-fascist photo-op with the Attorney General, the Secretary of Defense, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs in tow. On Monday, June 1, Trump berated the nation’s governors in a conference call, calling them “weak” in the face of the rebellions. “If you don’t dominate [the protests]”, Trump said, “you’re wasting your time”. Further: “In Washington, they had large groups, very large groups....But we’re going to have it under much more control. We’re pouring in – we’re going to pull in thousands of people...We’re going to clamp down very, very strong. *The word is dominate. If you don’t dominate your city and your state, they’re gonna walk away with you.* And we’re doing it in Washington, in DC, *we’re going to do something that people haven’t seen before....we’re going to have total domination*”. (“Law enforcement response is not going to work”, Trump’s authoritarian Attorney General William Barr told the governors, “unless we dominate the streets”.) “Total domination” was the language of the supreme dictator who Trump clearly dreamed of becoming. Trump told the governors that “you have to use the military” and “we have a wonderful military”. He described the 2011 Occupy Wall Street movement as a “disgrace” that was rightly ended by governors and mayors being “tough”. He told the governors that protesters should serve ten-year prison sentences. Meanwhile, Trump’s top military official, U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper, said this to a new domestic riot-control “central command center” headed by Joint Chiefs Chair Gen. Mark Milley, Esper, and Attorney General William Barr: “The sooner that you mass and *dominate the battlespace the sooner*

*this dissipates and we can get back to the right normal*". (An interesting term, "the right normal" – that's when the nation's citizens stay home and cower while police, prison guards, border guards, and other public officials, including the president, murder and maim poor people, workers, and people of color with impunity, both directly and indirectly.)

After his "total domination" harangue, Trump ordered combat-ready military personnel to Washington D.C. from Fort Bragg in North Carolina. He threatened protesters outside the White House with "vicious dogs" and "ominous weapons". After police and National Guard military police brutally cleared Lafayette Square with chemical weapons and batons to let the wannabe strongman come out of a protective bunker in which Secret Service had placed him on the evening of June 1, Trump gave a nod to his Christian fascist base. He walked across Pennsylvania Avenue to pose while awkwardly holding up a Holy Bible before cameras at historic St. John's Parish.<sup>33</sup> "We have the greatest country in the world, we're going to keep it nice and safe", Trump proclaimed. Trump never set foot in the church, eschewing an opportunity to pray for peace or for George Floyd. Or for the wisdom to lead the nation in its moment of crisis. Before marching to the church, Trump said this in the White House Rose Garden: "Mayors and governors must establish an overwhelming law enforcement presence until the violence has been quelled. If a city or state refuses to take the actions that are necessary to defend the life and property of their residents, then I will deploy the United States military and quickly solve the problem for them". Earlier in the day, a senior Pentagon official told *The Washington Post*, Trump stated, "We need to get control of the streets. We need ten thousand troops up here [in Washington]. I want it right now". (Trump's far-right evangelical Vice President Mike Pence had argued for invoking the 1807 Insurrection Act.)<sup>34</sup> "Our country always wins", Trump said. "That is why I am taking immediate Presidential action to stop the violence and restore security and safety in America. We are putting everybody on warning...One law and order and that is what it is. One law – we have one beautiful law". The demented oligarch went on to falsely accuse the very predominantly peaceful protesters of "the spilling of innocent blood" – an Orwellian inversion of reality if ever there was one. He called protesters' actions



“crime[s] against God”. Smearing the entire movement as the handiwork of “professional anarchists, violent mobs, arsonists, looters, Antifa, and others”, Trump threatened to commit a war crime by turning the US military on and against the public’s rights of free speech and assembly. Along the way, he tried to encourage his “MAGA” base to come out into the streets to physically confront civil and human rights protesters outside the White House. Masha Gessen captured the essence of Trump’s response to the Movement for Black Lives rebellion in a commentary titled “Trump’s Fascist Performance”:

Donald Trump thinks power looks like masked men in combat uniforms lined up in front of the marble columns of the Lincoln Memorial. He thinks it looks like Black Hawk helicopters hovering so low over protesters that they chop off the tops of trees. He thinks it looks like troops using tear gas to clear a plaza for a photo op. He thinks it looks like him hoisting a Bible in his raised right hand...To Trump, power sounds like the word “dominate”, repeated over and over on a leaked call with governors. It sounds like the silence of the men in uniform when they are asked who they are...A power grab is always a performance of sorts...In his intuition, power is autocratic; it affirms the superiority of one nation and one race; it asserts total domination; and it mercilessly suppresses all opposition. Whether or not he is capable of grasping the concept, Trump is performing fascism.<sup>35</sup>

- Following one of his wildly distorted and classically fascist claims that the inherently virtuous national Fatherland was under assault from “Left radicals” leading the George Floyd Rebellion, Trump ordered the following extreme federal penalties for “any person or any entity” [i.e., group or organization] “that destroys, damages, vandalizes, or desecrates a monument, memorial, or statue within the United States or otherwise vandalizes government property”: ten years in jail and a \$250,000 fine for each count. Trump’s order made the same threat against “any person or entity” that “participates in efforts to incite violence or other illegal activity in connection with the riots and acts of vandalism” and anyone who “assist[s] the agitator” or “aid[s] and

abet[s]” others accused of federal crimes. The terms “aid”, “abet”, and “assist” are very broad, including actions like giving someone a ride or a bottle of water. In essence, the order criminalized the Black Lives Matter protest wave. Trump’s order also authorized the deployment of federal paramilitary forces in local areas without requests from local officials. The personnel authorized included the US military, Customs and Border Protection, ICE, FBI, and the Secret Service. Days later, the head of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced “the deployment and pre-positioning of Rapid Deployment Teams across the country to respond to potential threats to facilities and property”. These teams were sent to a number of cities, including Portland and Seattle, while others were positioned to be within reach anywhere in the USA within six hours. Infamously brutal and racist Border Patrol and ICE agents played major roles in these paramilitary teams sent out to protect the Fatherland’s monuments and property from “Marxist” and “anarchist” “extremists”.

- In early July, 2020 sent more than a hundred paramilitary agents from the Department of Homeland Security to crack down on anti-racist social justice protesters in Portland, where activists had undertaken nightly Black Lives Matter demonstrations. Code-named “Operation Diligent Valor”, the deployment chillingly resembled US military operations abroad. The federal gendarmes, many suspected to be mercenaries on contract from Erik Prince (a close Trump ally and the fascist head of the onetime notorious global mercenary firm Blackwater), swept up protesters into unmarked cars and vans, teargassed crowds, and beat reporters. In mid-July, a federal paramilitary nearly killed a young Portland protester by shooting him in the head with a lethal “impact munition” while the victim had his hands raised. Also shot in the head and sent to an emergency room was Maureen Healy,<sup>36</sup> chair of the History department at Lewis & Clark College and a specialist on the rise of German fascism. The federal troops in Portland, their presence and conduct opposed by elected Portland and Oregon officials, fueled rather than dampened civil unrest. They wore military camouflage uniforms that said “police” but didn’t clearly indicate what agency they came from.

Legal observers and activists reported difficulty discerning the difference between the federal troops and private right-wing militia units. This was no small concern. As the Yale historian Timothy Snyder, an expert on the rise of authoritarian regimes, said on MSNBC on the evening of July 25th:

In a rule-of-law state, which is what we should be, you can tell the police from the civilians. When the police don't identify themselves, when the police don't wear insignia, when the police act as if they're above the law, then you've moved clearly into an authoritarian direction. It's the dark fantasy both in life and in literature of authoritarianism and totalitarianism that someone who you can't identify arrests you and takes you away in the middle of the night... This is something we should be attending to.

Indications were that the federal Black-shirts sent to Portland were with US Customs and Border Protection and brought up from the southern US border. That made authoritarian sense. As Snyder explained to MSNBC's Rachel Maddow:

[Empires' authoritarian] violence [against their own citizens] starts at the borderland. People [gendarmes] can become accustomed to violence at the border. And then what an authoritarian regime does is it brings those people [gendarmes] back into the cities and uses them against protesters in the cities. People who are trained to think of Others as 'not like us,' as aliens, as foreigners are then told 'oh, well there happen to be people inland who are also not like us.

Sensing correctly that Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) operatives were also slated for deployment against homeland protesters, Snyder made a comparable point about how immigrant concentration camps (properly identified as such by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez) provide "lawless" breeding grounds for repression within authoritarian states:

A similar aspect here is the detention centers. We have this huge network of detention centers, which are basically lawless zones. Another historical pattern [in the development of authoritarian

states] is that people who are trained in lawless zones such as detention centers or concentration camps are then released into cities later on and they behave the same way. They behave the way they've been trained.<sup>37</sup>

- Kept domestic paramilitaries and mercenaries in social justice protest hotspot Portland far beyond their ostensible legal mission of protecting federal facilities. According to a July 25th *New York Times* report:

After flooding the streets around the federal courthouse in Portland with tear gas during Friday's early morning hours, dozens of federal officers in camouflage and tactical gear stood in formation around the front of the building. Then, as one protester blared a soundtrack of 'The Imperial March,' the officers started advancing. Through the acrid haze, they continued to fire flash grenades and welt-inducing marble-size balls filled with caustic chemicals. They moved down Main Street and continued up the hill, where one of the agents announced over a loudspeaker: "This is an unlawful assembly."...By the time the security forces halted their advance, the federal courthouse they had been sent to protect was out of sight — two blocks behind them. The aggressive incursion of federal officers into Portland has been stretching the legal limits of federal law enforcement, as agents with batons and riot gear range deep into the streets of a city whose leadership has made it clear they are not welcome.

Oregon's Democratic Senator Ron Wyden called the agents an "occupying army". House Speaker Nancy Pelosi called them "storm troopers". Zakir Khan, a spokesperson for the Oregon chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), warned that the White House was using Portland as a test case. "*They want to see what they can get away with before launching into other parts of the country*", Khan told the *Washington Post*.<sup>38</sup> Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan told MSNBC at the end of July that Trump was "doing a dress rehearsal for martial law...Sending in federal

forces, to take over police duties in city after city for political purposes”, Durkan said, “was frightening ...making things worse”.<sup>39</sup>

*The Week's* Ryan Cooper agreed, in an essay titled “Why Trump’s Invasion of Portland is Textbook Fascism” – a reflection that included a warning on Trump’s coming effort to threaten to steal the 2020 election:

In terms of political function, sending out paramilitary thugs to incite unrest and bludgeon protesters who are simply exercising their constitutional rights is *straight out of the fascist playbook*. And someone who is already president does not need majority support to seize power – he can simply destabilize the election administration enough to declare the results invalid (by, say, destroying the Post Office), and hope the armed forces don’t intervene...The groundwork has been laid for the classic fascist move of overthrowing the Constitution to forestall a fake left-wing plot...I once wondered whether American police would serve as Trump’s storm troopers. It seems with the Border Patrol – perhaps the most corrupt and lawless federal law enforcement agency, and that is saying a lot – he has found his brownshirts.<sup>40</sup>

- Consistent with Zakir Khan’s warning, Trump in late July announced “a surge of federal law enforcement into American communities plagued by violent crime”. Trump claimed he would “immediately send surge federal law enforcement to Chicago. The FBI, ATF, DEA, US Marshals Service, and Homeland Security will together be sending hundreds of skilled law enforcement officers to Chicago to help drive down violent crime”. Trump spoke of Chicago in much the same kind of way that President George W. Bush spoke of Fallujah, Iraq. (The two-thirds non-white city of Chicago had long served as Trump’s top metropolitan “law and order” whipping boy. He had threatened Chicago with federal occupation throughout and indeed before his presidency.<sup>41</sup>) “We will put in 50,000, 60,000 people that really know what they’re doing” into American cities, Trump told “Fatherland News” anchor Sean Hannity. “*And they’re strong. They’re tough. And we could solve these problems so fast*”.<sup>42</sup>

## **“Hysterical Hyperbole” and Eliminationist Rhetoric: Hallmarks of Fascism**

- Set a new presidential standard when it came to the use of extreme rhetoric, using tone and word choices that deploy “emotion to circumvent reason, to overwhelm reason”, in the words of Yale philosophy professor Jason Stanley. Such extreme rhetoric, *Washington Post* columnist Dana Milbank noted in late May of 2019, is “a hallmark of totalitarianism”, combining “lavish praise of and great love for his supporters” with “unalloyed vitriol toward foreigners, racial minorities, elites and socialists” in ways clearly meant to manipulate his audience towards a desired political goal pitting “us” against “them”. Milbank captured the syndrome very well, in a column titled “Trump’s Rhetoric is a Hallmark of Totalitarianism”:

It is the best of times. It is the worst of times. In our current age of foolishness, things are “incredible”, “thriving”, “booming”, “prospering”, “tremendous”, “beautiful”, “very much happy” – the “greatest”, “best”, and “most”. It is also a “disaster”, a “mess”, “disintegrating”, “really bad”, “even worse” than the “worst”, “ridiculous”, “nasty”, and “fake” – with “abuses”, a “lot of problems”, and in a “spiral down”. All of the above thoughts were proclaimed by President Trump within the span of a few minutes this last week. So extreme is his rhetoric that even an attempt to portray himself as calm devolved into hysterical hyperbole...We have by now become accustomed to such extreme emotion – both hot and cold – from the president. Routine though it is for him, it is not normal.<sup>43</sup>

- Set a new low presidential-rhetorical bar for targeting and demonizing his major party opposition. Political scientist Anthony DiMaggio’s comparative analysis of 89 key speeches by 21st-century US presidents George W. Bush (25 speeches), Barack Obama (33 speeches), and Donald Trump (31 speeches) from 2000 to 2020 finds that Trump mentioned his opposition party a remarkable 10.1 times per speech

compared to just 1.6 times per speech for Bush and 2.9 times per speech for Obama. But the Trump difference here wasn't just about quantity of mentions, it was also and above all about quality: Trump typically referenced the Democrats in provocative and eliminationist ways, portraying them as a “criminal”, “radical”, “crazy”, “chaotic”, “evil”, “undemocratic”, “dangerous”, “lazy”, “corrupt”, “crooked”, and “stupid” (to name just a handful of Trump’s extreme and shaming descriptors of the Democrats) threat to decency, law and order, and the American way of life. By DiMaggio’s count, such rhetoric, suggesting that the Democrats deserved required elimination, occurred 9.2 times per Trump speech. The rhetoric was consistent with candidate Trump’s call for his 2016 Democratic Party opponent to be jailed. Neither Bush nor Obama engaged in such extreme rhetoric regarding their opposing major parties to any remotely comparable degree.

- Set a new low presidential-rhetorical bar for crude, fascist-style dehumanization of his opponents and targets, describing Others and enemies as “animals”, “serpents”, “predators”, “infest[ers]”, “scum”, “rats”, “poison”, “devils”, “disease[s]”, “plague[s]”, “threats”, and other such wild-eyed, apocalyptic menaces. Such language was deeply reminiscent of Hitler’s horrific discourse.<sup>44</sup>

## ***The Assault on the 2020 Presidential Election***

- Claimed throughout the campaign that the only way he could lose was if the election was “rigged”, “stolen”, and “fraudulent”.
- Told the openly neo-fascist and paramilitary Proud Boys, infamous for street violence to “stand back and stand-by” during his first and insanely unhinged “presidential debate” with Joe Biden.
- Proclaimed that there “will be no transition of power” after the election.
- Refused to commit to honoring the outcome of an election that didn’t go his way.
- Mounted a long propaganda campaign against the mail-in ballots required by the pandemic he spread, this with knowledge that these ballots would mainly go against him since Democrats were more likely than Republicans to avoid in-person voting during the pandemic.

- Appointed an unqualified right-wing financial backer (Louis DeJoy) to head the Post Office in a transparent bid to disrupt mail-in ballots.
- Used the false claim that mail-in ballots were fraud-prone to suggest that the 2020 elections might have to be “delayed”. (This alarming suggestion led even the founder of the right-wing Federalist Society to Tweet about Trump’s “fascistic” essence.<sup>45</sup>)
- Called Biden’s clear and commanding win (declared by the media on Saturday, November 7th) a fraud and launched dozens of lawsuits challenging the results.
- Called repeatedly for states to stop counting votes in the days after the polls closed, alleging that Democrats were using mail-in ballots to steal the election and sparking numerous ugly “stop counting” rallies outside ballot-tabulating sites in contested states.
- Refused to concede even after dozens of legal challenges failed, even after Republican state legislatures confirmed the results, even after his own election lawyers and even his own right-wing white nationalist Attorney General William Barr told him that reality simply did not match his stolen election narrative.
- Rode his limousine alongside 20,000 fervent supporters who rallied in Washington DC on November 14 behind Trump’s bogus claim of a stolen election. (Among the leading participants in this initial “Million MAGA March” were the openly neo-fascist and paramilitary Proud Boys. Among the speakers at this ominous gathering was a conspiratorialist QAnon supporter recently elected to the US House. This demented politico from rural Georgia expressed racist sentiments and told participants to march on the Supreme Court to demand that it install Trump for a second term. “Stop the Steal” activists physically assaulted Trump critics and racial minorities at the rally.)
- Following the advice of demented right-wing conspiracist lawyers Rudy Giuliani, Sidney Powell, and Lin Wood, sent to the Supreme Court a (failed) lawsuit in which the majority of the nation’s Republican state attorneys general sought to discount 20 million swing-state votes.
- Gave his approval, signaled by his presence overhead in the presidential helicopter, to a second chaotic and violent “Million MAGA March” on December 13, 2020. During this Trump-supported gathering,



his favorite fascist group the Proud Boys beat liberal and left counter-protesters, stabbing at least four people. They tore a Black Lives Matter flag down from the Asbury United Methodist Church, a majority-Black but mixed congregation founded in 1836 and located a few blocks from the White House. The fascists burned the flag, reminding the church's pastor of racist "cross-burnings", in the name of "real Americanism". They made the "OK" hand gesture, adopted by those on the far-right as a signal of white supremacy. Some of Trump's Proud Boys wore T-shirts emblazoned with the slogan "Pinochet Did Nothing Wrong" – a chilling reference to the US-backed fascist dictator Augusto Pinochet, who overthrew the democratically elected leftist government of Chile and ordered the murder and torture of thousands of left activists and intellectuals in 1973.

- Enlisted a team of right-wing putschists, including the openly deranged founder of MyPillow, Mike Lindell, the former [Overstock.com](#) CEO Patrick Byrne, the former Trump advisors Michael Fynn and Steve Bannon, and the leader of a far-right organization called Women for America First to build a coalition bringing on board open proto-fascists (including white nationalist Jared Taylor, Proud Boys leader and government informant Enrique Tarrío, and top QAnon acolytes) to spread the dangerous gospel of a stolen election and argue for direct action to "do", the *New York Times* reported, "what the political process and the courts would not: upend the peaceful transfer of power".<sup>46</sup>
- Tried to get Republican state legislative leaders to overturn the popular vote in their states and send Trump Electoral College votes to Congress from states Biden won.
- Met with his close ally, pardon beneficiary, and former National Security Adviser, the fascist felon and retired General Flynn, who openly called for military intervention and martial law on December 17th. In an interview on the far-right television station Newsmax, Flynn said Trump "could order the, within the swing states, if he wanted to, he could take military capabilities, and he could place those in states and basically rerun an election in each of those states...I mean, it's not unprecedented. These people are out there talking about martial law like

it's something that we've never done. Martial law has been instituted 64 times".<sup>47</sup>

- Called Brad Raffensperger, Georgia's secretary of state, urging him to change the outcome of the presidential vote in the state (Raffensperger released an audio recording of the call) – an openly criminal attempt at election interference.
- Called on Georgia's Republican governor to overturn the 2020 presidential election results in his state.
- Sparked chilling physical threats to state election officials in states won by Biden.
- Refused to cease and desist from encouraging these threats even after a top Georgia state official warned that "someone is going to get killed... It has to stop", the official said: "Mr. President, you have not condemned these actions or this language. This has to stop. We need you to step up".<sup>48</sup>
- Fired his Defense Secretary Mark Esper, who had irked Trump by opposing the declaration of martial law to crush the George Floyd Rebellion, and replaced him with a new appointee he expected to back his efforts to declare martial law to prevent Congress from certifying Biden's Electoral College victory and cancel Biden's inauguration. (This action was so alarming to constitutionalists within the military that the ten living former US Secretaries of Defense published a January 3, 2021 *Washington Post* letter warning military leaders and the acting Secretary of Defense not to get involved in election results. "As senior Defense Department leaders have noted", the letter ran, "there's no role for the U.S. military in determining the outcome of a U.S. election." Efforts to involve the U.S. armed forces in resolving election disputes would take us into dangerous, unlawful, and unconstitutional territory. Civilian and military officials who direct or carry out such measures would be accountable, including potentially facing criminal penalties, for the grave consequences of their actions on our republic... Acting defense secretary Christopher C. Miller and his subordinates – political appointees, officers and civil servants – are each bound by oath, law and precedent to facilitate the entry into office of the incoming administration and to do so wholeheartedly. They must also refrain from

any political actions that undermine the results of the election or hinder the success of the new team”.<sup>49</sup> On January 4th, the *Financial Times* published an editorial titled “A Moment of Grave Danger for U.S. Democracy”. “As extraordinary as it may sound”, the elite investor class paper’s editorial board wrote, “what amounts to an undeclared coup d’état is being attempted in the United States. It will almost certainly fail. But the next two weeks will test the strength of America’s institutions – and the courage of its officials”.<sup>50</sup>)

## **Lies, Magical Thinking, and the War on Truth, Science, and Public Health**

### ***False, Bizarre, and Scary Statements and Actions...***

As president of the USA, Trump:

- Made an astonishing number of false statements: 18,000 false or misleading claims across just his first three years in the White House by the count of *The Washington Post* in early 2020.<sup>51</sup> A tiny portion of these false statements, many of which were outright lies, will be listed below.
- Marked his initial days in office by absurdly claiming with no evidence that 3 to 5 million illegal immigrant votes had cost him a popular vote victory in the 2016 presidential election and by ridiculously insisting that the “fake news” media was suppressing the supposed (egregiously false) fact that he had garnered a larger Inauguration crowd than Obama did in 2009.
- Falsely claimed in his first month in office that the US murder rate was at its highest level in 45 to 47 years.
- Told his supporters not to believe what they heard and saw in the “fake news” and to take their information from him.
- Claimed without evidence that the Obama administration had bugged Trump Tower.

- Lied repeatedly when claiming he was committed to maintaining the Affordable Care Act's ("Obamacare's") protections against insurance companies denying health coverage to people with pre-existing conditions.
- Claimed that factories were reopening when they weren't.
- Absurdly claimed to have "drained the [Washington] swamp" of corrupt, corporate-captive politicians while conducting one of the most corrupt and plutocratic, pro-corporate US presidencies ever.<sup>52</sup>
- Falsely said that the Boy Scouts called him to say that his bizarre and unhinged, absurdly inappropriate Jamboree speech was "the best speech ever given to the Scouts".
- Absurdly claimed to have no knowledge of his attorney Michael Cohen's efforts to break campaign finance laws by using Trump Organization money to prevent two women (Karen McDougal and Stormy Daniels) from publicly revealing their past sexual affairs with Trump before the 2016 election.
- Said that "America" was "respected again" now that he was president – a ludicrous claim in a world that was appalled by the nonstop Trump circus and horror show.
- Repeatedly and absurdly claimed that the U.S. electoral process was biased against him and his party.
- Repeatedly and absurdly claimed that his tariffs on goods imported from China were a boon for the USA when they were really and obviously a *de facto* tax on American consumers.
- Responded to the nation's continuing epidemic of mass-shootings by continuing to blame them on "bad people" and "mental health", parroting the NRA's doctrinal denial of the well-documented role played by the deadly saturation of the nation by firearms, including tens of millions of military-grade assault weapons.
- Preposterously claimed that one in five American schoolteachers were "very gun-adept people" as part of his justification for failing to move forward on gun control measures favored by most Americans.
- Repeatedly and absurdly claimed that his infamous 2019 phone call seeking political dirt on Joe Biden from Ukraine's president in exchange

for US military was a “perfect call”, with no criminal or corrupt content.

- Failed to appoint a Science Adviser for more than a year and a half.
- Marked his fifth day in office by outrageously removing all references to climate change, arguably the greatest existential crisis facing humanity, from the White House Website.
- Absurdly coupled his withdrawal from a major international climate accord with the Orwellian statement that “we’re gonna have the cleanest air”.
- Dismantled an Obama-era White House National Security Council directorate whose mission was *to prepare for when, not if, a major pandemic hit the USA*.
- Responded to epic and lethal California wildfires in the fall of 2019 by threatening to withhold federal aid from the state, claiming that Governor Gavin Newsom “has done a terrible job of forest management” because Newsom did not listen to Trump’s insane call for him to “clean” forest “floors” – a bizarre admonition Trump first made in 2018, absurdly claiming that Finland prevented forest fires by “sweeping” forest “floors”.
- Insisted in September 2019 that Hurricane Dorian would “hit Alabama very hard” despite the fact that the federal government’s National Weather Service said no such thing – and then presented to the media a weather map with Sharpie marks purporting to demonstrate that federal experts expected the storm to hit Alabama.
- Insanely ordered the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association to contradict the National Weather Service by claiming that Dorian could hit Alabama.
- Repeatedly and falsely claimed to have caused the job growth pattern he inherited from the Obama years.
- Made repeated attempts in the spring and summer of 2020 to create a false scandal he called “ObamaGate”.
- Let unqualified political hacks overrule government scientists on climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Suggested the government use nuclear weapons to reduce the power of hurricanes.
- Suggested that wind turbines cause cancer.

- Obsessively and insanely claimed that energy efficiency requirements were making toilets, showers, sinks, lightbulbs, and dishwashers practically unusable.
- Repeated a thoroughly debunked lie about Joe Biden, claiming falsely that “Vice President Biden used his office and \$1 billion dollars of US aid money to coerce Ukraine in to firing the prosecutor who was digging into the company paying his son millions of dollars”.
- Claimed at a hate rally that Democrats wanted to “rip babies from their mothers’ wombs” and “execute” the infants.
- Refused to disavow the mystical fascistic conspiracy cult QAnon (see above), a dedicated enemy of science and expertise, during the 2020 presidential campaign.
- Falsely claimed to have built a giant Wall on the southern border and to have made Mexico pay for it.

### *Acceleration of the Neoliberal War on Livable Ecology*

In what are perhaps his biggest crimes prior to his pandemicist response to COVID-19, Trump as president, waged an exterminist war on environmental sanity in league with the American fossil fuel sector and other polluting industries. As of July 2020, the prestigious British medical journal *The Lancet* reports, Trump rolled back fully 84 regulations that protected the environment, safeguarded the health of US workers, and mitigated climate change. “Between 2016 and 2019”, *The Lancet* found,

The annual number of environmentally and occupationally related [US] deaths increased by more than 22,000, reversing 15 years of steady progress. Trump rolled back 29 air pollution and emissions standards, 20 restrictions on fossil fuel extraction, 9 water pollution limits, and toxic chemical protections.

Along the way, the Trump administration introduced “occupational health rollbacks include[ing] the termination of a silicosis prevention program, the weakening of health and safety standards for miners, and a proposal to allow new industrial uses of asbestos” and “pursued an aggressive campaign

against the scientific foundations of environmental and occupational health policy” under the direction of “the tobacco, fossil fuel, and chemical lobbies”. The eco-fascist Trump:

- Ordered the EPA and other federal agencies to delete references to climate change and to stop reporting on corporate polluters.
- Withdrew with the US from the Paris Climate Accord.
- Opened millions of acres of pristine federal lands to environmentally disastrous “development” and drilling.
- Issued executive orders *ridding the country of regulations that protected children from mercury and asbestos poisoning and preserved the country’s water supplies and lands*.
- Rolled back regulations that stopped coal companies from dumping waste into rivers and streams.
- Overturned energy conservation standards.
- Used the pandemic he fueled and fanned as “a pretext for further deregulation, suspending all enforcement of air and water rules and implementing additional rollbacks in a brazen attempt to lock in lax standards before a potential change in administration”.<sup>53</sup>

### *Pandemo-Fascist Anti-Science Response to COVID-19 (2020–2021)*

- Initially ignored the pandemic’s outbreak in Wuhan, China.
- Badly downplayed the lethality of the COVID-19 infection at the outset despite being *fully cognizant of its deadliness* from the beginning.
- Refused to let the cruise ship *Grand Princess’s* infected passengers come ashore because “I like the numbers [of Americans with the COVID-19 virus] where they are...I don’t need to have the numbers double because of one ship”.
- Initially called the novel coronavirus a “hoax”, claiming that it would magically “disappear” soon.
- Dismissed the COVID-19 threat as minuscule, claiming in late February that “The level that we’ve had in our country is very low, and those people are getting better, or we think that in almost all cases they’re better or getting. We have a total of 15”.

- Made repeated false claims that COVID-19 cures were available in the forms of hydroxychloroquine, bleach, ultraviolet light, convalescent plasma therapy, the Regeneron cocktail, oleander extract, or simply warm weather.
- Refused to order an appropriate testing regime or to mandate the adequate production and provision of medical and protective equipment to counter the spread of COVID-19.
- Appointed and approved the work of a White House COVID-19 taskforce (led by his corrupt son-in-law, Jared Kushner) that squashed a national testing plan it had in the works during the pandemic's opening months. "Because the virus had hit blue [Democrat-voting] states hardest", an inside source told *Vanity Fair*, the White House task force concluded that "a national plan was unnecessary, and would not make sense politically".<sup>54</sup>
- Fired a top pandemic response expert and official, Dr. Rick Bright, for raising alarms about the shortage of masks and other protective gear.
- Applauded right-wing militia activists who brought assault weapons to state capitols to protest common-sense state-level shutdowns, masking regulations, and social distancing measures meant to save lives.
- Incited and approved anti-"lockdown" protests across the country.
- Pretentiously refused to wear a mask while talking to company officials, all of whom were masked, during a tour of a mask-making factory. The macabre scene was presented to the public with Guns and Roses' version of the darkly appropriate tune "Live and Let Die" blaring in the background.
- Issued an April 28 executive order prematurely reopening slaughterhouses and meat processing plants after the spread of the virus forced the closure of dozens of meatpacking facilities.
- Absurdly said this to FOX Business News as the USA set a grim new record with 50,000 new cases on July 1st, 2020, a reflection of his inaction and incompetence: "We're heading back in a very strong fashion, and I think we're going to be very good with the coronavirus. I think at some point that it's going to sort of just disappear..."
- Falsely claimed that 99 percent of coronavirus cases were "totally harmless" and that the rising number of US COVID-19 cases was a



result simply of increased testing.

- Absurdly insisted that the US was leading the world in responding effectively to the coronavirus – a complete Orwellian inversion of reality as America’s case count skyrocketed.
- Suggested that Americans should inject bleach into their bodies to cure COVID-19.
- Ignored the pandemic, refusing to attend a single COVID-19 White House briefing for five months between late May and November of 2020 – this while complaining about the media’s focus on the pandemic.
- Aggressively lobbied Congress to block the movement of funds to states for vaccine rollout efforts, rendering governors unable to effectively conduct mass immunizations.
- Threatened to ban international students from colleges and universities that failed to disregard public health recommendations and fully resume in-person classes in the fall of 2020.
- Pressed public schools to disregard public health recommendations and physically reopen, threatening to withhold federal funding from those districts that deemed the pandemic too dangerous for that. (In mid-July, Trump’s press secretary said that “The science should not stand in the way of this”, insisting against the science that it was “perfectly safe” to fully reopen all classrooms.)<sup>55</sup>
- Launched a purge-style propaganda assault on the nation’s leading official infectious disease expert Dr. Anthony Fauci. (Irrked by Fauci’s failure to go along with the White House’s Orwellian claims to be leading the world in responding positively to the COVID-19 crisis, the administration publicly released what amounted to opposition research on Fauci’s real and alleged mistakes in responding to the novel coronavirus. The attack had nothing to do with public health. It was an effort to downgrade Fauci’s high public approval, seen as a threat to Trump’s re-election.)
- Ordered that hospital data on coronavirus patients be rerouted from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (the CDC) to the White House. (This profoundly dangerous and authoritarian move made critical medical data less transparent to the public as Trump continued

to mass-murderously downplay the accelerating spread of the pandemic.)

- In August of 2020, selected Scott Atlas, a right-wing radiologist and political commentator from the Hoover Institution, as his leading advisor on the White House Coronavirus Task Force. Atlas spread misinformation about COVID-19, claiming masks and social distancing were ineffective. In savage Social Darwinian rejection of the medical science consensus, he advocated herd immunity, that is mass infection without mitigation. He called for a rapid reopening of schools and businesses and said that states should not test virus-exposed but asymptomatic individuals. He encouraged citizens to “rise up” against public health protections. He was an agent of mass death.
- Mocked White House staff, political opponents, and reporters for wearing masks.
- Recklessly snubbed public health recommendations in numerous reckless super-spreader public appearances.
- Made repeated calls for the nation to slow testing for COVID-19 since, he said, tests only created more cases.
- Used his own COVID-19 infection and survival to publicly downplay its lethality, this after receiving the finest care and medicine available in the world at the publicly funded and managed (and hence technically socialist) Walter Reed Military Hospital.
- Subjected White House and Secret Service staff to infection during his COVID-19 episode, turning the White House into a COVID-19 hot zone.
- Complained about the attention being paid to the deadly pandemic (“Covid, Covid, Covid!”) during campaign rallies.
- Rejected safe campaigning protocols to hold super-spreader events that killed hundreds and infected tens of thousands. “While Biden’s campaign rallies were largely virtual or held in parking areas with participants in their vehicles, Laurie Garrett noted, “Trump’s tightly packed, mostly mask-free throngs increased in both number and frequency, further spreading the virus and causing the US government’s top COVID-19 response expert, Anthony Fauci, to warn that the president was ‘asking for trouble’”.<sup>56</sup>

- Continued his lethal pandemo-fascistic madness through the 2020 election and beyond, as America's COVID-19 death toll climbed towards a world-leading 500,000 in early 2021. While news stories related the horror of a deadly fall and winter surge in November, December, and January, Trump alternated his time between golfing, scheming, and acting to subvert and nullify the 2020 presidential election and preparing presidential pardons for those he deemed sufficiently loyal to be freed or protected from federal conviction and prison. It was one of the most horrific displays of narcissistic indifference to mass American suffering in the history of the modern US presidency.
- Instigated the January 6th, 2021 Attack on the Capitol, a super-spreader event followed by 38 Capitol Police officers and 150 National Guardsman testing positive<sup>57</sup> for the virus.

## **Personalized and Politicized Glorification of the Military, Hyper-Militarism, Imperialism, and Bellicose Nationalism**

As president of the USA, Trump:

- Marked his second day in office by going to the CIA's headquarters to give a delusional and disjointed "speech" that bemoaned how the USA hadn't won any wars in many years. Trump blustered that "we should have kept [Iraq's] oil" and that "maybe you'll have another chance" (to get "the oil").
- Outdid Obama (no small feat) in murderous drone attacks across the Middle East.
- Eagerly maintained US support for and participation in Saudi Arabia's savage infliction of mass death, disease, and poverty in Yemen, home to an epic humanitarian crisis caused by US-sponsored violence.
- Wildly threatened to hit North Korea with "fire and fury like the world has never seen" if did not suspend its nuclear weapons program.
- Boasted about the size of his "nuclear button" in January of 2018: "North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un just stated that the 'Nuclear Button

is on his desk at all times.’ Will someone from his depleted and food-starved regime please inform him that I too have a Nuclear Button, but it is a much bigger & more powerful one than his, and my Button works!”

- Ordered the production and deployment of a highly provocative nuclear missile, the W76-2, “a low-yield variant of the nuclear warhead traditionally used on the Trident missile”. (Antiproliferation experts raised grave concerns: “having a low-yield and high-yield warhead launched on the same submarine-launched missile creates a situation where an adversary doesn’t know which system is being used and therefore reacts as if the larger warhead has been launched”.<sup>58</sup> The missile increases the chances for an *apocalyptic* global nuclear war.)
- Tried to violate the 1996 Test Ban Treaty.
- Made repeated (thankfully failed) efforts to sponsor a right wing racist and business class coup against the democratically elected socialist government of Venezuela.
- Supported a vicious Christian fascist coup against a democratically elected left government in Bolivia.
- Imposed brutal economic sanctions that killed at least 40,000 Venezuelans.
- Withdrew the USA from Obama’s Iranian nuclear deal and then imposed brutal economic and medical sanctions on Iran, refusing to loosen those sanctions even after the nation was ravaged by COVID-19.
- Turned back the clock on Obama’s efforts at reopening with socialist Cuba.
- Championed and pardoned sociopathic war criminals who murdered civilians with sadistic impunity in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- Abandoned the democratic Kurds, opening them up to attack by authoritarian Turkey.
- Threatened to bring about “the official end of Iran” in May of 2019.
- Refused to acknowledge that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman ordered the brutal vivisection and murder of the Saudi dissident and *Washington Post* journalist Jamal Kashoggi in the fall of 2018. Trump justified his defense of the Saudi regime by pointing out it was *leading purchaser of US military equipment in the world*.

- Provocatively relocated the US embassy in Israel from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem, an open offense to the Palestinians and the broader Arab and Muslim world.
- Funded and equipped the Saudis' criminal and catastrophic war on Yemen over Congressional opposition.
- Coldly violated international law and risked a major regional war by assassinating a commanding general of a sovereign government – Iran's Maj. Gen. Qassim Soleimani – on the sovereign territory of Iraq without the permission of Iraq's government. This was an epic international crime.
- Retweeted a right-wing lunatic's tweet depicting Democratic Congressional leaders Charles Schumer (Senate Minority Leader) and Nancy Pelosi (House Speaker) in Muslim garb (a turban for Schumer and a hijab for Pelosi) in front of an Iranian flag.
- Suggested the USA could "buy Greenland".
- Insulted the leaders of Canada, France, Britain, Germany, Australia, and Sweden, among other allied states.
- Thanked his backers for making the USA "the greatest and most powerful country in the history of the world", offering this chilling paean to the American Fatherland under his nationalist guidance in the winter of 2019: "With your help, and with your devotion, and your drive we are going to keep on working, we are going to keep on fighting, and we are going to keep on winning, winning, winning. We are going to keep on winning. We are one movement, one people, one family, and one glorious nation under God. America is thriving like never before.... Together we will make America wealthy again, we will make America strong again, we will make America proud again, we will make America safe again, and we will make America great again". Such bellicose nationalist braggadocio was standard in president Trump's hate rally rhetoric.

## **Obsessive Fear and Hatred of the Radical Left**

As president of the USA, Trump:

- Made repeated fascist-style conflation of corporate and moderate Democrats with the “radical” and “socialist Left”. Trump did this continuously through the summer and fall of 2020, routinely calling the Democrats “the radical left Democrats” and “the socialist Democrats”, claiming that Kamala Harris was a “communist”, and calling Biden “a trojan horse of socialism”.
- Tried to blame the fascist atrocities in Charlottesville on something he called “the Alt-Left”, absurdly suggesting moral and practical equivalence between violent white supremacists and fascists who came to defend Confederate statues in his name and the peaceful liberal and progressive civil rights counter-protesters who came out in the name of Black lives and social justice.
- Said this during a September 2020 campaign rally in Ohio: “The choice in November is going to be very simple. There’s never been a time when there’s been such a difference. One is probably communism. I don’t know. They keep saying socialism. I think they’ve gone over that one. That one’s passed already”.
- Repeatedly called Black Lives Matter and anti-racist demonstrators “radicals”, “Marxists”, and “anarchists”.
- Repeatedly spoke and tweeted in menacing terms about “radical Left ANITIFA”, as if a large and radical Left organization by that name existed and posed a dire threat to American society.
- Held a July 4th, 2020 celebration event displaying openly fascist Third Reich aesthetics at Mount Rushmore in South Dakota, where he claimed that a “left-wing fascist mob” was trying to end “America” by “erasing the nation’s history and indoctrinating its children”.
- Gave a July 4th speech in Washington DC featuring high-tech military displays and patriotic pomp. Trump proclaimed that “We are now in the process of defeating the radical left, the Marxists, the anarchists, the agitators, the looters, and people who, in many instances, have absolutely no clue what they are doing”.
- In early July, Trump threatened the tax-exempt status of American colleges and universities, bizarrely claiming that “Too many universities and school systems are about Radical Left Indoctrination”.
- Told a white Texas audience in the summer of 2020 that “the radical Left” wanted to “abolish the suburbs” and “incite riots”.

- Called the George Floyd Rebellion a “radical Left” attempt to “destroy our country” and described mass protest against racist police violence as “left-wing rioting and mayhem” that was “the direct result of decades of left-wing indoctrination in our schools” and had “gone on far too long”.
- Issued an under-reported June 26th, 2020 “Executive Order on Protecting American Monuments, Memorials and Statues and Combating Recent Criminal Violence”. This order sought to justify the repression of civil rights and social protesters by charging that “innocent citizens” were under attack from “arsonists and left-wing extremists” who “have led riots in the streets, burned police vehicles, killed and assaulted government officers as well as business owners defending their property...” Trump’s Order claimed that the George Floyd uprising “paints the United States of America as fundamentally unjust”, “shamelessly attack[s] the legitimacy of our institutions”, and challenges “the fundamental truth that America is good, her people are virtuous, and that justice prevails in this country to a far greater extent than anywhere else in the world”. Trump targeted “Marxism” in particular, saying that: “Many of the rioters, arsonists, and left-wing extremists who have carried out and supported these acts have explicitly identified themselves with ideologies – such as Marxism – that call for the destruction of the United States’ system of government”.
- Absurdly called the centrist liberal magazine *The Atlantic* “radical left”.
- Justified the provocative, constitutionally dubious deployment of federal paramilitaries to Portland by claiming absurdly that Portland’s “radical Left” mayor was “going to lose Portland” to radical Marxists and anarchists.

## **Fake Populism Combined with Service to the Capitalist Rich and Harm to the Working Class and Poor**

As President, Trump:

- Repeatedly and falsely portrayed himself as a champion of the nation’s working and middle-class majority while actively working to divide that majority along lines of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, party, and religion and serving the interests of the wealthy Few, including his own.
- Told his backers again and again that “We are taking back our country, we are returning power to the American people, to you” – this while acting to further concentrate wealth and hence power upward and strip government protections and assistance for the majority working class populace.
- Consistently directed popular anger away from the nation’s economic ruling class and onto other targets: immigrants, Blacks, liberals, leftists, Democrats.
- Reduced life expectancy and increased mortality rates in the USA, helping generate excess deaths through “callous, ill-considered policies and brutal budget cuts” even “preceding the virus’s arrival to U.S. shores” (public health expert Laurie Garrett<sup>59</sup>).
- Pushed for and signed his “signature legislative achievement, a trillion-dollar tax cut for corporations and high-income individuals” that “opened a budget hole that he used to justify cutting food subsidies and health care” (Laurie Garrett).
- Weakened the Affordable Care Act’s coverage and increased the number of uninsured people by 2 to 3 million, even before the mass insurance loss resulting from the pandemic.
- Accelerated the privatization of government health programs.
- Made repeated attacks on Social Security.
- Made repeated calls for Congress to end the Affordable Care Act and to thereby throw tens of millions of disproportionately poor and non-white Americans off of health insurance rolls – this while advancing no plan expanding coverage.
- Approved a Department of Justice filing (on June 8, 2018) before the US Court of Appeals arguing that the Affordable Care Act’s protections for people with pre-existing conditions was unconstitutional – this even as Trump and his fellow Republicans claimed to be dedicated to preserving “Obamacare’s” guarantee of health insurance rights for such people.



- Approved a March 2019 filing to the US Court of Appeals calling for the invalidation of the entire Affordable Care Act.
- Approved sadistic work requirements for Medicaid recipients in numerous states run by right wing Republicans.
- Attempted to slash food stamp assistance for nearly three quarters of a million impoverished Americans in December of 2019.
- Formalized draconian and impractical work requirements for recipients of food stamps, an action that removed many millions of poor and disproportionately non-white Americans from access to life-saving nutrition.
- Appointed as his inter-agency homelessness czar a man who had previously pushed cities to pass ordinances banning anti-hunger activists from feeding homeless people on city streets.

## Social Darwinism

- Asked that wounded veterans be left out of military parades since they did not project strength.
- Exhibited a bizarre and chilling obsession with *bloodlines*, “good genes”, and gene pools, advancing the “racehorse” theory of success and “winning”,<sup>60</sup> all echoing classic Nazi thoughts on eugenics and genetics.
- Claimed to have survived COVID-19 because of “good genes”, implying that those who succumbed were evolutionarily inferior and ignoring the fact that his own survival had depended on the best taxpayer medical intervention available on the planet.
- Attacked Social Security benefits for the disabled.
- Tried to remove Obamacare protections against health insurance companies denying health insurance to Americans with pre-existing conditions.
- Made fun of a reporter with a disability.
- Referred chronically to his opponents as “weak” and “failing”.
- Let and indeed encouraged COVID-19’s killing of hundreds of thousands of Americans in the name of “herd immunity”, a fascistic

strategy amounting to the murder of the poor and infirm, the old, the weakest and most vulnerable, disproportionately non-white.

## **Cruelty and Hate**

“This man’s cruelty is boundless”, *The Nation*’s Sasha Ambrasky wrote in December of 2019, reflecting on Trump’s assault on the nation’s Food Stamp program.<sup>61</sup> Looking back on the Trump years, one thing that hits a morally sentient being is the all-pervasive meanness, viciousness, callousness, and heartlessness of the 45th US president and his administration. Almost everything Trump said and did as president was driven by and expressive of a deep underlying, richly fascist cruelty. Among the most glaring examples: trying to slash Social Security benefits for disabled people, trying to remove the legal prohibition against insurance companies denying health coverage to people with pre-existing conditions, trying to push tens of millions of people off of health insurance, calling for the electrification of the southern border, encouraging Border Patrol agents to shoot asylum-seekers, telling supporters how he enjoyed the image of immigrants running from snarling dogs, savagely ending deportation deferrals for people with grave medical conditions requiring treatment in the USA, ordering the separation of children from their mothers’ arms at the southern border, refusing to admonish his royal Saudi ally Mohammad Bin Salman for ordering the vivisection of a *Washington Post* journalist, threatening civil rights protesters with “vicious dogs” and “ominous weapons”, ordering a militarized police assault on peaceful civil rights protesters to clear the way for a bombastic Christian-Fascistic photo op, embracing teen fascist Kyle Rittenhouse’s murder of Black Lives Matter protesters, activists, the recurrent shaming and humiliation of his enemies, ugly indifference to the plight of Puerto Ricans and Bermuda residents devastated by hurricanes, unleashing a murderous mob on the US Congress and his own Vice President, refusing to call his mob off at the height of its lethal Attack on the Capitol, openly threatening to annihilate North Korea and Iran, and, above all, his eagerness to slash basic environmental and public health protections and the savage crime of pandemicide, which accounts for hundreds of thousands of American deaths.

Cruelty, indeed. In November of 2019, Trump pardoned three murderous US military war criminals and then fired the US Secretary of the Navy for calling for a review to consider expelling one of those criminals from the elite Navy Seals. At the encouragement of FOX News, Trump made one of these vicious killers a cause célèbre, using Chief Petty Officer Edward Gallagher as part the president's case for re-election. By the *New York Times*' account, Gallagher

and other Navy SEALs gave [a young Islamic State] medical aid in Iraq in 2017, sedating him and cutting an airway in his throat to help him breathe. Then, without warning, according to colleagues, Chief Gallagher pulled a small hunting knife from a sheath and stabbed the sedated captive in the neck. The same Chief Gallagher who later posed for a photograph holding the dead captive up by the hair, has now been celebrated on the campaign trail by President Trump, who upended the military code of justice to protect him from the punishment resulting from the episode.

It was hardly Gallagher's first war-crime. The *Times* recounted Trump's hero's other grisly transgressions, which included the likely murder of a harmless young Iraqi girl:

Chief Gallagher, 40, a seasoned operator with a deeply weathered face from eight combat deployments, sometimes went by the nickname Blade. He sought out the toughest assignments, where gunfire and blood were almost guaranteed. Months before deploying, he sent a text to the SEAL master chief making assignments, saying he was "down to go" to any spot, no matter how awful, so long as "there is for sure action and work to be done... We don't care about living conditions," he added. "We just want to kill as many people as possible".... Before deployment, he commissioned a friend and former SEAL to make him a custom hunting knife and a hatchet, vowing in a text, "I'll try and dig that knife or hatchet into someone's skull!"... On May 6, 2017, when an Apache helicopter banked over a dusty patchwork of fields outside Mosul, fixed its sights on a farmhouse serving as an Islamic State command post and fired two

Hellfire missiles reducing it to rubble...Gallagher saw the distant explosion from an armored gun truck. When he heard on the radio that Iraqi soldiers had captured an Islamic State fighter and took him to a nearby staging area, he raced to the scene. “No one touch him,” he radioed other SEALs. “He’s mine.” When the captive was killed, other SEALs were shocked. A medic inches from Chief Gallagher testified that he froze, unsure what to do. Some SEALs said in interviews that the stabbing immediately struck them as wrong, but because it was Chief Gallagher, the most experienced commando in the group, no one knew how to react. When senior platoon members confronted Chief Gallagher, they said, he told them, “Stop worrying about it; they do a lot worse to us.” The officer in charge, Lt. Jacob Portier, who was in his first command, gathered everyone for trophy photos, then held a re-enlistment ceremony for Chief Gallagher over the corpse, several SEALs testified.

A week later, Chief Gallagher sent a friend in California a text with a photo of himself with a knife in one hand, holding the captive up by the hair with the other. “Good story behind this, got him with my hunting knife,” he wrote. As the deployment wore on, SEALs said the chief’s behavior grew more erratic. He led a small team beyond the front lines, telling members to turn off locator beacons so they would not be caught by superiors, according to four SEALs, who confirmed video of the mission obtained by *The New York Times*. He then tried to cover up the mission when one platoon member was shot.

At various points, he appeared to be either amped up or zoned out; several SEALs told investigators they saw him taking pills, including the narcotic Tramadol. He spent much of his time scanning the streets of Mosul from hidden sniper nests, firing three or four times as often as the platoon’s snipers, sometimes targeting civilians. One SEAL sniper told investigators he heard a shot from Chief Gallagher’s position, then saw a schoolgirl in a flower-print hijab crumple to the ground. Another sniper reported hearing a shot from Chief Gallagher’s position, then seeing a man carrying a water jug

fall, a red blotch spreading on his back. Neither episode was investigated and the fate of the civilians remains unknown.

Chief Gallagher had been accused of misconduct before, including shooting through an Afghan girl to hit the man carrying her in 2010 and trying to run over a Navy police officer in 2014...By the end of [his] deployment, SEALs said, Chief Gallagher was largely isolated from the rest of the platoon, with some privately calling him “el diablo,” or the devil.<sup>62</sup>

This maniacal killer, Eddie Ghallager, so recklessly homicidal that even the infamously murderous US military<sup>63</sup> felt it necessary to convict him, *was Trump’s choice as an American military hero heading into the 2020 campaign season.*

The ultimate fascist Trump act as president came with the deadly actions of January 6, 2021. The wild plan behind the Attack on the Capitol, which included significant participation from current and former military members, police officers, and members and leaders of the proto-fascist paramilitary groups the Oath Keepers and the Proud Boys, was aptly summarized by the left Canadian political commentator Paul Jay:

Trump would incite the crowd that rallied on January 6th to go to Congress, where the crowd’s militants were organized to storm the building. [Trump ally Steve] Bannon and others thought there would be similar riots in State capitals around the country. They expected Acting [Defense] Secretary [Christopher] Miller to order the military to intervene, declare Martial Law and new elections. This was Trump’s utterly delusional plan. It didn’t work out; Trump and/or Acting Secretary Miller were rebuffed by most if not all, the senior military leadership. Still, based on what’s in the public record, if this was the plan, Trump should be investigated for sedition and treason.<sup>64</sup>

For Jay, there should have been nothing surprising about the failed coup attempt. It was the tragic and terrible if fantastic culmination of a long rolling coup campaign that went back at least to the previous summer and included a

number of interrelated and overlapping aspects: the constantly repeated Big Lie that Trump could lose the election only if it was rigged, the attempted physical intimidation of Biden voters with a “poll watcher army”, the recurrent demonization of mail-in ballots, the attempted disabling of the postal service’s capacity to collect ballots, attacks on vote-counting after Election Day, the flood of legal challenges to state vote counts, the intimidation of state election officials, two violent right-wing rallies in Washington, attempts to get state legislatures to reject the popular vote and Electoral College tally in their jurisdictions; and the final criminal assault on the US Capitol literally to block Congress’s certification of Biden’s victory and to spark a violent crisis Trump could use to declare martial law and order a new election under military supervision in contested states. Trump, Jay wrote, was “*the buffoon tip of a serious fascist spear*”.

Jay dated the coup from September 17, 2020, when the fascist strategist and former Trump campaign manager Steve Bannon went on key Trump ally Tucker Carlson’s prime time FOX News show to call for a “war” starting on November 4th, the day after the election.<sup>65</sup>

For the historian Timothy Snyder, speaking to the *Washington Post*’s Milbank, the rolling coup on America’s “constitutional democracy” went back further – to June of 2020. In September 2020, he told Milbank that:

The Reichstag [a reference to the 1933 German Parliament conflagration that gave Hitler his pretext to suspend constitutional democracy] has been on *a slow burn since June*...The language Trump uses to talk about Black Lives Matter and the protests is very similar to the language Hitler used – that there’s some vague left-wing conspiracy based in the cities that is destroying the country... It’s important not to talk about this as just an election. It’s an election surrounded by the authoritarian language of a coup d’état. The opposition has to win the election and it has to win the aftermath of the election. If not, there won’t be another ‘normal’ election for some time.<sup>66</sup>

In reality, as we have seen, Snyder *intuitively and accurately predicted that Trump would resort to a coup to try stay in power – and that the coup*

would fail – back in April of 2017. For Snyder, hauntingly enough, the coup was already written into Trump’s authoritarian mindset and in the combination between this mindset and his unpopularity, which would rule out winning a second term through “conventional” means – that is, by running a popular and successful campaign. Snyder was right to date the coup from much earlier in the Trump presidency – even from day one of the administration, which started with Trump falsely claiming to have won the 2016 popular vote. And that’s because Trump was a fascist, buffoonish or not, or at least “95 percent” of one, as Snyder seemed to tell de Vega four months into the Trump presidency.<sup>67</sup>

My fellow Chicago Refuse Fascism activists had been right all along, like many of the Iowa City residents and students with whom I’d occupied Interstate-80 the Friday after Trump’s election: there’d been a fascist in the White House.

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## Chapter 4

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# The Anatomy of Fascism Denial

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The Republicans constantly, falsely, and absurdly call the Democrats socialists; the Democrats never accurately and honestly call the Republicans fascists.

–The author, private communication, April 28, 2021

To speak of “fascism” in American political discourse has long been one of the great taboos of political life – the wise opinion-leaders ritually insisting that this nefarious reference, like dictatorship, tyranny, and totalitarianism, is relevant exclusively to other countries.

–Carl Boggs, 2018

In my writing and interviews, I have consistently referred to Donald Trump as a fascist. I have received a great deal of resistance to that claim.

–*Salon* columnist Chauncy de Vega, May 1, 2017

If Trump was a fascist and we were in a situation akin to Germany in 1932 or Italy in 1921, certain kinds of actions would be justified.

But we are not, and they are not.

–Political scientist Sheri Berman, October 2020

If we start explaining how America is in fact in an authoritarian situation with Donald Trump and his administration, then another question arises. One of the reasons so many people are scared is that to admit the truth about Trump and authoritarianism then means they would have to do something about it. Many people do not want to take that leap.

–Historian Ruth Ben-Ghiat, July 23, 2020

I’ve hesitated to call Donald Trump a fascist. Until now.

–Historian Robert Paxton, author of *The Anatomy of Fascism*, January 14, 2021

In July of 2020, the authoritarianism scholar and European historian Timothy Snyder appeared from Germany on primetime liberal MSNBC commentator Rachel Maddow’s talk show amidst recent reports that Trump’s paramilitaries had been snatching-up protesters in Portland, Oregon. At the start of the interview, MSNBC put up an interesting visual – the words “IT CAN HAPPEN HERE” with the words “CAN HAPPEN” crossed out and replaced above by “*Is Happening*”.<sup>1</sup> It was a brilliant interview in which Snyder accurately discussed the events in Portland as a “material rule of law crisis” consistent with Germany’s descent into dictatorship under Adolph Hitler. As anyone who had read or knew anything of substance about Lewis’ 1935 novel *It Can’t Happen Here*, the “it” in question was fascism. The interview was chilling and instructive, but the specific historical menace Lewis warned about – fascism – was never mentioned. For all one could garner from the Maddow-Snyder dialogue, and consistent with the anti-Soviet historian Snyder’s published work, the danger afoot was simply generic authoritarianism.

**“Can We Call It Fascism Yet?”**



Here is a rough but appropriate summary of a critique I received from numerous online and in-person commentators on “the left” during the Trump years:

All the Democrats and their liberal corporate media allies at the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, CNN, and MSNBC etc. called Trump and his backers ‘fascists’ from the start. That ought to tell you how wrongheaded it was/is to consider Trump a fascist!

It was an absurd criticism. It would have been to the “liberal media’s” credit had it done that, but it did not actually go down that path for the most part. There were exceptions of various degrees, to be sure, such as Gopnik’s description (noted in Chapter 1) of Trump in the highbrow *New Yorker* in May of 2016 and, in more off-beat venues, Ryan Cooper (in *The Week*) and Jamielle Bouie (on *Salon*) the previous fall. In April of 2019, the *New York Times* put up an opinion video<sup>2</sup> in which Jason Stanley discussed numerous ways in which Trump was channeling core fascist political and ideological narratives. Paul Krugman likened Trump to fascism on the *New York Times* editorial page in the summer of 2017<sup>3</sup> and again in the wake of the Attack on the Capitol.

There was something of a mini-surge of candid discussion in the dominant media in the summer of 2020, when Trump went more transparently white-nationalist and authoritarian than ever in response to the George Floyd (and Brionna Taylor and Jacob Blake) Rebellion. In the fetid and frightening milieus of the American COVID-19 and George Floyd summer (which brought televised images of a young Portland protester being nearly killed by a Trump paramilitary’s impact munition and the death of at least 14 protesters)<sup>4</sup> the Public Broadcasting System’s “Amanpour & Co”. brought on Stanley to explain how and why Trump’s presidency was significantly fascistic.<sup>5</sup> The liberal *New York Times* columnist Michelle Goldberg noted that “protesters are being snatched from the streets without warrants” and asked, “*Can we call it fascism yet?*”<sup>6</sup> MSNBC’s most progressive commentator Mehdi Hasan gave the incisive reflection I quoted in the previous chapter on how it was “time to say the F-word, fascism”<sup>7</sup> Other media personalities who linked Trump to “the F-word” during the George

Floyd season included MSNBC's Chris Hayes, the *New Yorker's* Masha Gessen (with qualifications),<sup>8</sup> and (without qualifications) *The Week's* Ryan Cooper.<sup>9</sup>

But such explicit references to “the F-word” were by far and away the major media exception, not the rule. The prevalent corporate media response to Goldberg's question, “can we call it fascism yet?” was a resounding “*no, not really*”. The partial surge of “fascism-talk” that broke out in the summer of 2020 came absurdly late in the game and under extreme and undeniable circumstances that should have elicited far more such chatter. It came with numerous qualifications (Gessen felt compelled to call Trump's fascism merely “performative”) and a revealing tone of defensiveness (“can we say the word?” and “I know many don't want to hear this” and the like) indicating that it was *considered risky and over-provocative* and “incendiary” to call a spade a spade and accurately describe the fascist Trump and his fascist allies and supporters as fascists.

Paul Krugman's reference to Trump as obviously a fascist after the remarkably fascist events of January 6, 2021, was the last time the 45th US president was described that way by any *Times* opinion writer – this even after the ultimate proof of Trump's fascist aspiration had been made clear as day. In the five opinion pieces it published on the Capitol Riot in the four weeks following the incident, the Editorial Board of the nation's “newspaper of record” failed to use the word “fascism” even once. The editors couldn't even say “authoritarian”.

These were remarkable deletions considering that the editors were describing and denouncing the actions not just of Trump but also of openly fascist groups like the Three Percenters, 11 Percenters, Boogaloo Boys, the Oath Keepers, the Nationalist Social Club/NSC 131, QAnon, and the Proud Boys.<sup>10</sup>

“If this could happen in Washington, with its rock-solid democratic institutions”, the *Times* editors proclaimed in a bold statement of unabashed American Exceptionalism, “no one [is] was immune”. Just what “this” was left unstated by editors who proudly contrasted the glorious “democratic” USA with “authoritarian regimes” on “the other end of the geopolitical spectrum”.<sup>11</sup>

The *Times'* editors might just well have said, “it can't happen here”.

It wasn't just about the *Times*. The broader "liberal" corporate media during the Trump years ran heavily with the deceptively democratic-sounding terms "populist" and "populism" to describe the president and his allies and backers, thereby merging Trump's neofascism with the leftish social-democratic progressive "populism" of Bernie Sanders. It also habitually described Trump and his backers as "conservative" – an inappropriate term for a wannabe dictator who spent much of his presidency holding mass rallies fomenting racial hatred and political violence and who (as predicted and warned by many, including people from his inner circle and administration) tried to subvert and nullify an American presidential election. Reporting on his exhaustive empirical research on mainstream corporate media content during the Trump administration, the prolific political scientist and media and propaganda critic Anthony DiMaggio finds that US corporate media was reluctant to see Trump and Trumpism as fascist and even authoritarian, preferring the misleading terms "populism" and "populist":

*The New York Times'* editors' apprehension about recognizing an authoritarian or fascistic threat in the US is representative of a larger trend of denialism in American news media. Assessing various "liberal" media venues that are commonly framed as antagonistic toward Republicans and the right, I looked at news stories, op-eds, editorials, and other content in major newspapers, cable news, online, and newswire stories throughout the entirety of Trump's presidency, from election day 2016 (November 8) through election day 2020 (November 3), that referenced President Trump, in relation to discussions of populism, authoritarianism, and fascism .... references to fascism were far and away the most infrequent descriptor appearing in relation to Trump in news stories. More common were references to Trump and authoritarianism, which appeared in all outlets between 2.5 to more than 4 times as often as references to fascism. References to populism in relation to Trump were even more common, appearing between 4 and 5 times as often as references to fascism. Finally, references to populism in relation to Trump were also much more common than references to authoritarianism, appearing about twice as often in each media venue, with the single exception of MSNBC, which covered authoritarianism

slightly more often than populism ... The news media catered to power by softening their language when referring to the Trump administration. The populist frame was preferred to other more critical frameworks, stressing authoritarianism and fascism. This is what we would expect if journalists were going out of their way to avoid the sharpest, and most specific criticisms of this administration, for fear of backlash from the Trump administration, Republican officials, rightwing media pundits, and Americans on the conservative to far-right part of the political spectrum. Populism is the least offensive or controversial of all the labels that could be applied to Trump, since it generically refers to the alleged wisdom and passions of the “average” American, against the “corruption” of elites, and with regard to the importance of promoting political, social, and economic transformation of society away from the status quo.

As DiMaggio shows, those relatively rare media commentators and journalists who were willing to go beyond the deceptive and comfortable terms “populist” and “populism” preferred “authoritarianism” to fascism since the latter “carries with it more severe implications in terms of our understanding the threat of Trumpism to democratic-republican governance” and is “inextricably linked to two of the most heinous, repressive dictatorships in human history” in ways that are “incongruent with the dominant image of American exceptionalism – ‘It Can’t Happen Here’”.<sup>12</sup>

Even acknowledging Trump’s obvious authoritarianism was too much for *Times* columnist Ross Douthat. He published an editorial in early October of 2020 assuring readers that “there will be no Trump coup” since Trump was a “corrupt incompetent who postures as a strongman on Twitter” rather than “a threat to the Republic to whom words like ‘authoritarian’ and even ‘autocrat’ can be reasonably applied”.<sup>13</sup> Equally dismissive of “overblown alarmism” about the authoritarian menace was *New Republic* staff writer Walter Shapiro. On October 20, 2020, amidst Trump’s fascist war on bourgeois democracy, Shapiro made fun of those who saw “signs of the apocalypse”, brooding over “outlandish scenarios about democracy in peril” from Trump’s clear determination to subvert the election. Shapiro dripped with disdain for “frightened anti-Trumpers lying awake at 3 o’clock in the morning”, finding

these “Chicken Little” liberals and leftists caught up in a childish “phantasmagoria of fears” that was “a window into the fragile psyches of downtrodden Democrats”.<sup>14</sup>

## **Democratic Party Denialism**

This media avoidance of “the F-word” both reflected and reinforced the same trend in the Democratic Party. Fascism-denialism was not 100 percent in the party during the Trump years, but it was close. There were some exceptions, to be sure. We saw how the liberal US Representative James McGovern of Massachusetts rightly identified the Trump-instigated Capitol Rioters of January 6, 2021, as “homegrown fascists”. Thirteen days later, McGovern’s fellow liberal Representative Mark Pocan (D-WI) tweeted the following on the eve of Trump’s last day in the White House: “Good riddance you *fascist white supremacist*”. In early October of 2020, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) Tweeted the following: “Donald Trump is a white supremacist ... People have been warning about this for a long time. They were ridiculed, called hyperbolic & radical – not bc they were wrong, but bc others couldn’t accept that our country elected a supremacist as President. *This is fascism at our door*” (emphasis added).<sup>15</sup>

But such public acknowledgements, all quite late in the game, were extremely rare among Democratic Party politicians within and beyond elected office.

## **Obama's As If Speech**

The pattern was epitomized early on by Barack Obama immediately after Trump’s 2016 election. While the election results reverberated through a disbelieving and bewildered media, Obama went out to the White House Rose Garden to, in the trademark language of his public relations department, “address the nation on ... the next steps we can take to come together as a country and ensure a peaceful transition of power”. Obama’s oration was a *tour de force* of accommodation, appeasement, and denial. He spoke in muted terms of conflict-avoidant conservatism, unity, and normalization:

Now, everybody is sad when their side loses an election. But the day after, we have to remember that *we're actually all on one team. This is an intramural scrimmage. We're not Democrats first. We're not Republicans first. We are Americans first. We're patriots first. We all want what's best for this country. That's what I heard in Mr. Trump's remarks last night. That's what I heard when I spoke to him directly.* And I was heartened by that. That's what the country needs – a sense of unity; a sense of inclusion; a respect for our institutions, our way of life, rule of law; and a respect for each other. I hope that he maintains that spirit throughout this transition, and I certainly hope that's how his presidency has a chance to begin.

A lot of our fellow Americans are exultant today. A lot of Americans are less so. But that's the nature of campaigns. *That's the nature of democracy .... We try really hard to persuade people that we're right. And then people vote.* And then if we lose, we learn from our mistakes, we do some reflection, we lick our wounds, we brush ourselves off, we get back in the arena. We go at it. We try even harder the next time.

The point, though, is, *is that we all go forward, with a presumption of good faith in our fellow citizens – because that presumption of good faith is essential to a vibrant and functioning democracy.* That's how this country has moved forward for 240 years. It's how we've pushed boundaries and promoted freedom around the world. That's how we've expanded the rights of our founding to reach all of our citizens. It's how we have come this far. And that's why I'm confident that *this incredible journey that we're on as Americans will go on. And I am looking forward to doing everything that I can to make sure that the next President is successful in that.*<sup>16</sup>

This was Obama's standard bromide-laden style, appealing to the supposed "democratic" greatness of America and the purportedly shared values of all Americans – the same tired nostrums Obama and many of his fans had been confusing with Lincolnesque eloquence ever since he arrived on the national political stage in the summer of 2004.<sup>17</sup> The speech was written and delivered *as if* Trump, who has spent much of the 2015–2016 campaign

launching absurd and not-so subtly racist attacks on Obama, wasn't a deadly authoritarian, white-supremacist menace. Written in response to Hillary Clinton's equally accommodating and denialist concession speech, Masha Gessen's words could be easily applied to Obama's Rose Garden oration:

It was *as though* Donald Trump had not, in the course of his campaign, promised to deport US citizens, promised to create a system of surveillance targeted specifically at Muslim Americans, promised to build a wall on the border with Mexico, advocated war crimes, endorsed torture, and repeatedly threatened to jail Hillary Clinton herself. *It was as though those statements and many more could be written off as so much campaign hyperbole and now that the campaign was over, Trump would be eager to become a regular, rule-abiding politician of the pre-Trump era* (emphasis added).<sup>18</sup>

It is doubtful that Obama meant a word of what he said in the Rose Garden. We have already seen in Chapter 2 that Obama spoke to David Remnick four days before the election about how Trump was the reflection of a real danger brewing within the Republican Party for many years. As we know from *Hillary*, a Hillary Clinton documentary released last January, moreover, Obama called Donald Trump a "fascist" in an October 2016 conversation with Hillary Clinton's then-running mate, Senator Tim Kaine. "Tim, remember", Obama said by phone, within Mrs. Clinton's earshot, and with her nodding approval, "this is no time to be a purist. You've got to keep a *fascist* out of the White House".<sup>19</sup>

### ***"Things Can Apart Pretty Quickly"***

Obama's accurate October 2016 description of Trump as a "fascist" was a strictly private affair and stayed that way all the way through the Trump presidency. In researching my October 2020 book *Hollow Resistance: Trump, Obama, and the Politics of Resistance*, I examined all of Obama's public political comments from the 2016 election through the 2020 contest. Obama's responses to the fascistic horror of the Trump presidency, were, I found, excruciatingly sparse, mild, indirect, careful, and weak, with only

occasional and partial exceptions linked to the election cycle. Obama was almost absurdly loath even to mention Trump by name, much less describe him the way he did to Tim Kaine and Hillary Clinton in the fall of 2016. At no point in Trump's presidency did Obama properly and publicly refer to Trump as the fascist he understood his successor to be, or even as an authoritarian.<sup>20</sup>

He knew better, after as well as before the 2016 election. On one public occasion, ex-president Obama arguably revealed his own private understanding of Trump's authoritarian and indeed fascist nature. In December of 2017, Obama gave his first major public address since Trump's election at the posh and corporate Economic Club of Chicago, a fit setting given how his political rise had depended on his connections with Chicago and the nation's wealth and powerful elite.<sup>21</sup> "You have", Obama told his well-heeled business class audience during a Q&A after the talk, "*to tend to this garden of democracy. Otherwise*", Obama warned, "*things can fall apart fairly quickly*". By "fall apart fairly quickly", Obama clearly meant that the country could descend into authoritarianism and even, though he did not use the word, fascism. The former president made a somewhat awkward and indirect but unmistakable reference to the rise of Adolph Hitler's Third Reich. "We've seen societies where that happens", Obama said, adding this: "Now, presumably there was a ballroom *here in Vienna in the late 1920s or '30s that looked pretty sophisticated and seemed as if it, filled with the music and art and literature that was emerging, would continue into perpetuity. And then 60 million people died. An entire world was plunged into chaos ... So you got to pay attention – and vote!*"<sup>22</sup>

It was quite an historical reference, rendered more ominous by Obama saying "here in Vienna". In his first major public appearance since Trump's election, Obama made a sloppy but unmistakable analogy to Weimar Germany, which gave way to the Nazi dictatorship. This curious comment, made to opulent Chicago elites primed to profit from Trump's imminent tax cut for the wealthy Few in December of 2017, was the closest Obama would come during Trump's presidency to telling the world what he *privately* knew to be true about Trump – that the nation's 45th president was a fascist.

Of course, the last thing the arch-neoliberal corporatist Obama did during his own presidency was "tend" to the supposed American "garden of



democracy”. His two administrations were monuments to corporate and financial ruling class power in ways that were highly relevant to Trump’s rise, as will be seen in this book’s final chapter.

### ***Joe Biden: “He's Sort of Like Goebbels”***

What about Trump’s 2020 opponent and successor Joe Biden? In his expertly crafted campaign launch video in the spring of 2019, Joe Biden went straight to chilling scenes from the white-supremacist neo-fascist Unite the Right rally held in Charlottesville in August of 2017. Biden charged Trump with promoting neo-Nazis and Klansmen “chanting the same anti-Semitic bile heard across Europe in the 1930s”. The implied reference to historical fascism and the rise of Hitler was clear to those with enough education and knowledge to see and hear it. But most Americans lacked and lack those attributes and Biden said nothing to explicitly relate Charlottesville specifically to the Third Reich or to the rise of specifically fascist authoritarianism and white nationalism in 20th-century interwar Europe. The same deletion characterized Biden’s repeated likening of Trump to “Goebbels”,<sup>23</sup> the Nazi Party and Hitler’s master propagandist. Saying that Trump was “sort of like Goebbels”,<sup>24</sup> Biden never explicitly linked Trump to the Nazi Party or to contemporary neo-fascism. The F-word never passed his lips or Twitter account in public discourse even as his references betrayed his and his team’s private understanding of the connection.

### ***Madeline Albright: “The First Antidemocratic President in Modern American History”***

Another example of elite Democrats’ failure to properly apply “the F-Word” to Trump and Trumpism was former Bill Clinton Secretary of State Madeline Albright’s 2018 book *Fascism: A Warning*. Albright cited numerous terrible and fascistic Trump transgressions but never called him a fascist. Albright referred to Trump as “the first antidemocratic president in modern U.S. history”. It was a ridiculous description: most if not all US presidents have been significantly anti-democratic by institutional definition, but none before Trump had been a fascist. (Equally absurd, Albright’s definition of “fascism”

included Venezuelan socialist leader Hugo Chávez, the Soviet Union and other socialist nations, consistent with Biden's absurd likening of Trump to Fidel Castro,<sup>25</sup> in responding to Trump's absurd claim that Biden was a socialist in the fall of 2020.)

### ***Bernie Sanders: Trump “Does Not Believe in Democracy”, But “We've Got to Reach Out” to His Base***

Contrary to the common identification of “fascism-talk” with the Left, even the self-described “socialist” Bernie Sanders was unwilling to call Trump a fascist, even in mid-December 2020, at the near height of Trump's increasingly violent war on the 2020 election, replete with his approval of two violent fascistic demonstrations in Washington DC. Sanders went on the Sirius radio show of the progressive comedian and political commentator Dean Obeidallah, who asked the Senator the following perceptive question:

*Donald Trump and some of his elected officials there are on, seems like, laying the path for fascism .... with Trump, not only does he check off some of the alarming things of fascism, about hyper-nationalism and turning people against each other, but in the Fall he actually defended violence by his own supporters, the ones who went to Portland and shot people with paint balls. Do you think it's overblown to use the term fascism [to describe Trump]?*

Sanders' answer amounted to saying that *yes, he did in fact think it was overblown to describe Trump as a fascist:*

Look, what I would say, uh, is that to my mind it is not overblown to say that Donald Trump is an authoritarian who does not believe in democracy. It goes beyond Trump. We've got to ask ourselves why 73 million people voted for him, and we've got to reach out to those people and I think that to some degree, Dean, I'm sure a lot of my Democratic colleagues do not agree with me, but this is a reflection of the Democratic Party, because I think if you talk to many of those ... working class people who voted for Trump, they'll say, “Look, of course we

know he's a liar. We know he's full of shit. But at least he does this; he does that." Something the Democrats don't do.<sup>26</sup>

This was a remarkable statement, one that anticipates the next chapter of this book by linking Democratic Party, progressive, and Left fascism-denialism with a widespread and fundamental misunderstanding about the (supposedly proletarian) composition and nature of Trump and American neofascism's voting and movement base.

### ***Nixon Redux: Investigated and Impeached by Democrats Not for His Worst Crimes***

The fascism-denialism of the Democratic Party was subtly evident in the nature of the leading charges the Democrats levelled against Trump's atrocity-laden conduct as president. What were the main indictments made against Trump by the Democrats during his first three horrific years in power? His coddling of fascists in Charlottesville? His fascist-style militarization of the border and immigration raids? His criminal and fascistic child and family separation policy? Kids in cages? His fascistic demonization, menacing, and shaming of Black, LatinX, Asian, Indigenous, and female human beings? His bungled, racist, malicious, and fascistic response to Hurricane Maria? His criminal shutdown of the federal government and terrorization of federal employees in the name of his sadistic, nativist, and fascistic Wall? His sadistic war on health insurance for the poor and sick? His eco-fascistic war on livable ecology, rightly identified by both the hauntingly clairvoyant American University historian Alan Lichtman and the legendary Left intellectual Noam Chomsky as Trump's worst crime of all – the top reason for Chomsky's designation of Trump as "the most dangerous criminal in history"? Regarding this last crime, Lichtman said something worth remembering in the run-up to Trump's first impeachment:

The most overlooked and serious case for impeachment is that Trump is putting the survival of humanity at risk, by not just halting, but throttling back efforts to combat catastrophic climate change. At a time when every

scientific analysis is warning that we are at the brink of true existential disaster for all of humanity. I think that is a crime against humanity which he should be impeached for. And indeed, the International Criminal Court, we're not subject to its jurisdiction, but it makes crimes against environment one of the crimes against humanity. But just as Richard Nixon was not impeached for his worst crime, which was the illegal war that killed more than one hundred thousand people in Cambodia, I don't think Trump will be impeached for his worst crime.<sup>27</sup>

No, Trump was investigated for three years and impeached the first time in December of 2019 not for his cruel and fascistic conduct vis-a-vis people of color, the poor, and/or livable ecology but rather for intra-elite considerations relating to America's imperial foreign policy. While UkraineGate was surely impeachment-worthy and Trump's relationship with white-nationalist Russia was dodgy, to say the least, neither RussiaGate nor UkraineGate qualified as Trump's worst and most genuinely fascist crime against humanity within or beyond the USA. The same goes even for Trump's second justifiable impeachment, which includes no charges for his other and bigger transgressions against non-elites and humanity at home and abroad, including now the sickening, mass-murderous crime of pandemicide. Like Nixon's *de facto* 1974 impeachment and removal, both of Trump's House impeachments punished his transgressions against one of the nation's two dominant ruling class political parties (the Democrats) but not his bigger crimes against the citizenry and humanity.

## **Academic “Fascism Experts” on Why It Wasn't Real(ly) Fascism**

The corporate media and major (Democratic) party political silence on and denial of Trump's fascism (and his authoritarianism quite often) was unsurprising. “To speak of ‘fascism,’ in American political discourse”, Carl Boggs noted three years ago, “has long been one of the great taboos of [US] political life – the wise opinion-leaders ritually insisting that this nefarious reference, like dictatorship, tyranny, and totalitarianism, is relevant exclusively to other countries”<sup>28</sup> (as in “It Can't Happen Here”). It would

have taken more than even the long national nightmare of the Trump presidency, apparently, to convince more than a small number of mainstream media operatives and major party politicians to acknowledge the true nature of the neofascist horror unfolding before their eyes.

More depressing and perhaps more surprising was the denialism exhibited by those one might – perhaps naively – see as more inoculated from Boggs’ “great taboo”: academics.

## **Before the 2020 Election**

### **“95 Percent Bad”**

“In my writing and interviews”, *Salon*’s Chauncy de Vega told the eminent Yale historian Timothy Snyder in April of 2017, three months into the Trump presidency, “I have consistently referred to Donald Trump as a fascist. I have received a great deal of resistance to that claim. Do you think this description is correct? If not, then what language should we use to describe Donald Trump?” Here was Snyder’s answer:

The pushback that you are talking about is 95 percent bad. Americans do not want to think that there is an alternative to what we have. Therefore, as soon as you say “fascism” or whatever it might be, then the American response is to say “no” because we lack the categories that allow us to think outside of the box that we are no longer in .... I don’t want to dodge your question about whether Trump is a fascist or not. As I see it, there are certainly *elements of his approach which are fascistic*. The straight-on confrontation with the truth is at the center of the fascist worldview. The attempt to undo the Enlightenment as a way to undo institutions, that is fascism.

Whether he realizes it or not is a different question, but that’s what fascists did. They said, “Don’t worry about the facts; don’t worry about logic. Think instead in terms of mystical unities and direct connections between the mystical leader and the people.” *That’s fascism*. Whether

we see it or not, whether we like it or not, whether we forget, *that is fascism*.

Another thing that's *clearly fascist* about Trump [is] his rallies. The way that he use[s] the language, the blunt repetitions, the naming of the enemies, the physical removal of opponents from rallies, that [is] really, without exaggeration, just like the 1920s and the 1930s ... And Mr. [Steve] Bannon's preoccupation with the 1930s and his kind of wishful reclamation of Italian and other fascists speaks for itself.

There are two remarkable things to note about this exchange. The first is that de Vega faced “resistance” in liberal and Left circles for the elementarily accurate description of Donald Trump as a fascist. We have seen (in Chapter 2) that numerous perceptive observers like de Vega, Jamielle Bouie, Adam Gopnik, and Henry Giroux (among others) easily understood Trump correctly and obviously to be *a fascist* – not just a racist, sexist, and authoritarian brute with some “fascistic elements” – even before his fascist presidency.

The second thing was that Snyder qualified the notion that the “pushback” de Vega was getting was wrong. “95 percent bad” is very close to “100 percent bad”, to be sure, but why did Snyder feel compelled to hold back on going all the way, this while describing key definitionally fascist things Trump was doing – this in an interview that correctly predicted Trump would try to mount a coup to stay in office in 2020 and 2021.<sup>29</sup>

### ***“Most People Think of an Instant Shutdown of Democracy”***

Speaking to de Vega three years and three months later, Snyder's fellow European historian and “fascism expert”, New York University's Ruth Ben-Ghiat said she felt pressure to “use the word ‘fascistic’ as opposed to ‘fascism’ to describe Donald Trump” because “when we use the word ‘fascism’ *most people think of an instant shutdown of democracy and brown shirts and other political thugs in the streets*”.<sup>30</sup>

It was an interesting comment. There *were* “brown shirts and other political thugs” in the nation's streets when Ben-Ghiat spoke to de Vega, as

antifascist and other civil and human rights protesters could have told the professor in July of 2020 (there would be more in coming days and months). And who did Ben-Ghiat mean by “most people?” Academics and (an overlapping but different category) intellectuals, who certainly made up the majority of people using or contemplating the applicability of “the F-word”.

The critical mistake she cited without calling it a mistake – thinking that the F-word didn’t apply until there was the rapid installation of a dictatorship with fascist forces violently crushing opposition – was just one among a handful of errors that the intellectual class made vis-a-vis Trump and Trumpism-fascism. The cognitively dissonant stubbornness of many tenured, doctorate-brandishing thinkers’ fascism-denial would last up to and beyond the election, even as Trump did everything he could to undermine a reasonably free and fair election and then to reverse that election’s outcome – to the point of encouraging fascist mobs, replete with armed militia men (including Three Percenters and neo-Nazi Proud Boys), to engage in “wild” protests of the election, and asking his advisors about the possibility of declaring martial law to prevent Biden’s inauguration. In some cases, we will see, it persisted even after the Attack on the Capitol, with one notable and somewhat risible exception – that of historian Robert Paxton, author of the classic text *The Anatomy of Fascism*.

### ***Bruce Neuborne: “Like Hitler” and Yet “Reluctant to Use the Names Hitler and Trump in the Same Sentence”***

In telling de Vega why she preferred to say “fascistic” and “authoritarian” over “fascist” in her professional milieu, Ben-Ghiat could have been thinking of a book published by her NYU colleague Bruce Neuborne. Neuborne was the Norman Dorsan Professor of Civil Liberties at NYU’s law school, the former legal director of the NAACP, and the founding director of NYU’s prestigious and distinctly liberal Brennan Center for Justice. Published in 2019, Neuborne’s volume *When At Times the Mob is Swayed* found no less than *twenty* common themes, tactics, and policies that Trump as president was “*copying from the early Hitler government*” of 1930s Germany: holding power without winning majority support; finding and using direct lines of communication with their base; blaming others and dividing along

racial lines; relentlessly demonizing opponents; constantly attacking objective truth; relentlessly attacking mainstream media; assaulting science; cultivating a fawning alternative media to spread lies; regular orchestrated mass hate-rallies; extreme nationalism; closing borders; embracing mass detention and deportation; using borders to protect selected industries; embedding authoritarian rule by rewarding capitalist elites; rejecting international norms; attacking domestic democratic processes; attacking courts and the rule of law; glorifying the military and demanding loyalty oaths; proclaiming unchecked power; relegating women to subordinate roles.<sup>31</sup>

Neuborne portrayed the menace posed by Trump in unnerving terms. “It shouldn’t come as a surprise”, Neuborne wrote, “that Trump is so adept at exploiting fear and inventing scapegoats. He studied at the feet of the master ... a younger Donald Trump slept with a book of Adolf Hitler’s collected political speeches, published in 1941 as *My New Order*, in a locked cabinet at his bedside”.<sup>32</sup> Claiming that Trump was “following Hitler’s playbook” and “letting Hitler’s genies out of the bottle”, Neuborne wrote that “It could happen here” – “it” meaning dictatorship. Neuborne added a note of highly personal trepidation:

I lived through McCarthyism ... I was on Nixon’s enemies list ... Edwin Meese, Ronald Reagan’s attorney general, once described the ACLU under my leadership as “the criminals” lobby. But *I have never experienced the sense of dread that Trump’s behavior has unleashed in my mind and heart ... [a] sense that the very existence of a tolerant democracy was in play ...* He is unleashing forces the imperil the fragile fabric of a multicultural democracy ... Trump’s bedside study of Hitler’s speeches – especially the use of personal invective, white racism, and xenophobia – has shaped the way Trump seeks to gain political power in our time (emphasis added).<sup>33</sup>

And yet, despite all this, Neuborne was strangely unimpressed by the similarities with classic historical fascism:



What are we to make of such parallels? *Possibly very little ... they simply reflect the inherent nature of populist politics. When you scratch a successful populist movement, like Mussolini's Italy, Peron's Argentina, or Huey Long's Louisiana, there's always a charismatic leader, a disaffected mass, an adroit use of communications media, economic insecurity, racial or religious fault lines, xenophobia, a turn to violence, and a search for scapegoats.*<sup>34</sup>

In fact *I'm reluctant to use the names Hitler and Trump in the same sentence.* It trivializes Hitler's obscene crimes to compare them with Donald Trump's often pathetic foibles. It is also unfair to Trump to cast him as the epitome of evil rather than the shallow blowhard that he is. While our forty-fifth president loves to play at being the boss, I do not believe Trump hopes or intends to morph into a dictator with an agenda of evil ... I don't for a moment believe Trump admires what Hitler eventually did with his power (emphasis added).<sup>35</sup>

Here Neuborne fell so far into the myth (deconstructed in the introduction to the present volume) of fascism as populism as to see even Mussolini's classical historical fascist regime as a "successful populist movement".

The "F-word" didn't make it into Neuborne's book's index or text *even as he dedicated 14 pages to direct and chilling parallels between Trump and the ultimate classic historical fascist Adolf Hitler. Neuborne's statement that he was "reluctant to use the names Hitler and Trump in the same sentence" comes right before he dedicates 11 pages precisely to making 20 parallels between Trump and Hitler.*

Neuborne was in deep denial not just about fascism but even about the depth and degree of Trump's malevolence. He might have wanted to consult those who knew Trump from inside the demented president's circle, family, and administration – people like Trump's longtime personal lawyer and fixer Michael Cohen, Trump's psychologist niece Mary Trump, and the former Trump administration official Miles Taylor. During the last two years of Trump's presidency, each of these individuals published books suggesting that Trump was a malicious individual who would have *loved precisely to "morph into a dictator"*. Whence Trump's special love for despots and dictators of various ideological stripes around the world? "The president", a

top national security official aide told Taylor, “sees in these guys what he wishes he had: total power, no term limits, enforced popularity, and the ability to silence critics for good”.<sup>36</sup>

The title of Mary Trump’s later book was *Too Much and Never Enough: How My Family Created the World’s Most Dangerous Man*. Ms. Trump revealed that her uncle was a sick and sadistic individual incapable of concern for others, that he hired someone to take his SAT exam, and that he grew up under the abusive control of a domineering father while spouting racist, antisemitic, sexist, and homophobic rhetoric. More alarming perhaps was Ms. Trump’s warning on cable news that her uncle’s re-election would be “the end of the American experiment”.<sup>37</sup> By the “American experiment”, Ms. Trump meant “democracy” – or what was left of it in the USA.

Neuborne could not fathom that the supposed mere clown (the “pathetic” and “shallow blowhard”) Trump might have been every bit as evil as “the master” (Hitler) at whose feet Trump once studied by the law professor’s account.

### ***Elijah Bures: “Don’t Call Donald Trump a Fascist”***

Professor Ben-Ghiat might also have been thinking of her longtime fellow NYU historian Greg Grandin’s magisterial book *The End of the Myth*, a brilliant reflection on Trump that dared not use the F-word to characterize Trump and his brand of “barbarism” – or of Grandin’s future Yale colleague Timothy Snyder’s widely read 2017 book *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*. Writing in the wake of Trump’s election, the authoritarianism scholar Snyder sagely wrote that “We are no wiser than the Europeans who saw who saw democracy yield to fascism, Nazism, or communism” but made no properly specific or explicit connections between Trump and *the specific form of authoritarianism* that is fascism.

Professor Ben-Ghiat might also have been thinking of the nation’s leading Left intellectual Noam Chomsky, who likened Trump’s victory to the rise of Adolph Hitler<sup>38</sup> but explicitly rejected use of the term fascism to describe the new fascist US president. Or she might have been reflecting on an article published in the influential journal *Foreign Policy* in early November of 2019 under the title “Don’t Call Donald Trump a Fascist: What it Means to

Brand Today's Right-Wing Leaders with the F-Word – and Why You Probably Shouldn't". The article's author Eliah Bures, a 20th-century European/German historian, informed readers that Trump didn't pass F-word muster because he wasn't the "real [20th Century European] fascism" thing. Trump failed to get the F-grade, Bures insisted, because he didn't "practice[e] a purifying brutality in furtherance of utopian goals", including "the organization of the world along hierarchical racial lines and the military conquest of a vast new ... empire, in which the biologically unworthy would be killed or enslaved". Professor Bures here set the tone for the most widespread *explicitly Trump-fascism-denying academic narratives, commonly* articulated by European 20th-century historians who lacked expertise on 21st-century American politics and neofascism, fittingly enough: Trump should not be understood as fascist because he was not a classic disciplined 20th-century European "revolutionary fascist ideologue" on the model of Mussolini or Hitler but rather a lazy and sloppy "illiberal" 21st-century oligarch and "populist" plutocrat in neoliberal corporate America.<sup>39</sup>

### ***Robert Paxton: "Still No State Management of the Economy"***

One year later, with Trump exposing his fascistic essence on a grand scale, the online political journal *VOX* published an essay bearing this title: "Is Trump a Fascist? 8 Experts Weigh In". The answer was a resounding NO. "Call him a kleptocrat, an oligarch, a xenophobe, a racist, even an authoritarian", *VOX's* Dylan Matthews (a former *Washington Post* blogger and a Harvard philosophy graduate) wrote, "but he doesn't quite fit the definition of a fascist". The *VOX* piece featured selections from interviews with eight "fascism scholars", seven of whom (Jason Stanley being the sole exception) insisted that the F-word didn't apply to Trump.<sup>40</sup>

For those who had been actively resisting Trumpism-fascism in the streets and public squares as well as in the political-intellectual culture, Matthews' feature was a depressing read, loaded with egregious failures of logic and evidence that were all the more remarkable for how late in Trump's clearly fascist presidency the *VOX* report came out. Columbia University's emeritus professor Robert Paxton, possibly the leading historian

of 20th-century European fascism, told Matthews that he was “struck now with Trump’s growing willingness to employ physical violence”. Paxton noted that “we now ... have the Proud Boys and the aggression against the governor of Michigan” and observed that Trump was getting “closer to having his own SA [the Nazi paramilitary group], a sobering thought as the election approaches”. Nonetheless, Paxton insisted on “stand[ing] by” his denial of Trump’s fascism because:

*there is still no state management of the economy here (as there was to a degree in Nazi Germany and fascist Italy). Trump is content to aid business by reducing government protections of the environment and of workers ... and his economic policy is mainly just to let businessmen do what they want, So I still think terms like “oligarchy” and “plutocracy” work for Trump, with the added thought that he is close to crossing the line with his toleration of violence.*

This was essentially the same position taken by Noam Chomsky, who cited Robert Brady’s mid-1930s study of the Third Reich, *The Spirit and Structure of German Fascism* (1937) as “proof” that Trumpism and fascism didn’t really deserve to be mentioned in the same breath.

Paxton’s resistance to calling Trump a fascist rested on an over-identification of a political and ideological phenomenon (fascism) with a political-economic relationship between the state, economy, and the business class specific to classically fascist Italy and Germany eighty to ninety years ago and on an excessive reluctance to call fascism fascism before a nation has gone fully fascist and become a fascist state. Paxton channeled a widespread fascism-denying narrative: Trump and Trumpism weren’t fascist because Trump hadn’t succeeded in introducing a consolidated one-party-state fascist regime with a maximal dictator, the shutting down of independent media, and the state (dictator) commanding the economy.

*The problem here was that nobody legitimately and seriously concerned about Trumpism-fascism claimed that Trump had introduced or was introducing such a consolidated fascist regime. They saw him as the leader atop a movement practicing fascist politics and ideology, a movement that had captured the presidency, but (of course) not as an actual dictator atop a fully formed fascist government. As Jason Stanley explained to*

Matthews, it is essential to identify and oppose fascist politics and movements before they hatch an actual fascist regime:

you can legitimately call Trumpism *a fascist social and political movement* ... Trumpism involves a cult of the leader, and Trump embodies that. I certainly think he's using fascist political tactics. I think there's no question about that. He is calling for national restoration in the face of humiliations brought on by immigrants, liberals, liberal minorities, and leftists. He's certainly *playing the fascist playbook* .... My definition is of *fascist politics, not of a fascist regime. I think most of the other [fascism scholars] are just talking about something else. They're talking about regimes. ... If you're only worried about fascist regimes, you're never going to catch fascist social and political movements. The goal is to catch fascist social and political movements, and fascist ideology, before it becomes a regime* (emphasis added).

This is a critical distinction. When classic historical fascism was still a movement and not yet a regime in 1930s Germany, Hitler's brown-shirts didn't smash heads and kill people chanting "Let's Build a Corporate State with a State Command Capitalist Political Economy!" They went about beating up and murdering communists, socialists, and Jews, threats they merged in the phrase "judeo-bolshevism". They were very much about white nationalism, the recurrent dominant theme in Hitler's writings and speeches, as was Trump eight decades later.

Mid-way through the Trump years, it dawned on the present writer that many American intellectuals wouldn't be willing to see fascism as a problem in the USA until paramilitaries came to their homes and dragged them off to detention camps. The critical flaw here was an all-or-nothing black and white litmus test for fascism: either a triumphant consolidated fascist regime on the maximal models of Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Third Reich or "no fascism". Serious contemporary analysts of neofascism were working instead with a more reasonably nuanced attention to gray areas, "fascist creep" ("creeping fascism", if one prefers), and fascist movements in the neoliberal era. Activists and intellectuals who saw and see Trump and Trumpism as fascist have never posited or expected an exact replication of German Nazi

or Italian fascism in the contemporary USA. (A 21st-century neoliberal-era American fascist regime, they know, will be considerably less state-command-oriented than the classic historical European fascism of the past century.) As Timothy Snyder would note eleven days after the Capitol Riot, Stanley's perspective was preferable to that of those who took an all-or-nothing black and white, Eurocentric, and 20th-century, Hitler- and Mussolini-obsessed approach to the matter:

These last four years, scholars have discussed the legitimacy and value of invoking fascism in reference to Trumpian propaganda. One comfortable position has been to label such an effort as *a direct comparison* [with German and Italian fascism 1920s–1940s] *and then to treat such comparisons as taboo. More productively, the philosopher Jason Stanley has treated fascism as a phenomenon, as a series of patterns that can be observed not only in interwar Europe but beyond it.*

### **Stanley Payne: “Just Silly Public Remarks”**

Stanley Payne, the Jaume Vicens Vives and Hilldale professor emeritus of history at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, was coldly contemptuous of the notion that Trump deserved to be understood in terms of “the F-word” in the fall of 2020. In response to Matthews' query, Payne committed the recurrent master blunder of many intellectuals with whom I interacted between 2017 and 2021: claiming that failure to introduce a full fascist state and commit crimes on the scale of Hitler (and/or Mussolini) meant that Trump and Trumpism weren't fascist. Payne went further, describing Trump's fascism as little more than inane rhetoric:

This inquiry made a little sense four years ago, when Trump was still an unknown quantity, but now he has a record. Well – that's pretty *thin gruel. Nothing much to work with here.* The Democrats won the first election under Trump [the 2018 midterms], and I'm not aware of anything negative happening. Straining at gnats doesn't really get us anywhere. Mostly these are just *silly public remarks. Hitler's place in*

*history is not based on his remarks, nor for any temporary detention cages. Please do not .* That indicates absence of an argument (emphasis added).

That was a bone-chilling reflection, reducing the epic criminality depicted in the present volume's third chapter to nothing more, really than "silly public remarks" – as if Trump's eliminationist, sexist, white-supremacist, and arch-authoritarian rhetoric and the support it garnered from tens of millions of Americans was of no real significance. These were insights Payne needed to share with the immigrants penned up in Trump's concentration camps, the parents whose children were stolen from them at the southern US border under Trump's family separation policy, and the survivors of the nearly 400,000-plus Americans who had died by October of 2020 from the pandemic Trump had fanned across the nation, dismissing its significance even after he contracted the virus himself (likely surviving because of his access to the best treatments available). Payne should have shared his "thin gruel" and "just silly public remarks" judgement with the survivors of people murdered by white-nationalist killers triggered by Trump's hateful rhetoric, the survivors of the hundreds who died in the desert trying to reach the USA trying to get past Trump's tightened border controls,<sup>41</sup> the people of Puerto Rico, who Trump left to suffer without adequate federal (while downplaying the extent of death and destruction) assistance in the wake of Hurricane Maria, the people of sanction-ravaged Iran, and the Muslims and others from Muslim countries who were unable to visit loved ones because of Trump's racist travel ban.

Even sharp and prescient observers like Masha Gessen and Jason Stanley were susceptible to this downplaying of Trump's deeds. Gessen labelled Trump's fascist response to the George Floyd Rebellion merely "*performative fascism*" and Stanley made this weak statement to *Business Insider* in the summer of 2020:

*I'm not saying that Trump is a fascist. Trump is certainly performing fascism – it's performative fascism that we're seeing. It's the tropes of fascism, and I think that's worrisome enough. What's to stop him from escalating? What's to stop a future person, a future president from escalating, whether Democrat or Republican? ... He might be doing it*

*merely performatively* – we don't know. But you want to stop it early, so you don't allow *this performative fascism to be something that could be turned non-performative and degrade our democratic norms.* (emphasis added).<sup>42</sup>

Beyond the fact that fascism has always been highly performative, Trump's rhetoric and "theater" mattered a great deal. When the occupant of the White House regularly channels far-, right conspiracy theories, violent white nationalism, and vile malignant narcissism on a mass scale, great harm results and "democratic norms" are badly "degraded".

### ***"He's a Wheeler and Dealer, Not an Ideologue ... No Challenge to Constitutional Democracy"***

The emeritus Oxford historian Roger Griffin told Matthews that Trump was "absolutely not a fascist" because:

He's never actually done a Putin and tried to make himself a permanent president, let alone suggest any coherent plan for overthrowing the constitutional system. And I don't even think that's in his mind. He is an exploiter, he's a freeloader. He's a wheeler and dealer. And that is not the same as an ideologue .... He does not pose a challenge to constitutional democracy.

What he is quite consistently is an illiberal democrat. He is a democrat to the extent that he's used democratic processes to be where he is, which he doesn't radically challenge ... By *not calling him fascist*, and concentrating on the way he perverts democracy, we see Trump in a different context. *We don't see him as Hitler or Mussolini.* We see him in a different rogues' gallery. And the rogues' gallery is made up of a whole load of dictators throughout history, including Putin and Erdogan and Orbán and Assad today, who have abused constitutionalism and democracy to rationalize their abuse of power and their crimes against humanity.



This was an arrogant, poorly conceived take on Trump as the president and his party scrambled to cripple and subvert the 2020 presidential election in *precisely* “a challenge to constitutional democracy” – one that Timothy Snyder had easily predicted three years before and that culminated in a fascist-style, Trump-sparked physical assault on Congress as it attempted to certify Joe Biden’s victory. Ignoring numerous ways in which Trump was an ideologue of white-supremacist authoritarian nationalism who posed clear and present dangers to “constitutional democracy”, Griffin set up a false dichotomy between fascism and the use, perversion, and abuse of “constitutional democracy” to gain power and justify crimes against humanity. (Hitler and Mussolini, Griffin’s historical gold standard for understanding fascism, both used and distorted bourgeois democracy and law for their nefarious purposes.) This was an embarrassing mistake, as was Griffin’s giveaway statement that “*we don’t see him as Hitler or Mussolini*”, since no serious thinker or activist believed Trump was or could have been an historical replica of dictators from two European countries nearly a century ago. As was well understood not just by his left and liberal critics but by people inside the Trump regime, moreover, Trump very much aspired to “do a Putin and try to make himself president for life”.

### ***Sheri Berman: “We Are Still Not in 1930s Germany” and So Don’t Have to Fight Trump***

Sheri Berman, a professor of political science at Columbia University, told Matthews that she rejected what she incorrectly called “an almost majority view” because she did “not like applying that term” – fascism – “to Trump or to what is going on in this country ... National socialism or, more broadly, fascism”, Berman explained:

was a totalitarian ideology and political regime that wanted to do away not only with liberalism and democracy but to revolutionize society, economy, and politics .... and that is not where we are today ... Of course Trump maintains his support by engaging in explicitly divisive appeals designed to pit groups against each other – particularly but not exclusively ethnic groups – And, of course, Trump is undermining

various norms and institutions of democracy. But this doesn't make him a fascist, which means much more than these things. Indeed, I almost think calling Trump "fascist" gives him too much "credit" – he isn't strategic enough, ideological enough, or ambitious enough. And as bad as things are today, *we are still not in 1930s Germany*...I would still prefer referring to him as an illiberal populist or right-wing populist. He has a lot in common with the right-wing populists roaming around Europe today.

Berman here fell prey to the common misunderstanding of fascism as a "totalitarian" societal makeover – a myth that Carl Boggs explodes in his important but widely neglected 2017 book *Fascism Old and New: American Politics at the Crossroads*. (Boggs shows that classic historical "fascism by its very nature ... never reach[ed] totalitarian dimensions, as in practice it possessed many of the very characteristics of diversity, pluralism, and social autonomy for which it assailed liberalism – though within a more organized and regulated statism".)<sup>43</sup> Berman also repeated the common academic mistake of seeing the authoritarian plutocrat Trump as a populist, adding the prefix "right-wing" to create the oxymoronic phrase "right-wing populist".

Berman was correct to note that Trump wasn't and isn't capable of strong strategy or a strong grasp of fascist ideology. But so what? Fascism has never been exactly strong on brainpower and reasoning. It has always promoted the power of "will", force, violence, and cult leaders over rational thought and intellectual rigor. At the same time, Trump was not without real political acumen when it came to rallying his base. He had enough skill and cleverness to have garnered a soul-chilling second term but for his (yes) idiotic response to the chance occurrence of the COVID-19 outbreak. And he was advised by reasonably lucid fascists like Steve Bannon and Stephen Miller.

Like Griffin and like numerous avowedly left thinkers with whom I corresponded in the Trump years, Berman could not understand Trump in relation to fascism without repeated references to Hitler and Mussolini and the classic historical models of 20th-century European fascism. To say that "as bad as things are today, we are still not in 1930s Germany", was both cold comfort – a rather low bar to say the least – and beside the point in

regard to 21st-century American realities. Along with stating an elementary fact so obvious as to be absurd, saying that “we are still not in 1930s Germany” was to *give the game away: she could or would not extract her understanding of “real” fascism from the classic historical fascist regimes of the 1920s–1940s* (this was perhaps the top calling card of academic and other intellectual workers’ fascism-denial during the Trump years).

But Berman’s most depressing response to Matthews was this: “If Trump was a fascist and we were in a situation akin to Germany in 1932 or Italy in 1921, *certain kinds of actions would be justified. But we are not, and they are not*”. Beyond the false equivalence between Trump being a fascist and Americans being in a situation like that facing Germans and Italians on the eve of Hitler and Mussolini seizing power, the most remarkable thing about this statement was its justification for the continuation of passive nonresistance to the Trump nightmare – for staying behind the protected walls of the ivory tower and letting the political process proceed undisturbed by mass popular action even as Trump murdered tens of thousands of Americans.

It was a revealing reflection. “If we start explaining how America is in fact in an authoritarian situation with Donald Trump and his administration”, Ben-Ghiat told Chauncy de Vega in late July of 2020, “another question arises. One of the reasons so many people are scared is that *to admit the truth about Trump and authoritarianism then means they would have to do something about it. Many people do not want to take that leap*”.<sup>44</sup>

### ***Ruth Ben-Ghiat: “Something More Than a Fascist”***

But Ruth Ben-Ghiat’s response to Dylan Matthews in October of 2020 was a departure from her bolder statements on *Salon* the previous summer. Now, three months later, with Trump clearly scheming to steal the presidential election, Ben-Ghiat said she “favor[ed] authoritarian over fascist as a description for Trump because the former captures how autocratic power works today. In the 21st century, fascist takeovers have been replaced by rulers who come to power through elections and then, over time, extinguish freedom”. Surely, Ben-Ghiat was aware that both Mussolini and Hitler came to power through elections and that Trump had the obvious ambition of

snuffing out the constitutional rule of law and representative “democracy” as the November 2020 contest approached. Perhaps field specialization in European history blinded her to the work of other academics and commentators (examples included Stanley, Henry Giroux, Carl Boggs, and Anthony DiMaggio) who warned about clear fascist tendencies embedded in specifically US-American history and contemporary US society.

Professor Ben-Ghiat posited a false dichotomy between authoritarianism and fascism while saying something peculiar in that regard: “Trump’s role models include leaders like Erdogan and Putin who are not exactly fascists, but *something more*: authoritarians, or strongman rulers who also use virility as a tool of domination”. How such an historical actor was *different from and even “more” than a fascist* was left unexplained, perhaps with good reason.

### ***Jason Brownlee: Not “the Traditional Idea of Fascism”***

Jason Brownlee, a professor of government at the University of Texas at Austin, gave the game away at the outset by telling Matthews this: “I would not say the traditional idea of fascism fits Donald Trump in 2020 any more than it did before he took office”. The problem here was that those who saw Trump as a fascist were *not working with “the traditional idea of fascism”* as exemplified by Hitler and Mussolini. Advancing a false dichotomy positing Trump as being either a fascist (understood as a replication of Hitler and/or Mussolini) or a corrupt kleptocrat seeking to “profit from his time in office” (Brownlee rightly thought the second description applied), Brownlee tore down his straw dog (Trump as a Hitler or Mussolini) by mentioning things Mussolini and Hitler did that Trump didn’t do – “building mass-mobilizing parties and paramilitary organizations with the goal of sweeping aside alternative movements and establishing single-party dictatorship”. Yet while arguing that Trump therefore wasn’t a fascist, Brownlee ironically went on to note that Trump “promoted a *very hierarchical, ethnically based ultranationalist vision that endorses violence against out-groups*” and that Trump “acts as a consummate *demagogue, fabulist, and ultranationalist*” (emphasis added). These were classically fascist behaviors.

At the same time, there is little doubt that Trump aspired to accomplish much of what Brownlee noted Trump failed to achieve. Trump would have loved to develop a powerful paramilitary wing to enforce his will and indeed *tried to do so, however ineptly*, as we have seen in Chapter 3. The special border patrol agents he called in from the white-nationalist frontier to unleash on social justice protesters in Portland, Oregon were a Trump paramilitary force-in-training. Trump got an antifascist killed, death squad-style, outside of Seattle with a snap of his fingers. He accelerated the formation of a vast swath of real and aspiring proto-fascist paramilitary sorts like the Proud Boys, the Oath Keepers, the Three Percenters, the 11 Percenters, various neo-Nazis, the Kenosha Guard (of Kyle Rittenhouse infamy), the Michigan Militia, and the like. He cultivated dangerous loyalty from white police officers across the country – a vast army of authoritarian and racist cops (including much of the NYPD,<sup>45</sup> the CPD,<sup>46</sup> and other major metropolitan gendarme forces) who would *have gladly and bloodily suppressed urban rebellions against an election he would have stolen if it had been closer*. Who knows how many supporters Trump had/has in the military and among military veterans? Who knows what kind of paramilitary he would have cultivated within and beyond the nation’s armed and police forces had he gotten a second term (which would have happened but for COVID-19)? As Max Berger observed last January 18th:

Trump’s support among enlisted service members was threatening enough to the incoming Biden administration that the Joint Chiefs had [just days before January 6, 2021] to issue a report clarifying they stood behind him. *There are hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of current and former law enforcement and military who are devotees of Trump. There is no shortage of veterans or police officers who could be mobilized to violence by white grievance politics and serve as easy recruits for the next fascist leader.*<sup>47</sup>

### **“An Analogy to a Specific Moment in European History”**

The only “fascism expert” interviewed by VOX’s Dylan Matthews who avoided the “not real fascism because not Hitler or Mussolini” pitfall was

Jason Stanley, who had the elementary decency to (as we have seen) distinguish between a consolidated fascist regime and fascism understood as a social and political movement. It helped, perhaps, that, unlike most of Matthews' designated academic "fascism experts", Stanley wasn't a European historian specializing in the 20th century's classic historical fascist regimes. These academic historians (most of them retired) were simply out of their analytical and informational depth when it came to assessing contemporary neo-fascism within and beyond the USA. Matthews failed to tap the knowledge of more current and methodologically astute analysts of 21st-century neoliberal era fascism – people like Boggs, John Bellamy Foster, Henry Giroux, Anthony DiMaggio, Alexander Reid-Ross, David Neiwert, William Connally, Matthew MacWilliams, David Smith, Mark Hetherington, Jonathan Weiler, Pippa Norris, and Ronald Inglehart to mention some of the most prominent and relevant names. Not a single such analyst or academic was among Matthews eight "fascism experts". This reflected *Matthews's own denialist belief* that the F-word didn't apply to Trump and his backers and that, in Matthews' words last January 14th, "*Fascism is not just a term, it's an analogy to a specific moment in European history*". Matthews' telling comment misleadingly suggested that any "expert" who thought fascism possessed a life beyond European history between the 1920s and the 1940s was using "the F-word" as little more than "just a term" (whatever that exactly meant). Matthews' selection of (mainly retired) European historians of classic historical 20th-century fascist regimes was a form of self-fulfilling proof for his belief that the word fascism only applied to the fully consolidated fascist governments that arose in Europe between the two world wars of the 20th century.

Matthews and the "fascism experts" he consulted did a great disservice to political discourse. On numerous occasions, my attempts to properly identify Trump and Trumpism as fascist were met with dismissive references to Matthews' *VOX* essay as "proof" that "the F-word" did not apply. "See", the response went, "this is what the experts say".

Many of the more academically and intellectually inclined self-identified Leftists I caught criticism from for identifying Trump and Trumpism as fascist were caught up in the same Euro-centric and 20th-century-focused obsession with the classic historical fascist regimes of Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany that marred the perspective of Dylan Matthews and his roster of

academics. Thus it was that a menacing Rutgers graduate student named Matt Reichel wrote me the following at the end of a long paragraph repeating a handful of the denialist narratives: “In sum, we are confronting a very different phenomenon than the fascism that emerged in Europe a century ago”. This line gave the game away: nobody serious argued that Trump and Trumpism was replicating the classic and fully consolidated fascist regimes of interwar Europe.

## **The “No Ideology” (Other Than Self) and “Not a Rigid Doctrinal Ideologue” Distraction**

But it wasn't just Dylan Matthew's self-selected group of liberal-left academics, primarily European historians, who fell for the notion that the blundering narcissist Trump didn't have the ideological coherence and chutzpah to be a *real fascist*. In June of 2020, the left author and activist Frank Barat asked Noam Chomsky to comment on Trump's authoritarian and racist response to the George Floyd protests. “Remember”, Chomsky said, articulating something the present writer often heard from Left thinkers:

*that Trump has an ideology, but it's very simple. It consists of two letters: M.E. That's the total ideology. And he knows how to appeal to his white-supremacist base. And the way to do it is to stand up for law and order against these violent leftists who are destroying our society. And, of course, these are racist sub-texts that are pretty easy to detect ... So it's pretty easy to understand him ... He's concerned with his own power .... He understands that his antics will be tolerated by the rich and the powerful and the corporate sector for as long as he fulfills his main function: stuffing their pockets with dollars. As long as does that they'll let him get away with it.<sup>48</sup>*

For Chomsky, Trump's only “ideology” was megalomaniacal narcissism, pure self-interest, linked self-protectively to serving the nation's corporate and financial overlords – this even as Chomsky described Trump playing straight out of the fascist politico-ideological playbook.

Here Chomsky stuck to his original formulation on Trump even after three plus years of clear fascism from Trump. Fascism's arrival in the USA, Chomsky wrote in early 2017, "requires an honest ideologue, a Hitler type, not someone whose only detectable ideology is narcissism".<sup>49</sup>

Similar in this regard was the later commentary of Timothy Snyder in *The New York Times Magazine*: Trump "had no vision that is greater than himself or what his admirers project upon him. In this respect his pre-fascism fell short of fascism: His vision never went further than a mirror".<sup>50</sup>

Early on, no less of an early and intrepid Trump alarm-raiser and skilled fascism analyst than David Neiwert claimed after Trump's election that "Trump cannot be categorized as a true fascist" because "he is not an ideologue who acts out of a rigid adherence to a consistent worldview, as do all real fascists. Trump's only real ideology is worship of himself".<sup>51</sup> (Neiwert also opined in early 2017 that the 45th president wasn't a "true fascist" because "Trump has never yet called upon the shock troops of a paramilitary wing for support" and "has attempted to keep an arms-length distance from the overtly racist white nationalists and neo-Nazis who have become some of his most enthusiastic backers". It would be interesting to know if subsequent events recounted in the present volume's first three chapters led Neiwert to adjust this conclusion!)

There are critical mistakes behind these judgements. "Trump is a white supremacist", the women's studies scholar Loretta J. Ross in a January 2021 article on what she called "the Nazification of the Republican Party", adding "that he is also a deranged narcissist is really incidental".<sup>52</sup> Indeed, Ross could have said more: Trump was an at least instinctual fascist who, we have seen, read a book of Hitler's pre-World War II political speeches and who combined white supremacism, white nationalism, Social Darwinism, arch-authoritarianism, nativism, arch sexism, truth-inversion, anti-intellectualism, a belief in political violence, a faith in the power of Will, a readiness to break the law in the name of "law and order", and hatred for democracy (along with other hallmark and classic fascist beliefs) with malignant narcissism and venal corporate gangsterism.

The notion that Trump's legendary selfishness and egotism was somehow opposed to being a fascist was mistaken. As Jason Stanley reminds us in *How Fascism Works*:



We often think of fascism as anti-individualistic, deriving its power from uniform masses. Yet Hitler repeatedly extolled both the value of the individual and the ideal of meritocracy. It is the Social Darwinist conception of individual worth that gives structure to fascist hierarchy and explains [its recurrent charge] of laziness [against the poor and minorities]. Groups are ordered, in fascism, by their capacity to achieve, to rise above others, in labor and war ... Though fascism involves a commitment to group hierarchies of worth that is incompatible with economic libertarianism, which does not generalize beyond the individual, both philosophies share a common principle by which value is measured. Economic libertarianism is, after all, the Manhattan dinner party face of social Darwinism ... Hitler saw “two principles starkly opposed: the principle of democracy which, wherever its practical results are evident, is the principle of destruction. And the principle of the authority of the individual, which I would like to call the principle of achievement.”<sup>53</sup>

Equally mistaken is the notion that being a fascist requires rigid adherence to a coherent doctrinal world view. Untrue even of classic historical European fascism, as the great Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm has shown,<sup>54</sup> this is certainly false in the distinctly nonrigorous and anti-intellectual political culture of the contemporary USA.

“But”, it was common to hear during the Trump years, “he never actually called himself a fascist and indeed even called some his left and left opponents fascists”. Both objections were true and irrelevant. Murderers tend not to describe themselves as murderers while murdering. Racists don’t typically identify themselves as racists. Sexists don’t commonly out themselves as sexists. “Fascism” is a very bad word in American (and global) political discourse thanks to the world’s experience with the Third Reich and its Axis allies in the 1930s and 1940s (50 million people died during the global war against fascism, 1939–1945), so it was hardly surprising that Trump did not openly identify as a fascist or that Trump would absurdly call Black Lives Matter activists and Portland antifascists “fascists”. At the same time, it is worth recalling that the fascist Third Reich

Nazis did not call themselves fascists. They referred to themselves as “National Socialists”, something that hardly meant they weren’t fascists.

## **“Fascism Experts” and Other Academics After the 2020 Election**

### ***Cory Robin: “Almost the Complete Opposite of Fascism”***

Academic denial of, and hence *complicity in*, the threat represented by Trump and his allies and backers continued even after the election, as Trump sparked and encouraged mass proto-fascist rampages to protest the totally mythical theft of the 2020 presidential election. In early December of 2020, the liberal New York University political scientist Cory Robin told *Jewish Currents* that Trump’s electoral loss and inability to reverse the election were the latest in a long line of failures showing that Trump was not only not a fascist but *not even an authoritarian*. Calling Trump “almost the complete opposite of fascism”, Robin saw the lame-duck president as little more than a blundering, corrupt, and “ineffective” neoliberal kleptocrat who couldn’t shoot straight, as in “nothing much to see here” – a judgement that coldly dismissed the enormous toll Trump’s had taken on millions of Americans and especially on poor Black and brown people.<sup>55</sup>

Robin’s commentary was marred by two glaring errors. His first mistake was to set up a false dichotomy between Trump’s (unacknowledged) neofascism and Trump’s neoliberalism. As Giroux and DiMaggio (among others) have shown,<sup>56</sup> American neoliberalism and neofascism are intimately, one might even say dialectically, bound up with each other in a mutually reinforcing relationship aptly designated “neoliberal fascism” – a topic to which I will turn in the present volume’s final chapter.

Robin’s second and most conspicuous mistake was to claim that Trump had made no serious lasting impact on the Republican Party. This judgement was shown to be egregiously false in coming months as the majority of Republican Congresspersons and voters backed Trump’s Big fascist Lie on the “stolen” 2020 election. Just three weeks after he had screamed at Trump

over the phone while hiding from the Trumpist marauders who had invaded Congress, begging the president to call off the Attack on the Capitol, House Republican Leader Kevin McCarthy made his peace with the deposed fascist, running down to Mar-a-Lago like a simpering pet as the former president settled into his new role as a kingmaker behind future Republican primaries and as the frontrunner for the 2024 Republican nomination. Twelve days after the fascist insurrection attempt, Max Berger gave what amounted to a complete repudiation of Cory Robin's judgement that Trump had little lasting impact on the GOP:

We must consider the defeat of Trump's insurrectionary, incoherent fascism not as the end of the threat posed by American fascism, but as the beginning. Whether Trump is a fascist, or merely a pre-fascist, the fact is that he has demonstrated the path to power for future, more coherent fascist leaders to follow. Power abhors a vacuum. So as long our political system affords politicians who can win over the fascist bloc of Republican voters a pathway to the party's nomination, and therefore the presidency and majorities in Congress, there will be politicians who'll take advantage of the opportunity.

The majority of Republican voters support Trump's American fascism – even after the coup. According to polling by *The Washington Post*, 51 percent of Republicans say GOP leaders didn't go far enough in nullifying the election, 56 percent say Trump bears zero blame for the insurrection, and 66 percent say he has acted responsibly. Trump's approval rating is way down due to the unfavorable coverage, but he's still at 60 percent favorability among Republicans and is the prohibitive frontrunner for the Republican Party presidential nomination. Sadly, these numbers are likely the floor, and not the ceiling for these beliefs.

The fascist majority within the Republican Party means that Republican office holders can't break with Trump's vision of the party even if they wanted to. Democratic Rep. Jason Crow told MSNBC, "A couple of [my Republican colleagues] actually broke down in tears talking to me, and saying that they are afraid for their lives if they vote for this impeachment." Republicans are already talking about primarying the

members who supported impeachment and are taking steps to remove Liz Cheney (R-WY) from leadership for supporting impeachment. So long as the majority or even a significant plurality of Republican voters are fascist, it will continue to be in Republican politicians' interests to support fascism.<sup>57</sup>

Eleven days later, *Esquire's* Charles Pierce wrote this in a short reflection titled "Kevin McCarthy Made a Pilgrimage to the Golden Commode":

It's a damn miracle, is what it is. Barely three weeks ago, El Caudillo Del Mar-a-Lago was the most successful insurrectionist leader since Robert E. Lee. The Republicans were huddled in the bowels of the Capitol right along with the Democrats while a gibbet rose on the National Mall. This was universally determined to be a fairly bad day in the world's oldest continuous self-governing republic.

Barely ... three ... weeks ... ago. From *Politico*: "The RNC is also expected to invite other potential 2024 candidates and Republican leaders to the retreat, which is to be held in Palm Beach, Fla., April 9-11 ... With Trump considering a 2024 comeback, the committee has been careful to demonstrate neutrality, since the former president is no longer an incumbent. It invited Trump and other would-be presidential candidates to its annual winter meeting earlier this month."

This is one of those days where I wonder if I'm crazy or they are. The FBI is still rounding up the people who occupied the Capitol for the purpose of overturning a presidential election. The trials are going to be in federal courts all over the country for years. More dreadful material is bound to come pouring out about the insurrection, and about the administration that welcomed it. And barely three weeks after the mob overwhelmed the Capitol, the Republican Party has decided that it can't win an election without the mob, and without the president who incited it. For all our political divisions, I thought we all still agreed that overthrowing the republic and submitting to the rule of Buffalo Head Guy and the Walmart Warlords would not be a satisfactory outcome. For all our political divisions, I thought that cop-killing was something that

devalued your political relevance going forward. Clearly, this calls for further study.<sup>58</sup>

Trump's continuing hold over the GOP would only deepen in coming months.

### **Samuel Moyn: “Overblown Fears” of an Anti-Neoliberal “Populist”**

Six days after the election, Samuel Moyn, the Henry R. Luce Professor of Jurisprudence at Yale Law School and a professor of history at Yale, celebrated how Trump “failed as an autocrat, despite opponents’ overblown fears” and was “leaving the stage not with a bang but a whimper, rather uncharacteristic of foreign despots and madmen of the past”. The “not with a bang” comment was *retrospectively amusing, with the joke on Moyn, in light of the remarkable, second impeachment-garnering events of January 6, 2021!*

Imperiously proclaiming that Trump’s “presidency turned out utterly different to what so many worried it would be” (one could more justifiably have said that it had turned out even more terrible than what many had feared), Moyn took to the *New York Review of Books* to quip that “Trump’s near-miss” in the election would “give ... a second lease on life to frameworks and rhetoric that cast America as tottering on the brink of fascism and tyranny”. As if this arrogant dismissal of the real and fascistic menace posed and murderous criminality inflicted by Trump and his allies and followers was not sufficiently transgressive, Moyn doubled down on the bizarreness of his take by falsely proclaiming Trump a populist champion in the search for a policy framework beyond neoliberal capitalism – a judgement negated by Moyn’s own observation that Trump had slashed taxes for the rich and stocked the federal judiciary with judges committed to “free market capitalism”. Like Robin, Moyn took Trump’s failure and inability to introduce a fully consolidated fascist state and to win over the nation’s ruling classes and majority populace over to such a state as proof that threats of “fascism and tyranny” had been grossly exaggerated by hysterical liberals and leftists. Moyn could not see or did not care to note the distinction between fascist politics and a fascist regime.<sup>59</sup> Along the way, his dismissal

extended to the misery Trump's fascist conduct inflicted on millions, including tens of thousands of migrants detained in Trump's concentration camps and migrant parents whose children were literally stolen from their arms at the southern US border.

## **... and Even After the Attack on the Capitol**

### ***“Stuck in the Past”: Rejecting Paxton's Final Days Reversal***

Matthews and the “fascism experts” he selected to back his fascism-denialism clung to their head-in-the-sand narrative even after the Trump-sparked fascist Attack on the Capitol. There was one big if somewhat comically belated exception – no less of a go-to historical “fascism expert” than Robert *Anatomy of Fascism* Paxton himself. With *just six days remaining in the Trump administration and only after Trump's frothing minions breached the Capitol and forced Congresspersons to flee for their lives*, Paxton reversed course and *admitted that Trump was now in fact a fascist*. “Trump's incitement of the invasion of the Capitol on January 6, 2020”, the world's leading “fascism expert” told *Newsweek* on January 14th, “removes my objection to the fascist label. His open encouragement of civic violence to overturn an election crosses a red line”.<sup>60</sup>

It was a strangely deferred conversion. As the terrorism expert Colin Clarke noted in *The New York Times* two weeks after the Attack on the Capitol:

Bolstered by conservative cable news networks and radio as well social media, *Mr. Trump has been laying the groundwork for political violence for years. The Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, VA, in August of 2017, should have been the alarm* for this country to understand the sense of urgency required to address the threat from the emboldened far right. It wasn't. Attacks in Pittsburgh in 2018 and El Paso in 2019, and the plot to kidnap Gov. Gretcham Whitmer of Michigan

last year, were all missed opportunities to take the threat seriously (emphasis added).<sup>61</sup>

Each one of the violent and fascistic incidents Clarke cited was inspired to no small extent by Trump. Trump encouraged political violence as a presidential candidate in 2015 and 2016 and would not promise to tell his violent backers to honor the outcome of the 2016 election if Hillary Clinton prevailed, as we have seen.

Still, Paxton deserved some “better late than never” credit in comparison to some other “fascism scholars”. Dylan Matthews’ selective roster of denialist academicians, heavily biased toward European historians, continued to stick their heads in the sand even after the murderous mayhem of January 6. It was darkly amusing and something of a surreal experience after the Capitol Riot to read Matthews’ *VOX* follow up, titled “The F-Word: The Debate Over Whether to Call Donald Trump a Fascist and Why it Matters”.<sup>62</sup> Three of Matthews’ original “fascism experts” – Griffin, Payne, and Berman and one new academic authority, Cambridge historian Richard Evans – told Matthews *why they thought Paxton was wrong to conclude that Trump had crossed into fascist space by instigating a violent fascist assault on the US Capitol*. The insufferable Griffin doubled down on his previous false argument by opining that:

Trump is far too pathologically incoherent and intellectually challenged to be a fascist, and suffers from both Attention Deficiency Disorder, lack of self-knowledge, capacity for denial, narcissism and sheer ignorance and lack of either culture or education to a degree that precludes the Machiavellian intelligence and voracious curiosity about and knowledge about contemporary history and politics needed to seize power in the manner of Mussolini and Hitler.

For Roger Griffin, preposterously, being a real fascist politico required strong focus, a wide knowledge base, admirable self-control, elite cultural attainment, noble self-awareness, a grand hunger for learning and wisdom! This was a profoundly wrongheaded and frankly moronic judgement.

Stanley Payne clung doggedly to the *Mussolini and Hitler or bust* argument and added childish myths of Trump as a nonimperialist and a

populist. He now lectured *VOX* readers on how Trump “Never founded a new fascist party, never embraced a coherent new revolutionary ideology, never announced a radical new doctrine but introduced a noninterventionist foreign military policy. Not even a poor man’s fascist. Ever an incoherent nationalist-populist with sometimes destructive tendencies”.

The European historian Matthew Feldman reiterated his belief that Trump was “less Mussolini than Berlusconi”, betraying his all-or-nothing attachment to an understanding of fascism limited to the classic European fascist regimes of nearly a century ago.

As in October, professor Berman had the most to say, reprising previous themes by declaring that:

We should reserve the term “fascism” for leaders or movements that are not merely authoritarian. Fascists were revolutionaries, they aspired to control the state, economy and society (totalitarian vs. authoritarian), had large, organized mass movements behind them (which included institutionalized paramilitaries alongside control of the military as well as extensive secret police and intelligence services) and of course came to power after democracy had largely failed.

This was an unfortunate formulation. Trump and many of his backers certainly had fascist aspirations, however delusional, very much along Berman’s “revolutionary” and “totalitarian” lines. The 45th president had clearly also hoped for the creation of a large, organized mass movement buttressed by military, paramilitary, and police state power. And he came to power in the wake of the long failure of American “democracy” in the neoliberal era, as I will show in Chapter 7.

All these narratives were problematic before January 6, 2021. Still, it took real chutzpah for Matthews’ “fascism experts” to double down on their fascism-denialism in the wake of the instantly infamous fascistic moment for which Trump and Trumpism will long be most remembered: an actual attempted fascist coup attempt.

Matthews added links to a *New Statesman* essay in which the retired Cambridge historian Richard Evans explained that Trump wasn’t a fascist because he wasn’t Mussolini or Hitler and that “You can’t win the political battles of the present if you’re always stuck in the past”. It was a richly



ironic judgement. For Evans, consistent with Matthews' bias, fascism was by definition an historical topic fit only for the examination of European historians. *It was Evans who was "stuck in the past", fittingly enough for yet another retired European historian.*

The die-hard fascism-denier Matthews also now approvingly quoted Hamilton College government professor Eric de Bruin, who offered an arrogant dismissal of the relevance of the January 6th action: "At no point did yesterday's protesters attempt to actually seize control of the levers of state power – nor did anyone watching think these goons were now running the government". For de-Bruin, "the F-Word" didn't apply because Trump's sloppy power grab failed.

### ***"No True Fascist"***

It wasn't just Matthews' handpicked fascism-deniers who had a hard time applying "the F-Word" to Trump even after his fascist coup attempt of January 6th. In a *New York Times Magazine* piece published even days after the Attack on the Capitol, Timothy Snyder reflected on how Trump's "pre-fascism fell short of fascism". Besides *falsely* proclaiming that Trump had no world view beyond self-interest ("a mirror") he wrote that:

Trump never prepared the decisive blow. He lacked the support of the military, some of whose leaders he had alienated (*No true fascist* would have made the mistake he made there, which was to openly love foreign dictators; supporters convinced that the enemy was at home might not mind, but those sworn to protect from enemies abroad did). Trump's secret police force, the men carrying out snatch operations in Portland, was violent but small and ludicrous ... for all his lawsuits and entreaties and threats to public officials, [Trump] could not engineer a situation that ended with the right people doing the wrong things ... he was unable to bring institutions along with his big lie. He could bring his supporters to Washington and send them on a rampage in the Capitol, but none appeared to have any idea of how this was to work or what their presence would accomplish. It's hard to think of a comparable

*insurrectionary moment*, when a building of great significance was seized, that involved so much milling around (emphasis added).

This was in some ways an unfortunate passage. The Attack on the Capitol wasn't actually an "insurrectionary moment", it was the violent outcome a failed rolling fascist coup attempt that had been in the works since the late summer of 2020. The phrase "so much milling around" jibed poorly with the reality of dedicated and (in some cases) armed fascist marauders hunting the Capitol complex for Congresspersons and a Vice President to capture and even kill. There was no requirement or expectation on the part of Trump that the rioters would undertake governance or even understand their role, which was to interrupt the certification of Biden's Electoral College victory and generate a crisis that would provide a pretext for Trump to declare a state of emergency and introduce martial law. The facts that Trump failed to actually stop the certification of Biden's election and stay in power and win the support of the military and secret police hardly made him or the attack he fanned and sparked less than "truly" fascist. It made him a failed and clumsy, undisciplined fascist. That Trump was unable to introduce an election-cancelling fascist regime under his personal dictatorial rule hardly negated the fascist content of the effort. It wasn't that Trump's "pre-fascism fell short of fascism". It was that the delusional fascist Trump's fascist power-grab fell short of success. Even Snyder couldn't completely escape the habit of contrasting Trump and Trumpism with the "true fascism" of Hitler and Mussolini.

### ***"Harmless" Trump's "Most Serious Evils Were Either Rhetorical or Symbolic"***

But Snyder was light years ahead of his fellow Yale historian Moyn. In a January 18, 2021 *Nation* column titled "Allegations of Fascism Distract From the Real Danger", Moyn continued his haughty mockery of "those crying 'fascism'" two weeks after those identifying Trump as a fascist had been proven correct by the Capitol Riot, compelling Paxton to change his mind with just days left in the nightmare presidency. According to Moyn, echoing Payne:

The Trump administration's most serious crimes were either rhetorical or symbolic. The same neoliberal system that often rendered Trump harmless continues to fail most Americans. The most graphic proof of this lies in *the latest election returns, which embarrass the fascism paradigm*. The most shocking thing about them is that, after four years of de-legitimation, Trump increased his support among *the presumed victims of fascism*, while the Democratic Party faltered. Biden broke through, thanks to the wealthy and powerful. *The state where I live*, Connecticut, is among the most unequal, with some of the country's worst poverty. Biden fared worse among urban workers, including Blacks and Hispanics in *my city of New Haven*, than earlier Democrats – but far, far better among the wealthy denizens of Greenwich and Westport” (emphasis added).

Beyond the dumbfounding absurdity of (a) thinking that the liberal state and city where one lives were proxies for the entire nation (Connecticut is home to 3.6 million people, 130,000 of whom live in New Haven), (b) calling Black and LatinX people merely “presumed victims” of Trumpism-fascism, and (c) thinking it “embarrass[ed] the fascism paradigm” that some wealthy people in liberal Connecticut voted for Biden in 2020, Moyn should have been badly *embarrassed* by his statement regarding ethnocultural voting patterns in 2016 and 2020. In 2020, Black voters went 87% for Biden, similar to their 88% vote for Hillary Clinton in 2016. LatinX voters chose Biden over Trump 65–32%, similar to their 65–29% break for Mrs. Clinton.<sup>63</sup> Even more problematic, though, was Moyn's minimization of Trump's crimes.

As if all this wasn't bad enough, Moyn added five further false assertions, claiming incorrectly that: Trump had been widely denounced as a fascist by establishment liberal media elites; activists and intellectuals who considered Trump a fascist lacked any proper sense of historical continuity between Trump/Trumpism and earlier American history; to focus on Trump's fascist conduct was to “distract from the unstable political landscape that led to his rise in the first place;” those who “have denounced fascism over the last four years wish to return to the *status quo ante* Trump and restore the failed policies that provided him the opportunity to win the White House;”

Trump's fascist essence was somehow disproven by the fact that "America killed fewer foreigners overall than it did when his two predecessors were in office".

## ***Trump's "Single Worst Crime"***

Downplaying Trump's evil deeds was a favorite activity of Trump-fascism-deniers even after the Attack on the Capitol and the pandemic explosion of COVID-19 infections and deaths that Trump oversaw in late 2020 and early 2021. The Tufts University Japanese historian Gary Leupp, an especially mean-spirited critic of those who described Trump as a fascist, wrote the following in February of 2021:

Question for discussion: "Who is the MORE vile? Donald Trump – *whose single worst crime seems to be the separation of families involving over 550 children losing contact with their parents whose whereabouts is unknown*, or George W. Bush – who waged multiple imperialist wars, based on lies, killing hundreds of thousands?"<sup>64</sup>

No serious observer would doubt that George W. Bush, the messianic-militarist invader of Iraq, had killed more people than Trump, but this was no reason for Leupp to diminish the terrible outcomes of Trump's presidency. . As *Salon's* incisive commentator David Masciotra wrote me in response to Leupp's remarks,

In assessing Trump's crimes, it is also important to include the deliberate subversion of the American electoral system, culminating in an attempt to violently overthrow the government. Even as the Trump mob beat police officers to death, and threatened elected officials, he said, "We love you. You're very special people."

The Chicago Refuse Fascism activist Jay Becker went further, noting the dark qualitative break between George W. Bush's messianic imperialism and Trump's specifically fascist politics:

Fascism isn't just an accumulation of more crimes, it's a different form of open, terroristic rule that makes no bones about trashing the rule of law and the most basic rights. With [Leupp's] approach, we could just go back and count the loss of life in all US imperial wars rank presidential vileness simply by their total "kill" – a meaningless exercise.

## **Trumpenleft Denialism: Eighteen False Narratives**

Leupp's disturbing commentary appeared in the online Left magazine *Counterpunch* (the present author's own main outlet). It was symptomatic of significant crossover between academic and "radical" Left fascism denial during the Trump years. Ironically enough given that the "F-word" has long found its most frequent usage on the portside, the most vitriolic and personally insulting (and in some cases threatening) defenses of Trump against the charge of fascism have in my experience come from those who purport to reside on the political left. Trumpism-fascism denialism maintained a stronghold in some Left circles, where it seemed almost a badge of radical honor to scoff at other Left thinkers and activists who understood Trump and Trumpism as neofascist. Oddly channeling the disastrous and absurd "red-brown" politics of the German Communist Party during the end the Weimar Republic,<sup>65</sup> these Trumpenleftists cited many of the same denialist narratives advanced by the more established and respectable academic and journalistic deniers mentioned above. Beyond endless repetition of the obvious fact that Trump failed to introduce a consolidated fascist regime on the model of Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Third Reich (betraying a black and white all-or-nothing and interwar Europe-obsessed understanding of the "F-word"), here are the top eighteen narratives of Trumpenleft fascism-denialism that I received during the Trump years, listed and critiqued (briefly) as follows:

1. *The identification of Trump and Trumpism as fascist aligned one with both the Democratic Party and the capitalist and imperial American system that the Democrats have long supported.* False. This claim was absurd when applied to Left antifascists, who placed significant blame

for Trump's rise and persistence in power on the appeasement and conservatism – what I called “hollow resistance”<sup>66</sup> at the height of the Trump administration – of the Democrats, in service to capital. At the same time, this claim was based on a false dichotomy between antifascism and anticapitalism. Fascism as a regime is a vicious and arch-repressive form of capitalism. Fascism is a product of, and subservient to, the modern corporate and capitalist era. It does not overthrow capitalism. Even in its classic historical form, it never supplanted private ownership of the means of production and investment or bourgeois class rule. Fascism (both as a social and political movement and fascism as a regime) is dedicated to smashing popular resistance to capitalism, among other things.

2. *Identification of Trump and Trumpism as fascist affiliated one with a deceptive narrative promoted by the Democrats and the “liberal media” to distract the populace from the capitalist-imperialist system and the Democrats’ captivity to that system.* False. As seen in the first two sections of this chapter, the dominant “liberal” media and the Democrats resisted such identification for the most part.
3. *Left anti-Trump/-fascism activists failed to grasp that “the Democrats are fascists too”.*<sup>67</sup>*The Democrats and the Republicans are the same, there’s no real difference between them”.* False. This was and remains sheer nonsense, based on a doctrinal, faux-radical refusal to acknowledge clear and plentiful differences (of constituency, region, rhetoric, policy, and ideology) between two obviously capitalist and imperial political organizations. The notion of a Donald Trump, Josh Hawley, or Marjorie Taylor Greene becoming an elected Democrat is absurd, as is the notion of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez or Ilhan Omar winning Congressional office as a Republican or Bernie Sanders running for president as a Republican. The Democrats have long appeased and collaborated with the rightmost and now white nationalist, neofascist Republican Party, with whom they stand in a co-dependent and mutually reinforcing relationship but they have not themselves crossed over into fascist ideological and political space thanks largely to their more urban and ethnically diverse constituency. The Democrats and the Republicans are indeed what the socialist Upton

- Sinclair said they were in 1904: “two wings of the same bird of [corporate and imperial] prey”. But they are not “the same”.
4. *Identification of Trump and Trumpism as fascist reflects a failure to see that fascism only happens when the state commands the economy under a corporatist scheme directed by a maximal leader atop a one-party dictatorship.* This claim was addressed and discredited earlier in this chapter, in the sub-section on Robert Paxton’s initial (pre-January 6, 2021) denial of Trump’s fascism. To repeat, the present volume, following the analysis of Jason Stanley and other astute analysts, understands Trump and Trumpism as a racist and sexist white-nationalist president and movement following the fascist political and ideological playbook, not as a consolidated political-economic regime comparable to Mussolini’s Italy or Hitler’s Third Reich.
  5. *Beneath all his racist and sexist strongman bravado, Trump was really just another neoliberal capitalist president.* False. Trump’s presidency was a monument to what Giroux calls neoliberal fascism. He crossed into fascist ideological and political space to an unprecedented extent in American presidential history while at the same being a reflection and agent of neoliberal capitalism. This form of anti-fascism is based on a false dichotomy. Far from being opposed to each other and even (as for Cory Robin and Samuel Moyn) “opposites”, contemporary neofascism (which has now captured much if not most of the Republican Party) and neoliberalism (which has captured both the nation’s leading political organizations since the mid-late 1970s) are bound up in a mutually reinforcing, co-dependent, and dialectically inseparable relationship with each other.
  6. *The identification of Trump and Trumpism as fascist misunderstands and betrays the proletarian, “white working-class” base of Trump’s “populist” support, alienating people the Left need to “reach out to” and thereby fails to advance the working-class unity required to fight capitalism and neoliberalism.* False. The notion that Trump’s base was working-class and significantly welcome and accessible to progressive/Left outreach will be addressed and discredited in this book’s next chapter, an in-depth analysis of the Trump cohort.
  7. *The identification of Trump as a fascist is invalidated by the (supposed) anti-imperialism of Trump.* False. Murderous military US

imperialism remained very much alive and well under Donald Trump. Trump continued the heavily air-war-focused global militarism and giant military budgets of the second Obama administration while increasing the pace of lethal drone war,<sup>68</sup> doubling down on the crucifixion of Yemen and Palestine, and terrorizing Iran and North Korea. Trump deployed a dangerous new tactical nuclear weapon and rolled back global nuclear weapons protections. Trump projected aggressive military belligerence, complaining at the start of his presidency that the USA needed to get back to “winning wars” and identifying himself throughout his presidency with a dominant US military projecting overwhelming global power.

8. *The identification of Trump as a fascist was contradicted by Trump’s response to COVID-19, which, “if Trump had been a fascist” would have involved “draconian” crackdowns in pursuit of authoritarian rule.* False. Trump’s failure to go strong with masking, “lockdowns”, and invocation of the Defense Production Act (to order the mass manufacture of medical supplies) reflected not only his desire to keep the economy going (ironically enough since failure to undertake proper public health measures deepened the economic impact of the virus) for his re-election but also his rejection of science and his racist, social Darwinian, and genocidal approval of how COVID-19 especially killed the old, the infirm, the poor, and the non-white and of how the virus initially targeted big multiracial urban and Democratic areas. It was all very fascist. As Jason Stanley reminds us, the militantly racist and Social Darwinist Hitler “had no appreciation for regulations that would protect either consumers or workers, just as he had no appreciation for the protections offered by welfare and trade unions”.<sup>69</sup> Another and clearly fascist, fake-populist, and eco-cidal head of state in the Americas – Brazil’s malevolent president Jair Bolsonaro – followed the same path, also with disastrous consequences suffered disproportionately by the marginalized and racialized poor. (Belarus’ authoritarian dictator Alexander Lukashenko, actively engaged in the suppression of mass protests in 2020, also refused to act against COVID-19 in a forceful manner).



9. *Fascism only holds relevance when there exists a revolutionary socialist Left and working class that the ruling capitalist class wants violently smashed.* False. Fascism isn't only about crushing the socialist and communist Left in service to capital. It is also very much about racial, ethnic, and cultural identity and nationalism – white nationalism today in the US as (with a special but hardly exclusive anti-Semitic emphasis) in 1930s Germany. At the same time, while there may not be a big revolutionary socialist Left to smash in the USA, much of the American right *thinks there is*. They hear it all the time from the paranoid-style neo-Bircher right-wing media, which calls conservative corporate Democrats “radical left socialists”. The George Floyd Rebellion, a massive uprising against racist police brutality that Trump's Christian fascist Attorney General William Barr described (to FOX News' frothing fascist Mark Levin) as “Bolshevik”, helped fuel neo-McCarthyite Republifascist fantasies of incipient “radical Left” revolution. To deepen the pseudo-plausible paranoia, a US Senator (Bernie Sanders) who calls himself (incorrectly) a socialist made strong runs for the Democratic presidential nomination in the last two quadrennial election cycles. (If Sanders had been the Democrats' nominee in 2020, we can be sure most of big capital would have been on board with the fascist Trump for a second term.)
10. *Antifascists in the Trump years were plagued by “Trump derangement syndrome” (TDS), an obsession with Trump himself and his evil, which (supposedly) no longer held relevance once Trump was removed from office.* False. This was an unsupported accusation when applied to serious antifascists like the present writer and many others. “TDS” certainly happened in the mainstream media, which became passionately fixated on Trump's every action and tweet. But when hurled at intellectually serious Left antifascists, the charge of “TDS” was both a bullying smear and incorrect. Those antifascists rightly saw Trump as the reflection and agent of a fascistic political movement that had been germinating in the USA for many decades and that promised to live beyond Trump's removal from power. At the same, there was nothing inherently wrong or dysfunctional about a certain degree of fixation on Trump: he was, after all, a fascist in the world's most powerful office. It's a shame that more Germans didn't develop “Hitler

Derangement Syndrome” in the mid-1930s. The notion that the menaces of Trump, Trumpism, and fascism disappeared because of Biden’s victory was and remains absurd, as the present volume shows.

11. *Fears of Trump’s fascism were overblown because Trump never won the allegiance of all but a small fraction of the nation’s corporate and financial ruling class, which turned decisively against him*<sup>70</sup> *after the January 6 Attack on the Capitol.* This is a problematic narrative on numerous levels. Some relevant and deep pockets sections of the ruling class (especially in the fossil fuel and other polluting industries) did in fact back Trump. And many of those corporate and financial elites who didn’t want the demented monster in the White House in 2017 were perfectly happy to leave him there for a full first term thanks to his tax cuts and neoliberal de-regulation policies.<sup>71</sup> “Those who hold the levers of the private power that dominates the society and political system”, Chomsky observed in the wake of the Attack on the Capitol, “never liked Trump’s behavior, which harmed the image they project as humanists dedicated to the common good. But they were willing to tolerate the vulgar performance as long as Trump and his accomplices delivered the goods, lining their pockets by robbing the public”.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, as Doug Henwood reflected last April:

Trump was not the bourgeoisie’s favorite candidate. He had support from provincial plutocrats but not from the executive suite at Goldman Sachs. When he took office and immediately began ransacking, one wondered if the deep state would rein him in. Maybe the CIA would even arrange a malfunction in Air Force One’s fuel line. But it was not to be. *Tax cuts and deregulation made capital forget all their reservations* about Trump, and the stock market made 128 fresh daily highs – on average, one every six days – between inauguration and the onset of the coronavirus crisis. *It took the encouragement of an attack on the U.S. Capitol for the big bourgeoisie to complain [about Trump’s extremism] openly – 99 percent of the way through his time in office! (emphasis and exclamation mark added).*<sup>73</sup>

The delusional fascist in the White House was good for the bottom line interests of big capital, which waited until he tried not just to legally and politically subvert and nullify a presidential election but to physically overthrow the outcome of that contest to go public with its disgust over his tyrannical conduct. At the same time, a respectable wealth and power elite that seriously wanted a fascist out could have pulled the plug well before the fall and winter of 2020–21. Trump’s fascist essence was fully evident after the summer 2017 events in Charlottesville, Virginia, at the very least. But this “deep state” coup never took place.

If Trump had gotten a second term (as he likely would have but for COVID-19), many corporate and financial chieftains not on board would have accommodated or reaccommodated to his power. A future fascistic presidential candidate and president who knows how to ruffle fewer ruling class feathers can expect to do much better with the nation’s wealth and power elite. And make no mistake: most of the American corporate and financial elite would have backed Trump in the 2016 and 2020 elections had the Democrats run Sanders, the leftish contender who campaigned in accord with majority progressive public opinion and called himself a socialist. The America ruling class will pick fascism over even mild social democracy every time.

“The real test of the elite turning against Trump”, DiMaggio wrote me five months after the Attack on the Capitol,

is if they expunge the party of his acolytes in key positions of power now that he’s out of power. To date, four months out from him leaving, they haven’t done it. He has consolidated his power and that is pretty obvious. Any thesis about the elites exercising agency to turn the tables on him is just wrong. It’s fascism denial, plain and simple.<sup>74</sup>

At the same time, lack of full corporate support may well not be enough to prevent Trump or some other, possibly worse neofascist candidate from rising to power in 2024–2025 with support from many millions of small donors and the vast right-wing media hate machine – and with help from racist and partisan voter suppression measures being passed in numerous “red” (Republican-controlled) states.

1. *“Trump is too much of an undisciplined clown and a buffoon to be taken seriously as a fascist”*. This objection has already been properly addressed and dismissed in this chapter. Here it is worth noting that this was precisely how many US observers responded to the rise of Adolf Hitler in the early 1930s,<sup>75</sup> something that informed Sinclair Lewis’ depiction of fictional fascist president Buzz Windrip’s rise in *It Can’t Happen Here*.
2. *“Trump never said he was a fascist”*. This objection has already been properly addressed and dismissed in this chapter. It is, as we have seen, utterly irrelevant.
3. *“January 6<sup>th</sup> wasn’t that big a deal, it was just more of Trump’s feckless ‘antics’”* (in an interview after the Attack on the Capitol, Chomsky actually referred to Trump’s attempted coup as “his latest antics”<sup>76</sup>) and what Trumpenleft *Counterpunch* curmudgeon Gary Olson called “a cartoonish spectacle” of “clueless and costumed” buffoons “smashing stuff” and “taking selfies” – a silly freakshow used by the Democrats (the most dangerous “fascists” of all in Olson’s demented view) to “scapegoat Trump” and crush working-class dissent.<sup>77</sup> This remarkable claim takes denialism to new levels. The January 6th Capitol Riot was a murderous physical assault by a frenzied fascist mob on the nation’s legislative body. It was instigated by a sitting fascist president with the clear intent of cancelling a free and fair presidential election and creating a crisis that Trump hoped to use to declare a state of emergency and perpetuate his presidency. It may have been delusional and doomed but it was a major, menacing, and ominous event, far beyond clownish “antics” and “cartoonish spectacle”.
4. *People concerned about Trumpism-fascism failed to see that “Trump’s open white supremacism was preferable to the Democrats’ more cloaked white supremacism”* (in the social media words of the Green Party’s 2016 vice presidential candidate Ajamu Baraka) *because the former produces mass protest while the latter “puts the people to sleep and keeps them off the streets”*. This was a richly ironic narrative loaded with bad faith. After Trump had left office, some flame-throwing Trumpenleftists claimed to be what is known on the left as “accelerationists” – radicals who want the system to get worse and

become more oppressive so as to spark popular resistance and even revolution. While an actual fascist, Trump, was in the White House, however, *these same “radical leftists” were de-accelerants, mocking anti-Trump protest as complicity with the other (supposedly also “fascist”) major party.* There was a fascist in the White House for four years and the makers of this argument not only refused to fight him but actively opposed and absurdly mocked mass resistance to him as complicity with the Democratic Party and the capitalist-imperialist system. With a Democrat (Biden) in the White House, they argued that it would have been better to have a second Trump term because an open white supremacist president is what puts people in the streets.

Historically the claim that Republican presidents push more people into the streets and fuel more popular and progressive social movement activism than do supposedly sleep-inducing Democratic presidents is problematic. The deeply rooted systemic nature of contemporary social and political problems and the limits of American electoral politics as the supposed solution become more evident and transparent when Democrats hold nominal power. This is part of the dynamic behind the rise of the New Left and poor people’s movements during the 1960s, the rise of the anti-nuclear power movement during the late 1970s, the rise of the global justice movement in the late 1990s, and the rise of the Occupy Wall Street movement under Barack Obama. At the same time, the Democrats are best able to deceptively pose as coopting “sleep”-inducing agent and as something they aren’t – a popular opposition party – and turn social movements into big electoralist “get-out-the-vote” (GOTV) projects *precisely when they are out of office.* They are most effectively exposed as captive to concentrated wealth and empire when they hold nominal power and the limits of the change that can be accomplished by voting them back into power are made clear in ways that can lead people into the streets, the public squares, and social movements for progressive and even radical change.

1. *Calling Trump and his supporters fascist and supporting their prosecution and banning from “social media” invites and encourages repression of the Left.* False. The critical mistakes here are (a) an absurd lack of confidence in Leftists’ ability to differentiate themselves

from neofascists and (b) a self-destructive reluctance to understand leftists and others' need for fascist forces to be decisively defeated. Fascism is a malignant tumor that cannot be allowed to grow. It is perfectly appropriate for leftists to collaborate with non-fascist liberal and moderate elites in trying to cut out this life-threatening cancer from the body politic. Wanting the fascist monster Trump, his Capitol Rioters, the Proud Boys, Oathkeepers, Three Percenters et al. to go free and have full access to the nation's political, television, radio, and Internet megaphones like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Parler is to fail to understand these supposed (self-described) victims of "cancel culture" as lethal neo-Confederate fascists who would like to reinstitute Black slavery, crush liberals, and the Left, and replace bourgeois democracy with an authoritarian ethno-state. As DiMaggio noted last May, "Fascism and white supremacy cannot be channeled into positive purposes. They can only ascend or be beaten back or destroyed".

Do leftists seriously think they are incapable of distinguishing themselves from neo-Nazis and other fascists in making their own case against repression and censorship? It was depressing to see numerous "leftists" who couldn't resist a fascist US president more concerned about Trump's access to Twitter than they were about his access to the nuclear codes.

1. *Calling Trump and his movement fascist was symptomatic of leftists' habit of overusing the "F-word" to the "the point that it has been stripped of much of any meaning" and became an "empty signifier that, at most, means 'really bad person on the right'"* (to quote the angry white graduate student Matt Reichel, who wrote me in late March of 2021 citing Chomsky in defense of this criticism). This was misleading: Refuse Fascism and numerous antifascist thinkers (including myself) were rigorous and specific in defining what they meant by fascism in the specific context of 21st-century America (see Chapters 2 and 3 of the present volume).
2. *People who called Trump and his supporters and allies fascist failed to understand that Trump posed two greater menaces than fascism.* In support of this last criticism, a radical intellectual who requests anonymity wrote me with this quotation from an interview Chomsky did

after the Attack on the Capitol: “Incitement of an attempted coup is no laughing matter, but it scarcely weighs in the balance against a dedicated effort to destroy the environment that sustains life on Earth or demolition of the arms control regime that mitigates the threat of nuclear war”.<sup>78</sup> This criticism is based on a false dichotomy. While there should be no doubt that environmental exterminism and nuclear holocaust represent terminal dangers worse even than fascism, this misses a rather fundamental point: there is no forward movement on these and other key issues of grave significance for human and other sentient beings when authoritarians and especially fascist authoritarians hold state power. One must fight fascism if one wishes to defeat the specters of ecocide and nuclear war.

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67. This is a recurrent theme in the endless Trumpenleftish white male faux-radical writings of regular *Counterpunch* writer Rob Urie. See, for one example among many, his reflection after the January 6 incident: “Neoliberalism is Fascism with Better Manners,” *Counterpunch*, January 15, 2021, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2021/01/15/neoliberalism-is-fascism-with-better-manners/>. An especially egregious but far less prolific perpetrator of the false Trumpenleft equivalency between the two ruling class parties is the retired Moravian College political scientist Gary Olson, who cites the problematic Urie as his source on the nature of “fascism.” Olson celebrated the three month anniversary of the Attack on the Capitol by publishing a *Counterpunch* reflection on how “it’s a mistake – one that even some on the left are making – to view Biden’s election with a sigh of relief, a welcome breathing space” and claiming that the threat posed to the nation by the supposedly weak and splintered right-wing “pales in significance when compared to the neoliberal fascists already in power,” led by “Biden, the oligarch’s tool.” Olson had earlier distinguished himself *by claiming* that American racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, homophobia, and nationalism “are just some of the scams and scapegoats that the Lords of the Universe deftly deploy to divide us and divert our gaze” from the problem of ruling class power. Gary Olson, “Will Neoliberalism Morph Into Fascism?” *Counterpunch*, March 5, 2021, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2021/03/05/will-neoliberalism-morph-into-fascism-in-the-united-states>; Gary Olson, “An Open Letter to Trump Supporters,” *Counterpunch*, November 27, 2021, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2020/11/27/an-open-letter-to-trump-voters-2/>. Olson maintains a social media following rife with white nationalists, to whom he thinks the Left should reach out since

they are in his opinion largely working class and therefore open to progressive agendas.

68. Anthony DiMaggio, "Trump's Empire," *Counterpunch*, January 24, 2021, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2021/01/24/trumps-empire-reflections-on-the-changing-nature-of-u-s-militarism/>
69. Stanley, *How Fascism Works*, 181.
70. Chomsky, who consistently resisted description of Trump and Trumpism as fascist from the left, placed great emphasis on the corporate sector's displeasure with the January 6th assault. "Shortly after the storming of the Capitol," Chomsky commented days after the Attack on the Capitol, "some prominent corporations and political action committees vowed to cut off support for the Republicans who had fanned the flames of anger and conspiracy that resulted in violence." See Noam Chomsky, "Coups Closer to Centers of Power Than Hitler's 1923 Putsch," *Truthout*, January 19, 2021, <https://truthout.org/articles/chomsky-coup-attempt-hit-closer-to-centers-of-power-than-hitlers-1923-putsch/>
71. Thomas Ferguson et al., "Industrial Structure and Party in an Age of Hunger Games," Institute for New Economic Thinking, January 2018, <https://www.ineteconomics.org/uploads/papers/Ferg-Jorg-Chen-INET-Working-Paper-Industrial-Structure-and-Party-Competition-in-an-Age-of-Hunger-Games-8-Jan-2018.pdf>; Doug Henwood, "Take Me to Your Leader: The Rot of the American Ruling Class," *Jacobin*, April 27, 2021, <https://jacobinmag.com/2021/04/take-me-to-your-leader-the-rot-of-the-american-ruling-class>
72. Chomsky, "Coups Closer."
73. Henwood, "Take Me to Your Leader."
74. Private communication, May 6, 2021.
75. Jennie Rothenburg Gritz, "Early Warnings: How American Journalists Reported the Rise of Hitler," *The Atlantic*, March 13, 2012, <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2012/03/early-warnings-how-american-journalists-reported-the-rise-of-hitler/>
76. Chomsky, "Coups Closer."
77. Olson, "Will Neoliberalism Morph into Fascism?"
78. Chomsky, "Coups Closer."

## Chapter 5

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# Amerikaners and Trumpenvolk

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What deserves to die isn't America's working-class communities.  
It's the myth that they were the reason Trump was elected.

–Nicholas Carnes and Noam Lupu, June 5, 2017

Amidst the seemingly nonstop horror show staged by Donald Trump and the Trump-addicted media, it was easy to forget that the long national Trump nightmare would not have been possible without the many tens of millions who backed the demented oligarch come Hell or high water, consistent with Trump's claim in 2015 that his fans would stay with him "if I went out on Fifth Avenue and shot somebody". Even while his impending impeachment and other presidential controversies dominated headlines and cable and air time at the end of November of 2019, a majority of Republicans told *Economist* and YouGov pollsters that President Trump was a "better leader than former President Abraham Lincoln". *The Economist/YouGov* poll found that 87 percent of Republicans approved of the horrific job Trump was doing as president.<sup>1</sup>

Trump maintained strong approval from Republicans during and beyond his impeachment for what arguably amounted to an act of treason<sup>2</sup> – trying to

extort the president of Ukraine into joining a conspiracy to dig up political dirt on his future election challenger Joe Biden. Trump's Gallup Survey approval rating with Republicans stayed at 90 percent even with his literally sickening performance in response to the COVID-19 pandemic – an epic, mass-murderous episode of failed state mis-leadership that would cost him the presidency. Trump's national approval rating fell just three points, from 46 to 43 percent, after he lost the election. His approval from Republicans stayed at 90 percent even as he broke historical precedent by refusing to acknowledge his clear election defeat and enlisted much of his party and tens of thousands of street thugs and protesters in a maniacal effort to overturn the results through means both legal and extra-legal.<sup>3</sup>

“Trump”, the senior Trump administration official “Anonymous” wrote in the fall of 2019, “has been prone to misstatements as long as he’s been in the public eye .... The problem is that people believe what he says because he’s president”.<sup>4</sup> Even worse, and consistent with Jason Stanley’s description of fascism as a “death cult”, hundreds of COVID-19 deaths were linked to Trump campaign rallies where masks were actively discouraged and proper social distancing was not practiced in 2020.<sup>5</sup> If Trump had taken the position of political leaders in other countries, calling for mask-wearing and other sensible practices and measures, the Trumpenvolk would have obeyed and untold tens if not hundreds of thousands of lives would have been saved.

Faith in and agreement with the Leader, bordering on cultist devotion at the extremes, extended to Trump’s preposterous claim that the Democrats stole the 2020 election. A Monmouth University poll conducted two weeks after the Biden win found that an extraordinary 77 percent of Trump voters believed that Biden beat Trump only “due to voter fraud”. Professor Patrick Murray, director of the independent Monmouth University Polling Institute, told reporters that:

*It’s not unusual for backers on the losing side to take a while to accept the results. It is quite another thing for the defeated candidate to prolong that process by spreading groundless conspiracy theories. This is dangerous territory for the republic’s stability.*<sup>6</sup>



Murray should hardly have been surprised. It was “dangerous territory” for democracy when Trump spread and got away with numerous previous groundless narratives over the previous five years, including Goebbels-worthy claims that: Barack Obama wasn’t a US citizen; a constitutional inquiry into Trump’s problematic relationship with Russia was a treasonous “witch-hunt”; corporate-neoliberal Democrats were “radical Left” socialists and even “communists”; Black Lives Matter was a “hate slogan”; climate change was a hoax disseminated to weaken America and destroy jobs; Central Americans desperately seeking to legally escape violence and poverty in their US-ravaged homelands were dangerous criminals seeking to invade and harm the US; Trump put “the people” in power and cleaned up the corrupt corporate swamp that had previously ruled the country; Black Americans “love[d] Trump” since he’d “done more for them any president since Abraham Lincoln”; George Floyd protesters were Marxist radicals who wanted to “destroy America” and trash its history; COVID-19 was a Chinese conspiracy that would “go away soon”; COVID-19 was no more dangerous than the flu; COVID-19 did not kill young people; COVID-19 hurt very few people ... and so on.

## **“Please Never Stop Tweeting”**

In the present writer’s experience engaging with Republicans in the red state of Iowa from 2017 through 2020, the Trumpenvolk were thoroughly unfazed by evidence of their angry cult hero’s boundless corruption and mendacity. Tell them accurately that Trump served multi-millionaires and billionaires, members of a capitalist ruling class that profited from Trump’s tax cuts and deregulation, and they would denounce you as a “communist” (supposedly a terrible thing to be). Observe that Trump was doing his best to accelerate environmental collapse by denying and escalating anthropogenic climate change (the fossil fuel-driven campaign to turn the entire planet into a giant Greenhouse Gas chamber) and slashing environmental regulations and they would tell you that “climate change is a hoax” meant to “destroy jobs” and “weaken America”. Note that Biden, Pete Buttigieg, Amy Klobuchar, Nancy Pelosi, Adam Schiff, Cory Booker, Charles Schumer, Obama, and the Clintons were Wall Street-friendly centrists and not remotely “radical Left”,

and say you'd been brainwashed by "the left-wing media" like, supposedly, CNN and *The New York Times*.

My experience was consistent with interviews that *New York Times* reporter Astead Herndon undertook at a December 2020 "Trumpstock" festival attended by a Republican Congressman and a Republican state representative in Golden Valley, Arizona. White Trumpists wearing red MAGA hats there told Herndon about "a white America under threat as racial minorities typified by [Barack] Obama ... gain political power". The festival's attendees "described Trump as an inspirational figure who is undoing Mr. Obama's legacy [absurdly considered as "radical" and "Left"] and beating back the perceived threat of Muslim and Latino immigrants, who Trumpsters denounced in prejudiced terms". Trumpstock speakers linked Obama's middle name, Hussein, "to a false belief that he is a foreign-born Muslim". They described Democrats as, in Herndon's words, "*not just political opponents but avatars of doom for Mr. Trump's predominantly white voter base and for the country*" (emphasis added).

"There is no difference between the democratic socialists [the Democratic Party] and the National Socialists", a "conservative" writer told Herndon, referring to Nazi Germany – an absurd case of the kettle calling the pot black. "Democrats", the writer said, "are the heirs to Adolf Hitler".

Trumpist singer Mona Fishman performed her songs "Fake News" and "Smells Like Soros". In one of her tunes, titled "Thank You Mr. President" she sang "please never stop tweeting. I can hardly wait to see what I'll be reading".

Another Trumpstocker, Mark Villatla, an older white man wearing a cowboy hat and a pistol, told Herndon that he'd been "stockpiling weapons, in case Mr. Trump's re-election is not successful ... 'Nothing less than a civil war would happen,' Mr Villatla said, his right hand reaching for a holstered handgun. 'I don't believe in violence, but I'll do what I got to do.'"<sup>7</sup>

The lockstep support that the ever-more white-nationalist-neofascist Republican Party's white-Americaner base and the Orwellian right-wing media gave Trump is why not a single Republican in the House of Representatives could bring themselves to vote to impeach him for setting the nation's Founders' wigs on fire<sup>8</sup> by seeking to trade arms to Ukraine in

exchange for political dirt on Joe Biden. Fear of backlash from Trump's angry devotees and the highly propagandistic and confirmation-biasing neofascist noise/news machine and anti-social media they relied on for political information made it was unthinkable that any but a few Republican US Senators might vote to remove Trump from office for UkraineGate, much less for any of his other more substantive and vicious crimes against America and humanity. It also why 126 House Republicans signed their names in a black book of historic infamy by joining an absurd lawsuit filed by 18 Republican state attorneys general asking the US Supreme Court to negate Biden's election victory in December of 2020. It's why a majority of Republican US Senators refused to acknowledge Biden's win even after it had been certified by the Electoral College – this even while most of them knew very well that Biden had won “fair and square” and privately disapproved of Trump's refusal to concede. It's why Trump was able to consolidate his power over a Republican Party filled by elected officials who didn't particularly like him during the opening months of 2021.

Four months after the Attack on the Capitol, the moderate Republican *New York Times* columnist David Brooks published a column titled “The G.O.P. is Getting Even Worse”. By Brooks' chilling account:

*It's as if the Trump base felt some security when their man was at the top, and that's now gone. Maybe Trump was the restraining force. What's happening can only be called a venomous panic attack. Since the election, large swaths of the Trumpian right have decided America is facing a crisis like never before and they are the small army of warriors fighting with Alamo-level desperation to ensure the survival of the country as they conceive it.*

The first important survey data to understand this moment is the one pollster Kristen Soltis Anderson discussed with my colleague Ezra Klein. When asked in late January if politics is more about “enacting good public policy” or “ensuring the survival of the country as we know it,” 51 percent of Trump Republicans said survival; only 19 percent said policy.

The level of Republican pessimism is off the charts. A February Economist-YouGov poll asked Americans which statement is closest to their view: “It’s a big, beautiful world, mostly full of good people, and we must find a way to embrace each other and not allow ourselves to become isolated” or “Our lives are threatened by terrorists, criminals and illegal immigrants, and our priority should be to protect ourselves.”

Over 75 percent of Biden voters chose “a big, beautiful world.” Two-thirds of Trump voters chose “our lives are threatened.” This level of catastrophism, nearly despair, has fed into an amped-up warrior mentality.

“The decent know that they must become ruthless. They must become the stuff of nightmares,” Jack Kerwick writes in the Trumpian magazine *American Greatness*. “The good man must spare not a moment to train, in both body and mind, to become the monster that he may need to become in order to slay the monsters that prey upon the vulnerable.”

With this view, the Jan. 6 insurrection was not a shocking descent into lawlessness *but practice for the war ahead*. A week after the siege, nearly a quarter of Republicans polled said violence can be acceptable to achieve political goals. William Saletan of *Slate* recently rounded up the evidence showing how many Republican politicians are now cheering the Jan. 6 crowd, voting against resolutions condemning them.

With their deep pessimism, the hyperpopulist wing of the G.O.P. seems to be crashing through the floor of philosophic liberalism into an abyss of authoritarian impulsiveness. Many of these folks are no longer even operating in the political realm. The G.O.P. response to the Biden agenda has been anemic because the base doesn’t care about mere legislation, just their own cultural standing.<sup>9</sup>

## **The Myth of Trump as a Working-Class Hero, Part I (2016)**

So who are the “grassroots” people who signed on with the faux-populist Trump pathology? According to a mainstream media myth shared by intellectuals who ought to know better, Trump rode into the White House on a great upsurge of support from poor, white working-class voters drawn to the Republican candidate’s “populist” anti-Wall Street pitch in key deindustrialized battleground states. This conventional “Rust Belt rebellion” wisdom was pronounced on the front page of the nation’s newspaper of record, *The New York Times*, one day after the 2016 election. The *Times* proclaimed that Trump’s victory was “a decisive demonstration of power by a largely overlooked coalition of mostly blue-collar white and working-class voters”. *Times* political writer Nate Cohn decreed that “Donald J. Trump won the presidency by *riding an enormous wave of support among working-class whites*”<sup>10</sup> (emphasis added). The statement was proclaimed without the slightest hint of statistical backing.

The same was true of an ABC News report broadcast on the same day. Titled “The Minefield: Donald Trump Represents the Triumph of Class Over Identity in American Politics”, this unfortunate news analysis included the following *astonishing pronunciation* from commentator Waleed Aly:

What you’ve got is someone who is running a *ticket that is left of the Democrats* to a group of people that have traditionally been voting Democrat. They didn’t see in him the racist and the misogynist. That wasn’t really what appealed to them. They saw in him a guy who used to be part of the system that’s screwing them who’s promised to come and *join their revolutionary army as he brings that system down*. Yes, race is there, yes, misogyny is there, yes, negativism is there, I’m not denying their existence. *But the thing that won the election, the thing that swung the result, was the surging return of class in politics*. That confounds us because we don’t talk about class in politics, not in any serious way. Class is something that went out with the end of the Cold War, if you even held on to it that long. It’s disappeared in our political

imagination, in our political reckoning. We view politics almost solely through the prism of identity, so when Trump emerged we viewed him through the prism of identity. Maybe some of his voters do too, but I've got a feeling a lot of them don't (emphasis added).<sup>11</sup>

There was nothing new about such serious evidence-free assertion about Trump's supposedly "white working-class" base. In a March 2016 *Guardian* column, the popular and innumerate liberal writer Thomas Frank claimed with no basis other than the appearance and behavior of Trump rally attendees that "working-class white people ... make up the bulk of Trump's fan base".<sup>12</sup> For Frank, who had made a career out of the popular but unsubstantiated notion that the Republican Party had won the formerly New Deal and now neoliberal Democrats' old working-class base,<sup>13</sup> the Trumpenproletarian thesis was seemingly too immediately irresistible to merit serious investigation. Naturally enough, Frank stuck to the narrative after the election, exhibiting a stunning attachment to superficial appearances and a related shocking indifference to actual data in his late 2016 book *Listen, Liberal*.<sup>14</sup>

The same disregard for evidence was seen in the right-wing *National Review*'s March 2016 claim that Trump's base was found among the white lumpenproletariat. "The white American underclass", the journal proclaimed with no effort at proof, "is in thrall to a vicious, selfish culture whose main products are misery and used heroin needles. Donald Trump's speeches make them feel good. So does OxyContin". "The truth about these dysfunctional downscale communities", the crassly classist *National Review* added for good measure, "is that they deserve to die".<sup>15</sup>

Even nearly four years later, long after the "populist" Trumpenproletarian thesis had been destroyed in one empirical study after another, no less of a liberal authority than *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman could write that "the white working class went heavily for Trump"<sup>16</sup> in 2016.

It wasn't just about journalists, pundits, and Republicans who either embraced (like the Trump campaign) or disdained (like the *National Review*) the populist and working-class story line. The narrative was picked up also by Democratic Party's politicians like Bernie Sanders on the party's left and by the centrist neoliberal and 2020 presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg. We

have seen in the previous chapter that Sanders in December of 2020 considered much of Trump's support base to be made up of aggrieved workers the Democrats could and should make contact with and mobilize on behalf of progressive causes like Single Payer health insurance.

It was an old Sanders theme. In March of 2019, he told a CNN town hall this: "I'm not going to say that within Trump's camp there aren't some people who are racists and sexists", the Vermont senator said.

There are. We have seen that. But I don't believe that is the case for most of those folks. I think many of these people are people who have worked hard their entire lives and their standard of living is going down, in many cases, they're making less today than they did 30 or 40 years ago.<sup>17</sup>

For his part, Buttigieg echoed the same theme from a far more conservative perspective, imploring the Democrats to reach out to heartland economic anxieties in early 2019. In an April 2019 trip to South Carolina, Buttigieg argued that many Trump backers were aware that their candidate was "not a good guy" but "walked into the voting booth and voted to burn the house down because of some very deep issues that motivated them to send a message. Some of which I think we should give no quarter to, like racism, but others of which deserve to be taken seriously", Buttigieg continued. "The sense of displacement, and the belief that Democratic and Republican presidencies have let them down, and the failure of this enormous American prosperity to reach so many people in so many communities".<sup>18</sup>

"Sanders and Buttigieg are far from alone among Democratic candidates in insisting that there was really only ever a thimbleful of 'deplorables.' Plenty of others", *New Yorker Magazine* political writer Eric Levitz noted in early 2019, "have suggested that a 2016 Trump vote is (more or less) the language of the unheard".<sup>19</sup>

The (as we shall see) statistically false Trumpenproletarian storyline has been repeated over and over and taken for granted in the mainstream media and in much of the portside commentariat, including such progressive stalwarts as Sanders, Chris Hedges, Krystal Ball, Chomsky,<sup>20</sup> and Naomi Klein. In a new 2017 Afterword to his 2016 book *Who Rules the World?*, Chomsky held forth on how Trump's base included "the working class ...

victims of the neoliberal policies of the last generation”, shafted by the collapse of unions and the inadequate federal minimum wage and fooled by “the American doctrinal system” into “divert[ing their] anger from the corporate sector to government”.<sup>21</sup> Throughout the Trump presidency, Chomsky clung to the unsupported Trumpenproletarian thesis, explaining (in one of many examples) in a February 2020 interview that “the Trump supporters”, including “working-class males who are supporting Trump” were “people who have just been cast aside, nobody does anything for them” since “the Democrats abandoned the working- class decades ago”. The only evidence cited in this interview for the notion of a relevant mass of economically aggrieved white-proletarian Trumpsters was anecdotal – a reference to renowned sociologist Arlie Hochschild’s ethnographic study of a small group of lower middle-class white Louisiana residents who backed the Tea Party and then Trump during the Obama years.<sup>22</sup> For her part, Klein wrote the following about Trump’s election in her 2017 book *No Is Not Enough: Resisting Trump’s Shock Politics and Winning the World We Need*:

There’s a real risk today of ... losing our focus on the conditions and politics that allowed Trump’s rise and are fueling the growth of far-right parties around the world ... In North America and Europe, *white workers* grew progressively more pissed off at having their voices [against corporate globalization] ignored. This opened the door for demagogues like Trump to step in and *direct workers’ rage* away from plutocrats like him ... and at Mexican immigrants, victims of the same policies that were hollowing out their communities.<sup>23</sup>

Unfortunately, the notion of a big (white) proletarian Trump base as proletarian is contradicted by the data. A March 2016 NBC survey showed that just “a third of Trump supporters had household incomes at or below the national median of about \$50,000. Another third made \$50,000 to \$100,000, and another third made \$100,000 or more, and that was true even when limited ... to only non-Hispanic whites. If being working class means being in the bottom half of the income distribution”, social scientists Nicholas Carnes and Noam Lupu reported, “the vast majority of Trump supporters during the primaries were not working class”.



This judgement was validated in November of 2016. “Among people who said they voted for Trump in the general election”, Carnes and Lupu found, “35 percent had household incomes under \$50,000 per year (the figure was also 35 percent among non-Hispanic whites), almost exactly the percentage in NBC’s March 2016 survey. Trump’s voters weren’t overwhelmingly poor. In the general election, like the primary, about two thirds of Trump supporters came from the better-off half of the economy”, Carnes and Pulu observed.<sup>24</sup> As political scientist Anthony DiMaggio noted seven months after the 2016 election, reviewing the relevant post-election polling data, Trump’s support was “largely concentrated among more affluent Americans. Trump voters were significantly more likely to be older, white, Republican conservatives – a group that has been quite privileged historically speaking”. Further:

Trump voters were not more likely to be unemployed, compared to non-Trump voters. Income-wise, the single largest group of Trump supporters was comprised of individuals hailing from households earning incomes of more than \$100,000 a year – which made up 35 percent of all his voters. Those earning between \$75,000 to \$100,000 a year accounted for 19 percent of Trump voters, meaning that 54 percent of the president’s supporters came from households earning over \$75,000 a year. Another 20 percent of Trump supporters earned between \$50,000 to \$75,000 a year, putting them over the national median household income, which has long hovered around \$50,000. In sum, *approximately three-quarters of Trump voters were from households earning more than the national median income, while just one-quarter earned less than the median*(emphasis added).<sup>25</sup>

The most detailed and comprehensive critique of the widely disseminated and broadly assumed notion that Trump rose to power on a big wave of white working-class economic anxiety, despair, and populism is found in DiMaggio’s 2020 book *Rebellion in America: Citizen Uprisings, the News Media, and the Politics of Plutocracy*. By DiMaggio’s account, based on the rigorous analysis of survey and census data, “the relationship between being white and working-class and identification with Trump” was not statistically

significant. “The narrative that ‘white working-class insecurity’ fuels Trumpism”, DiMaggio finds. “is unsupported when neither individuals suffering from economic insecurity nor those living in working-class areas suffering from higher rates of manufacturing job loss are more likely to support Trump”. The much-ballyhooed cohort of working-class whites who voted for Obama in 2012 and Trump in 2016 is a tiny portion of the electorate. DiMaggio rightly contradicts those who have cited county-level data purporting to show a shift of presidential votes from the party of Obama and Hillary Clinton to Trump in counties that experienced significant job losses to plant closings. In reality, Trump “gained no votes from these areas compared to Romney’s totals in 2012”. At the same time, “a more precise examination of geographic regions by ‘commuting zones’ and zip codes finds no connection between job loss and Trump voting. To the contrary, areas harmed by job loss were more likely to see greater opposition to Trump”.<sup>26</sup>

Trump’s voters weren’t anything remotely like what Cohn, Frank, Chomsky, Sanders, Ball, Klein, Hedges, and numerous other commentators thought. “What deserves to die”, Carnes and Lupu rightly noted, “isn’t America’s working-class communities. It’s the myth that they were the reason Trump was elected”.<sup>27</sup>

Like fascist and other right-nationalist political movements of the past, Trump has drawn his main support from the more reactionary segments of the middle class and petite bourgeoisie and the more privileged and well-off sections of the working-class. The parallels between Trumpism and fascism go beyond politics and ideology into the demographic composition of Trump’s base. Like other fascist movements past and present, Trumpism finds its main electoral base primarily in the petit bourgeoisie and working class aristocracy even while it serves ruling class corporate and finance capital. As the Marxist political sociologist John Bellamy Foster noted five months after the 2016 election:

Who forms social base of the *neofascist [Trump] phenomenon*? As a Gallup analysis and CNN exit polls have demonstrated, Trump’s electoral support came mainly from the intermediate strata of the population, i.e., from the lower middle class and privileged sections of the working class, primarily those with annual household incomes above

the median level of around \$56,000 ... Trump's backing comes primarily neither from the working-class majority nor the capitalist class – though the latter have mostly reconciled themselves to Trumpism, given that they are its principal beneficiaries.<sup>28</sup>

## ***Sexism and Racism Trumped Class***

What was driving Trump's base to rally behind the angry real estate baron? Contrary to the populist Trumpenproletarian storyline, and consistent with DiMaggio's analysis, it wasn't economic anxiety. The 2016 Trump vote, a research team led by political scientist Brian Schaffner found in March of 2018, was drawn primarily to his racist and sexist messages, not his fake populism. "The 2016 campaign", wrote Schaffner and his fellow researchers:

witnessed a dramatic polarization in the vote choices of whites based on (their level of) education. Very little of this gap can be explained by the economic difficulties faced by less-educated whites. Rather, most of the divide appears to be associated with sexism, and denialism of racism.

In the *Political Science Quarterly*, Schaffner and his colleagues noted a significant, historically novel difference in the preferences of highly educated and less-educated white voters. "In 2000, a small but notable gap began to emerge, with non-college-educated whites providing more support for the Republican presidential nominee," they wrote. "This gap remained relatively small, ranging from five to seven points in the elections held from 2000 to 2012 ... In 2016, however, the gap in vote preferences between college-educated and non-college-educated whites widened considerably to 18 points," they added. "College-educated whites were more supportive of [Hillary] Clinton than they had been of [Barack] Obama in 2012, while whites without a college degree moved even more dramatically toward Trump".

Seeking the source of this split, the researchers examined data from two large, nationally representative online surveys administered by YouGov: a pre-election poll of 2,000 American adults taken in late October of 2016,

and a survey of 2,830 who were interviewed right before and after the vote. Schaffner and his colleagues focused on their responses to seven statements that reflected voters' attitudes about race and gender. The statements included the following: "Women are too easily offended"; "Women seek to gain power by getting control over men"; "White people in the US have certain advantages because of the color of their skin"; "Racial problems in the US are rare, isolated situations". Participants indicated their level of agreement or disagreement with each of these statements and which presidential candidate they planned to vote for (and, in the follow-up survey, voted for). They also answered one of two questions about their personal finances. Those in the first survey were directly asked "How satisfied are you with your overall economic situation?", while those in the second indicated whether their household income had increased, decreased, or stayed about the same over the past four years. "While the economic variables in our models were significantly associated with vote choice, those effects were dwarfed by the relationship between hostile sexism and denial of racism and voting for Trump", the researchers found.

Moving from one end of the sexism scale to the other was associated with more than a 30-point increase in support for Trump among the average likely voter. The relationship for the denial-of-racism scale was nearly identical. Moving from the highest levels of acknowledgement and empathy for racism to the lowest level was associated with about a 30-point increase in support for Trump.

The findings stayed intact even after the researchers calculated the impact of two further factors linked to Trump support: "populism" (determined by responses to statements like "The system is stacked against people like me") and authoritarianism (measured by attitudes about child-rearing). "If non-college-educated whites had become somewhat more progressive in their attitudes toward racism and sexism, so that they matched those of college-educated whites", the researchers concluded, "Clinton would have won the popular vote by four points instead of two points. Such a shift could have had a dramatic effect in terms of the Electoral College outcome".<sup>29</sup>

In a similar vein, a detailed analysis of post-election survey data by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) found that "racism and xenophobia

were much bigger factors” than economic anxiety when it came to explaining the preferences of those “white working-class” voters who did back Trump, with “white-working class” defined as whites without a college degree or a salaried job. The PRRI study examined how this Trump support correlated with, among other factors, “fears about cultural displacement”, meaning fears of immigrants and non-whites. “White working-class voters who say they often feel like a stranger in their own land and who believe the U.S. needs protecting against foreign influence were 3.5 times more likely to favor Trump than those who did not share these concerns”, the PRRI found. Economic factors played a distinctly smaller role. Indeed, by PRRI’s account, economic difficulty actually predicted more white working-class support for Hillary Clinton, not Trump – the exact opposite of the Trumpenproletarian thesis.<sup>30</sup>

Surveying the research more broadly in early 2019, Eric Levitz found that:

A hefty body of political-science research has established that the more ‘racially conservative,’ ‘hostilely sexist,’ concerned about immigration, or distrustful of Muslims a 2016 voter was, the more likely they were to support Trump, no matter their partisan or ideological self-identification. *No similar correlation has held between Trump support and economic dissatisfaction.*

To make matters even worse for the Trumpenproletarian narrative, Levitz noted:

Trump’s coalition was almost identical to Mitt Romney’s – while the 2016 GOP nominee did attract a bit more support from working-class whites, the available data suggests that this had less to do with the mogul’s sporadic appeals to economic populism than with his near-constant stoking of white racial resentments and anxieties about demographic change. The idea that the typical Trump voter (or even, typical Obama-to-Trump voter) was a downwardly mobile proletarian – who grudgingly looked past Trump’s racism and sexism out of desperate hope that an outsider might deliver genuine economic change – has *no empirical validity*.<sup>31</sup>

## ***False Conflations of Class With Education and Region***

Whence all the confusion and ill-informed thinking about Trump's supposedly proletarian (if white) base? The suspects include classist disdain in traditional conservative Republican circles for the "white trash" poor, a reflexive liberal-elitist identification of revanchist values with "uneducated" working people, the desire of elitist neoliberal centrists to discredit "populism" of any kind, reflexive liberal and progressive allegiance to Thomas Frank's excessively influential writing (dating from the success of his 2004 book *What's the Matter With Kansas?*), the desire of Trump and his bankrollers and strategists to win votes by wrapping their neoliberal fascism in the false democratic flag of economic populism, and intellectuals' susceptibility to the relentless repetition of the Trumpenproletarian myth in the dominant US media-politics culture.

Diverse ideological motives and angles aside, the notion of Trump as a working-class hero rested on two basic and related methodological mistakes: an over-identification of class with education level and an over-identification of class with region.

Defined as Caucasians with less than a college degree, the "white working-class" demonstrated its usual neoliberal-era preference for Republicans over Democrats in the presidential election. (Trump bested Hillary Clinton among white voters without college degrees by 66 percent to 28 percent, the biggest Republican margin with those voters since 1980.<sup>32</sup>) But the lack of a college diploma is a highly imperfect measure of "working-class status". Bill Gates never got a bachelor's degree. Neither did his proletarian comrade Mark Zuckerberg. At the same time, the contemporary US proletariat and "precarariat"<sup>33</sup> contains plenty of poorly paid and insecurely employed workers with college degrees.<sup>34</sup> Occupation and income are far better indicators (exit polls include the second category but not the first) of class than education level. And *nearly 60 percent of white people without college degrees who voted for Trump were in the top half of the income distribution. One in five white Trump voters without a college degree had a household income over \$100,000.*<sup>35</sup> Many of the 2016 Trump voters without college degrees were from middle- and high-income

households, suggesting a fundamental difficulty with using education to define the working class.

The spatial/geographic question is equally full of potential for confusion. In 2016, The Brookings Institution found, the 2,584 counties that Trump won generated just 36 percent of the country's economic output, whereas the 472 counties Hillary Clinton carried produced nearly two-thirds of the nation's aggregate economy. This simple fact led some observers to mistakenly conclude that Trump was the candidate of impoverished America. Reflecting on this data, Brookings researchers Marc Muro and Sifian Liu concluded that "while cultural resentments played a huge role in this month's election, so too did a massive economic divide between relatively prosperous high-output counties and struggling lower-output rural ones".<sup>36</sup> This judgement falsely conflated region with economic class by ignoring two key facts: (a) the nation's metropolitan/urban high-GDP and high-median income regions were loaded with poor and working-class people at the bottom of steep regional class and race hierarchies; (b) Trump's support in more rural low-GDP and low median income regions came disproportionately from those who were "locally rich" relative to their neighbors. As the *Washington Post* acknowledged a year after Trump's victory, the "places that backed Trump skewed poor; voters who back Trump skewed wealthier".<sup>37</sup> As any intelligent political scientist or campaign manager should know, counties don't vote, people do.

There was no mass white working-class outpouring for Trump in 2016. Clinton's miserable, centrist campaign and Obama's neoliberal legacy<sup>38</sup> depressed (multi-racial and cross-ethnic) working- and lower-class voter turnout, opening the door for Trump to squeak into power along with no small help from racist voter suppression<sup>39</sup> in contested states. *Slate* writers Konstantin Kilibarda and Daria Roithmayr got it right three weeks after the election. "*Donald Trump didn't flip working-class white voters*", they wrote,

*Hillary Clinton lost them .... Relative to the 2012 election, Democratic support in the key Rust Belt states [Iowa, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin] collapsed as a huge number of Democrats stayed home or (to a lesser extent) voted for a third party. (emphasis added)*

The decline of working-class Democratic voters between 2012 and 2016 was much bigger than the rise of working-class Republican voters in the “Rust Belt Five”. Among those earning less than \$50,000 a year there, *the decline in Democratic voting was 3.5 times greater than the rise in Republican voting. Among white voters in general, the decline in Democratic voting was 2.1 times greater than the growth in Republican voting.*<sup>40</sup> By Kilibarda and Roithmayr’s account, the image of poor and working-class whites flocking to Trump was pure myth. The most relevant factor behind Trump’s success in winning over the majority of “white working-class” voters was the decision by so many in the working class not to vote thanks to the neoliberal nothingness of the onetime purported “party of the people”.<sup>41</sup> That was the truth behind Bernie Sanders’ statement to the 2017 People’s Summit in Chicago: “Trump didn’t win the election. The Democratic Party lost the election”.<sup>42</sup>

## **For a “Strong Leader” to Punish Liberal and Left Elites and Make Whites Supreme Again – With Violence If Necessary**

It is true that candidate Trump *posed* as a populist champion of “heartland” America’s “forgotten” working-class and a critic of a Wall Street and corporate elite that had invested heavily in the neoliberal corporatist Hillary Clinton.<sup>43</sup> But, consistent with Mrs. Clinton’s impolitic description of Trump’s backers as “a basket of deplorables”,<sup>44</sup> Trump’s voters were concerned primarily with the reactionary “social issues” that the orange-tinted plutocrat championed from the far right, not working-class economic grievances against the capitalist establishment. Sexism, nativism, and racism were the leading correlates with Trump voting, not socioeconomic dissatisfaction or disadvantage. It was Trump’s chauvinistic positions and statements on race, gender, and immigration and his related posture as a strongman, an authoritarian leader, not his deceptive outward “blue-collar populism”, that scored him the most points with his mostly middle-class backers.



In December 2015, the political scientist Matthew MacWilliams surveyed 1,800 registered voters across the American political spectrum. Employing standard survey analysis tools, MacWilliams found that education, income, gender, and age had no significant bearing on a Republican primary voter's presidential candidate preference. "Only two of the variables I looked at", MacWilliams reported in January of 2016, "were statistically significant: authoritarianism, followed by fear of terrorism, though the former was far more significant than the latter". Trump, MacWilliams found, was the only candidate in either party with statistically significant support from authoritarians. "Those who say a Trump presidency 'can't happen here,'" MacWilliams wrote in a *Politico* Magazine article titled "The One Weird Trait That Predicts Whether You're a Trump Supporter", "should check their conventional wisdom at the door .... Conditions are ripe for an authoritarian leader to emerge. Trump is seizing the opportunity".<sup>45</sup>

A year and a half later, a poll conducted by political scientists Ariel Malka and Yphtach Lelkes found that 56 percent of Republicans actually *supported postponing the 2020 presidential election* if Trump and congressional Republicans advocated this to "make sure that only eligible American citizens can vote".<sup>46</sup> As this suggests, support for Trump's authoritarianism was intimately related to support for Trump's racism, infused by an embattled white racial identity.<sup>47</sup> The Trumpian "make America Great Again" heart- and mind-set held that whites were becoming a minority targeted for discrimination by elite, "politically correct" liberals and leftists who were supposedly turning the nation's politics and policies against white American values, culture, rights and prerogatives. The role of the strongman Trump, for his base was to punish those dastardly elites and put whites back in their proper but supposedly subverted position of national superiority.

The fact that Trump was one of the most corrupt plutocrats to ever sit in the White House was of little significance to his white Amerikaner supporters. "Reverse discrimination" victim whiteness (devoid of evidence for its claims) informed the Trump base's understanding of the meaning of the word "corruption" in ways that liberal writer Peter Beinart captured well. For Trump's base, Beinart wrote in the summer of 2018, the idea of

corruption wasn't about money, politics, and the law. It was about *racial and gender purity and hierarchy*:

Trump supporters appear largely unfazed by the mounting evidence that Trump is the least ethical president in modern American history .... Once you grasp that for Trump and many of his supporters, *corruption means less the violation of law than the violation of established hierarchies [of race and gender], their behavior makes more sense* .... When Trump's former personal attorney testified to Congress about Trump's longstanding personal and political corruption, it made it harder for Republicans to claim that Trump hadn't violated the law. But for many if not most Republicans, Trump remained uncorrupt – indeed, anti-corrupt – because what they *fear most isn't the corruption of American law; it's the corruption of America's traditional identity*. And in the struggle against *that form of corruption* – the kind embodied by Cristhian Rivera [an “illegal immigrant” accused of murdering the young white woman Mollie Tibbetts in rural Iowa in early August of 2018] – *Trump isn't the problem. He's the solution* (emphasis added).<sup>48</sup>

It was never about choosing between nativist racism on one hand or authoritarianism on the other when it came to understanding Trump's base. White racial identity and authoritarianism were merged and cross-fertilized in the angry minds of the Trumpenvolk. In May of 2018, political scientists Steven V. Miller and Nicholas T. Davis released an important paper titled “White Outgroup Intolerance and Declining Support for American Democracy”. Their study found a strong correlation between white Americans' racial intolerance and support for authoritarian rule. “When racially intolerant white people fear democracy may benefit marginalized people of color”, NBC News reported, citing the Miller and Davis paper, “they abandon their commitment to democracy”. The Trump base's racial bigotry and its leanings toward authoritarianism, Miller and Davis determined, were inseparably linked.<sup>49</sup> When Trump called Mexicans murderers and rapists, when he railed about the need for building a wall, when he denounced the media as “fake news”, when he dissed judges and the

rule of law and juries, and when he praised authoritarian leaders, he was appealing throughout to the same voters.

One of the most sophisticated and astute analyses of the 2016 Trump electoral base was crafted by political sociologists David Norman Smith and Eric Hanley. In an article published in *Critical Sociology* in March of 2018, Smith and Hanley found that the white Trump base was differentiated from white non-Trump voters not by class or other “demographic” factors (including income, age, gender, and the alleged class identifier of education) but by eight key attitudes and values: identification as “conservative”, support for “domineering leaders”, Christian fundamentalism, prejudice against immigrants, prejudice against blacks, prejudice against Muslims, prejudice against women, and a sense of pessimism about the economy. Strong Trump supporters scored particularly high on support for domineering leaders, fundamentalism, and opposition to immigrants... They backed authoritarian leaders who promised to respond punitively to minorities they perceived as “line-cutters” – “undeserving” others who were allegedly getting ahead of traditional white Americans in the procurement of jobs and government benefits – and to liberal “rotten apples” who were supposedly allowing these “line-cutters” to advance ahead of white Americans.

Support for authoritarian politicians and intolerance of racial, ethnic and gender difference were two sides of the same Trumpian fascist coin. The basic desire animating Trump’s base was “the defiant wish for a domineering and impolitic leader” linked to “the wish for a reversal of what his base perceives as an inverted moral and racial order”.<sup>50</sup>

This Trump base was alarmingly supportive of political violence, also consistent with the fascist world view. The *Pew Research Centers* found in early 2017 revealed that 19 percent of Republicans (48 million people), and 20 percent of conservatives (51 million) agreed that “targeting and killing civilians can be justified in order to further a political, social, or religious cause” can “sometimes” or “often be justified”.<sup>51</sup>

Equally if not more disturbing was the Trump base’s cult-like devotion to their Fearless Leader. A Monmouth University poll conducted in November 2019, as Trump’s UkraineGate scandal was being exposed, determined that 62 percent of Americans who approved of the job Trump was doing as president could *not think of a single thing he could do that would cost him*

*to lose their support.*<sup>52</sup> The finding all too eerily matched presidential candidate Trump's 2016 boast: "I could stand on Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody and not lose any voters".

## **The Myth of Trump as a Working-Class Hero, Part II (2020)**

Beyond the simple fact that Trump added 11 million voters to his 2016 total, the 2020 presidential electorate broke down largely along the same lines as in 2016. As the relevant exit polling data showed, heavily partisan and ideological voters lined up just as strongly with their preferred candidates as they did four years before. In 2020 as in 2016, 90 percent or more of liberals and Democratic voters marked ballots for the Democratic presidential candidate and the same percentage of conservatives and Republicans picked Trump.<sup>53</sup>

Previous ethnocultural, gender, educational, and income divides also held. Black voters broke 87 percent for Biden, similar to their 88 percent vote for Hillary Clinton in 2016. LatinX voters chose Biden over Trump 65–32 percent, similar to their 65–29 percent break for Mrs. Clinton. Whites favored Trump over Biden by 58–41 percent, similar to their 58–37 preference for Trump over Clinton. Men went for Trump over Biden by 53–45 in 2020, similar to their 53–41 preference for Trump over Clinton. Women broke for Biden over Trump by 57–42 in 2020, just three points up from their 54–42 preference for Clinton over Trump in 2016. Individuals with a college degree broke for Biden over Trump 55–43, while individuals with a four-year degree favored Clinton over Trump by 49–45 four years before.<sup>54</sup>

Voting differences by income once again contradicted the myth of Trump as a hero of the working-class and followed the longstanding pattern of the Democrats receiving more support from the poor and working classes and the Republicans garnering higher levels of support from more affluent. Americans earning less than \$30,000 a year went for Biden over Trump by 54–46 in 2020, just slightly down from their 53–41 break for Clinton over Trump in 2016. Americans receiving between \$30,000 and \$50,000 went for Biden over Trump by 56–43 in 2020, up from their 51–42 preference for Mrs. Clinton in 2016.<sup>55</sup>

In 2020, as in 2016, Trump found his strongest support among more well-off Americans. As the *Financial Times* reported one week after the election:

Trump lost support among low-income voters but gained with the rich. Voters from wealthy households swung further towards Mr. Trump in 2020. Just over half of those whose family income was more than \$100,000 a year supported the president, compared with 45 per cent in 2016 ... By contrast, those making family incomes of less than \$50,000 voted Democratic by an 11.5-point margin (55 to 43), compared to an 8.2-point Democratic margin in 2016 (50 to 42).<sup>56</sup>

As DiMaggio observed three weeks after the election, the data:

undermine[s] the notion, promulgated endlessly over the last 4 years, that Trump speaks for the ‘common man’ who has fallen behind in the neoliberal era due to rising financial insecurity, and as a function of outsourcing, downsizing, and the rise of the contingent ‘gig economy.’

The most remarkable change was Trump’s increased support from the middle and upper-middle class. The biggest boost in voter preference for Trump between 2016 and 2020 was among Americans who earned between \$100,000 to \$200,000. This relatively affluent cohort *went from being evenly split between Clinton and Trump (47 percent for the Democrat and 48 percent for the Republican) in 2016 to breaking for Trump by a remarkable 58 to 41 percent in 2020.*<sup>57</sup>

The 2020 data did not jibe well, to say the least, with Chomsky’s following characterization of Trump’s base in a March 2021 interview: “the victims of the neoliberal globalization of the past 40 years”.<sup>58</sup>

Again in 2020 as in 2016, some elite commentators were fooled by geography into seeing Trump as the candidate of those on the losing side of the nation’s steep economic divide. The liberal Brookings Institution’s researchers found that Biden’s “winning base of 509 counties encompass[ed] fully 71% of America’s economic activity [GDP], while Trump’s losing base of 2,547 counties represents just 29% of the economy [GDP]”. Further:

So, while the election’s winner may have changed, the nation’s economic geography remains rigidly divided. Biden captured virtually all of the counties with the biggest economies in the country, including flipping the few that Clinton did not win in 2016 ... By contrast, Trump won

thousands of counties in small-town and rural communities with correspondingly tiny economies. Biden's counties tended to be far more diverse, educated, and white-collar professional, with their aggregate nonwhite and college-educated shares of the economy running to 35% and 36%, respectively, compared to 16% and 25% in counties that voted for Trump.

In short, 2020's map continues to reflect a striking split between the large, dense, metropolitan counties that voted Democratic and the mostly exurban, small-town, or rural counties that voted Republican. Blue and red America reflect two very different economies: one oriented to diverse, often college-educated workers in professional and digital services occupations, and the other whiter, less-educated, and more dependent on "traditional" industries.

This *economic rift that persists in dividing the nation* is a problem because it underscores the near-certainty of both continued clashes between the political parties and continued alienation and misunderstandings ... Republicans represent an economic base situated in the nation's struggling small towns and rural areas. Prosperity there remains out of reach for many, and the party sees no reason to consider the priorities and needs of the nation's metropolitan centers. That is not a scenario for economic consensus or achievement (emphasis added).<sup>59</sup>

Brookings' research was accurate, its write-up eloquent, but it left the false impression that Trump's base was poorer and more proletarian than Biden's. That was the case only with class replaced by geography – place of residence – as the signifier of economic status. This, as the perceptive policy researcher Jacob Whiton noted one day before Biden's inauguration, was a critical mistake:

National exit polling from both 2016 and 2020 confirm that even with President Trump at the top of the ballot, the positive relationship between household income and Republican support persisted. *One reason for persistent confusion on this point is the conflation of districts with voters.* Republicans do tend to represent congressional

*districts with lower median incomes, but it does not follow that their base of support is therefore drawn from those places' working-class residents. In fact, reconciling the fact of these districts' lower incomes with national survey results suggests the very opposite: the Republican base is composed of the wealthiest voters residing in lower-income districts (emphasis added).*

Another reason for the persistence of the Trumpenproletarian myth in 2020–21 as after 2016 was the persistent false conflation of class and education. As Whiton observed:

*Partisan polarization by education has risen dramatically over the last forty years, but post-election surveys show that voters with higher incomes and greater wealth are still significantly more likely to support Republican candidates .... Using educational attainment as a proxy for class obscures the extent to which many white Americans without a four-year college degree receive relatively high incomes and own some wealth, primarily in residential real estate and pensions. According to the Census's 2019 American Community Survey, more than half of white Americans without a four-year degree have household incomes greater than \$65,000 a year – roughly the national median income – and over 70 percent of them are homeowners. White homeowners are also significantly less likely to have a college education in [Congressional] districts represented by Republicans than in those represented by Democrats.<sup>60</sup>*

Whiton's most interesting finding concerns the nation's most militantly Trumpist congressional districts – the ones represented by the 139 House members who voted in support of rejecting the certification of Joe Biden's Electoral College victory on January 6th. By Whiton's analysis, these districts were heavily white middle to upper-middle class and evangelical Christian and located in growing ex-urban and mixed rural-suburban regions where rising younger LatinX and Asian populations were seen as a threat to white property, culture, and supremacy:



Support for pro-Trump Republicans remains driven by relatively well-off whites in fast-growing, rapidly diversifying suburbs – not by economic despair in rural America ... *The evidence cuts strongly against the common view of the [Trump] movement as driven by “lumpen” Rust Belt rage and economic despair in the country’s shrinking rural hinterland.* Rather, the picture that emerges is one of Greenfield suburbs that are both fast growing and rapidly diversifying, where inequalities between relatively well-off white households and their non-white neighbors have been shrinking the most. ... The Republican Party’s most pro-Trump members have been elected by higher-income white homeowners in fast-growing exurbia. They feel the social status traditionally associated with their identity as white Christians is being degraded and that left-wing political movements pose a threat to their livelihoods, personal wealth, and political power. In reaction, they have committed themselves to a movement seeking to defend the privileges of property-owning white Americans in our political system, economy, and public life, and have demonstrated a willingness to actively subvert democratic processes to achieve their ends.

Three-fourths of the House “objectors” represented expanding suburbia and exurbia, compared to two-thirds of non-objector Republican House member and just 13 percent of House Democrats.

Also defying the stereotype of the Trump base as proletarian, poor, “lumpen”, and rural was political scientist Robert Pape and researcher Kevin Ruby’s detailed analysis of the more than 400 people arrested for participation in the January 6th Capitol Riot. Pape and Ruby found that the very predominantly white (93 percent) and male (86 percent) Trumpist marauders were significantly affluent, employed, older, married, petit-bourgeois and from urban and dense-suburban blue (Democratic) metropolitan regions, not poor and working-class people from impoverished rural America and red (Republican) states. As Pape told the Public Broadcasting System’s Michael Martin last May:

Two-thirds of the [January 6th arrestees] are over the age of 34. We have a concentration [of people] ... in their 40s and 50s. They have families,

they have jobs, they are mature adults. This is a very different picture than what we've seen before .... 45 percent are CEOs, business owners, doctors, lawyers, accountants, midlevel managers. We have a State Department official ... Only 7 percent are unemployed. That is the national average at that point. These are not people that are at the desperate end of the job rung ladder.

We looked at the origins of where are the individuals who broke into the Capitol, where they lived .... We started to look more deeply and we [asked] ...what do the counties – there are about 250 [counties] that have produced these 420-plus insurrectionists – have most in common? What's their biggest risk factor? The biggest risk factor is not whether they're rural. The more rural, the less likely a county was to send an insurrectionist. It's not percent vote for Trump. The higher the vote for Trump, the less likely the county was to send an insurrectionist .... over half lived in counties in the United States that Biden won. They are not coming from the reddest parts of America. Half of them come from the bluest parts of America ... they're coming from Chicago. They're coming from Houston. They're coming from San Francisco. They're coming from Los Angeles and Beverly Hills within Los Angeles. They're coming from New York City.

What drove these relatively affluent older and mostly metropolitan area adult white males to undertake a mad assault on the US Congress in support of Trump's Stolen Election Lie? By Pape's account, linked to national opinion data, the main motivating belief was a sense that "white rights" were being "replaced" by Black and LatinX rights, a sense linked to residence in a country where the non-Hispanic white population had been falling in recent years:

The number one risk factor was percent decline of the non-Hispanic white population. The more the decline of the non-Hispanic white population, the more likely the county was to send an insurrectionist. And this would happen by chance, less than one in 1,000 times. So, this is very important to understand.

We follow this up because, you know, once we knew that, we wanted to say, well, gee. What does – what’s the general risk factor here in the population at large? So, we conducted a nationally representative sample with the National Opinion and Research Council, the gold standard of opinion surveys, not the kind of cheap thing that people sometimes do on the side. And we asked people, 1,000 American adults, we asked them, do you believe the election was stolen? And do you – would you willingly participate in a violent protest?

And what we discovered is 4 percent of all American adults, which equates to 10 million people, both believe in the steal and would participate in a violent protest. We further found that the key risk factor was belief in the great replacement, that is the belief, the fear that the rights of minorities were outpacing the rights of whites.<sup>61</sup>

## **Why Biden Won: Trump's Response to COVID-19 and the George Floyd Rebellion**

What accounts for Biden’s win? One top factor was the novel coronavirus and Trump’s horrific performance in response to COVID-19 and the pandemic’s negative impact on peoples’ ability to make a living. By DiMaggio’s expert analysis, Trump’s botched response to the pandemic and voters’ virus-related economic anxieties worked on Biden’s behalf:

Those most concerned with COVID-19, and those who have been the most harmed by negative economic developments over the last year, cut steadily – sometimes heavily – against Trump and in favor of Biden. On the COVID-19 front, and for individuals who said that the pandemic “mattered most in deciding how you voted for president”, the overwhelming majority voted for Biden over Trump, by 81–15 percent, *with these voters representing a significant 17 percent of the voting public*. Similarly, individuals who agreed that “U.S. efforts to contain the pandemic” was going “somewhat badly” or “very badly” preferred Biden to Trump by an overwhelming 81-18.

As COVID-19 imposed severe economic consequences on the public, those struggles also informed the vote. Polling data from as early as March 2020 suggested that disapproval of Trump was running about 15 percentage points higher in parts of the country that experienced the most “severe” economic impacts of COVID-19. And this early anxiety continued through election day, as exit polling revealed. Individuals who said their “family’s financial situation” was “worse today” compared to “four years ago” cut toward Biden by 77-22. Similarly, individuals who said that “the coronavirus pandemic caused you a severe financial hardship” favored Biden over Trump by 69-29, while those who said they faced “moderate financial hardship” because of the virus voted Biden over Trump by 59-39. More generally, those who said the U.S. economy was doing “not so good” or “poor” favored Biden to Trump by 80-17.<sup>62</sup>

Also devastating for Trump’s re-election was his horrific, white-supremacist response to the summer 2020 George Floyd and Brionna Taylor Rebellion against racist police conduct. DiMaggio again:

On the issue of racism in America, large numbers of voters cast a vote against the Trump administration, in opposition to its tone-deaf approach to protests of police brutality disproportionately directed against people of color. Voters who cited “racial inequality” as the issue that “mattered most in deciding how you voted for president” overwhelmingly favored Biden over Trump by 92-7, with these voters representing a sizable 20 percent of the electorate.<sup>63</sup>

Combing these two categories – people who voted against Trump over COVID-19 and those who voted against racial disparity – DiMaggio finds that “a solid third of the electorate” voted against Trump out of anti-racism and/or because of their dissatisfaction with his handling of the pandemic.

What *Trump’s support* in 2020 clearly wasn’t about was mass working-class anger over economic losses linked to neoliberal globalization and its many anti-worker symptoms – outsourcing, downsizing, de-unionization, and financial and occupational insecurity. The sadly durable Trumpenproletarian

narrative has always suffered from a nearly complete lack of substantive statistical proof, as DiMaggio and other researchers have shown in one study after another. In curious defiance of the data, numerous liberal and left intellectuals and mainstream media operatives have insisted on playing along with and getting played by right-wing Republican Party and media propaganda falsely identifying Trump's "populist" base as financially insecure, economically anxious whites.

Republicans' motive in advancing the Trumpenproletarian narrative seems clear enough: the goal is to deceptively identify their arch-reactionary and plutocratic party with the nation's working-class majority and thereby garner undeserved votes. More mysterious, perhaps, is why Democrats and even progressives have bought so heavily into the flawed, statistically unsupported narrative. Beyond methodological confusion and ignorance, possible explanations include classist elitism on the part of professional and business class Democrats and a related corporate Democratic determination to smear the working class as reactionary and to falsely merge the supposedly populist and noxious politics of a Trump with the more genuinely populist politics of leftish progressive Democrats like Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

In 2020 as in 2016, the ugly truth is that the Trump base was driven by neo-fascistic petit-bourgeois attachment to a strong white male authoritarian leader who promised to smack down liberal and supposedly "radical Left" Democratic elites accused of unjustly promoting people of color ahead of supposedly more deserving white people – and of trying to criminally overturn patriotic norms and structures of traditional social hierarchy. Fully 40 percent of Trump's 2020 vote came from self-identified evangelical Christians, who saw Trump as God's appointed agent to roll back gay rights, women's rights, and the threat posed to the white nation by rising minority populations – and who were naturally not deterred in the slightest by his opposition to science and professional expertise.

Chillingly enough, the fascist president increased his vote total among the nation's most reactionary elements by 11 million people between 2016 and 2020, including a significant rise among whites making \$100,000 to \$200,000 per year. He would likely have won re-election fair and square or come close enough to more credibly challenge the contest it in court or Congress but for the devastating impact of COVID-19.

It's a disturbing realization. But, as we have seen in earlier chapters, COVID-19 did not hit Trump's re-election bid like some chance contingency out of the sky. He and his pandemo-fascist administration blew American infection and death rates through the roof. The Trump "pandemicide" (Laurie Garrett) was a reflection of his racist and Social Darwinian neo-fascism as well as his mistaken electoral calculations. At the same time, the anti-racism that drove several million Americans to vote against Trump was intensified by the chauvinistic white supremacism of Trump's violent, fascistic response to the George Floyd Rebellion, which itself was significantly informed by Trump's fascist fanning of the racially disparate pandemic.

## **"Christian Fascists"**

Trump's remarkably strong support from evangelical Christians and white Catholics, key parts of his voting base in 2016<sup>64</sup> as in 2020, might seem odd given Trump's own long history of sexual transgression and extreme personal corruption. But the nation's evangelicals and white Catholics and their leaders have been willing to overlook Trump's individual flaws (from a morally consistent Christian spiritual standpoint) in return for his politically astute decision<sup>65</sup> to honor their wishes when it came to federal court appointments and executive actions aligned with their arch-reactionary values. At the same time, we should not underestimate the strong shared political and ideological space between American "Christian" fundamentalism and 21st-century neofascism. As Chris Hedges wrote in a December 2019 essay titled "Onward Christian Fascists":

The iconography and symbols of American nationalism became intertwined with the iconography and symbols of the Christian faith [on the U.S. religious right]. The mega-pastors, narcissists who rule despotic, cult-like fiefdoms, make millions of dollars by using this heretical belief system to prey on the mounting despair and desperation of their congregations ... These believers find in Donald Trump a reflection of themselves, a champion of the unfettered greed, cult of masculinity, lust for violence, white supremacy, bigotry, American chauvinism, religious intolerance, anger, racism and conspiracy theories

that define the central beliefs of the Christian right. When I wrote [the book] *American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America* I was deadly serious about the term “fascists.” ... Trump has filled his own ideological void with Christian fascism. He has elevated members of the Christian right to prominent positions, including Mike Pence to the vice presidency, Mike Pompeo to secretary of state, Betsy DeVos to secretary of education, Ben Carson to secretary of housing and urban development, William Barr to attorney general, Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court and the televangelist Paula White to his Faith and Opportunities Initiative. More importantly, Trump has handed the Christian right veto and appointment power over key positions in government, especially in the federal courts. He has installed 133 district court judges out of 677 total, 50 appeals court judges out of 179 total, and two U.S. Supreme Court justices out of nine. Almost all of these judges were, in effect, selected by the Federalist Society and the Christian right. Many of the extremists who make up the judicial appointees have been rated as unqualified by the American Bar Association, the country’s largest nonpartisan coalition of lawyers. Trump has moved to ban Muslim immigrants and rolled back civil rights legislation. He has made war on reproductive rights by restricting abortion and defunding Planned Parenthood. He has stripped away LGBTQ rights. He has ripped down the firewall between church and state by revoking the Johnson Amendment, which prohibits churches, which are tax-exempt, from endorsing political candidates. His appointees throughout the government routinely use biblical strictures to justify an array of policy decisions including environmental deregulation, war, tax cuts and the replacement of public schools with charter schools, an action that permits the transfer of federal education funds to private “Christian” schools.<sup>66</sup>

## Notes

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## Chapter 6

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# America Was Never Great: On “The Soul of This Nation”

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One, two three, four, slavery, genocide, and war; five, six, seven, eight, America was never great!

–Chant of Refuse Fascism activists in downtown  
Chicago, 2019–2020

History is written by the winners.

–William Barr, May 6, 2020<sup>1</sup>

Fascist elements and tendencies have always been part of the nation’s DNA, even though many Americans cannot admit this. Indeed, it can be said that some of the worst traits of European fascism were borrowed from America.

–David Neiwert, 2017

Everything we’ve seen in the last four years – the nativism, the racism, the corruption, the wanton exploitation of the weak and unconcealed contempt for the vulnerable – is as much a part of the

American story as our highest ideals and aspirations. The line to Trump runs through the whole of American history, from the white man's democracy of Andrew Jackson to the populist racism of George Wallace, from native expropriation to Chinese exclusion.

–Janelle Bouie, *New York Times*, November 2, 2020<sup>2</sup>

In the American model, in order for it to work, you have to say that Native Americans, Indians, are not quite human. And therefore they, like trees in the forest, are legitimate objects of creative destruction. And similarly blacks, African Americans, are legitimate objects of exploitation because they are considered to be not fully human.

–Richard Slotkin, 2013

## **How Many Killed and Enslaved Is Enough?**

Some of the fascist Proud Boys who rampaged in Washington DC to protest the Democrats' alleged "steal" of the 2020 presidential election (with Donald Trump signaling approval in the presidential helicopter above) on December 12, 2020, wore a t-shirt emblazoned with the neo-Nazi slogan "6MWE".<sup>3</sup> The term stood for "Six Million Wasn't Enough", with "six million" referring to the number of Jews murdered in the Nazi Holocaust.

Reflecting on the openly genocidal nature of this slogan, I wondered if the Proud Boys might have been proud to learn that exterminist white violence and disease reduced the Indigenous population living in what became the continental USA from 15 million on the eve of Christopher Columbus's "discovery" of "the New World" to less than half a million by the 1890s, with the US Census recording just 237,000 Native Americans in 1900.<sup>4</sup> This epic population decline marked what historian David E. Stannard calls "the worst human holocaust the world had ever witnessed".<sup>5</sup>

"For the entire present-day United States from 1492 to the present", historian David Michael Smith found in 2017,

the total number of Indigenous deaths includes the 12 million estimated by [the distinguished Cherokee-American anthropologist Russell] Thornton; the additional approximately 790,000 deaths that



occurred in Hawaii, Alaska, in Puerto Rico; and about 200,000 excess deaths since 1900. Thus, the Indigenous Holocaust in this country appears to have taken around 13 million lives.<sup>6</sup>

Those who think that fascism is impossible in the “exceptionally” free, decent, democratic, and law-abiding USA might want to read up on the dark undersides of American history. Slavery happened here, for two and a half centuries. Jim Crow segregation, disenfranchisement, and terrorism happened here for nearly a century. Native American removal and genocide happened here over three centuries. Mass Black ghettoization took place in the past century and remains intact today. Racist mass arrest, imprisonment, and criminal branding have been happening for half a century. From its genocidal and slave-based origins through its recurrent bloody repression and oppression of workers and radicals, its savage levelling and privatization of North American forests and prairies, its building of a giant authoritarian corporate system, its manufacture of vast urban Black ghettos, its creation of a globally unmatched racist mass incarceration system (which inspired the heralded Black novelist Tony Morrison to say that “America has often preferred fascist solutions to political problems” in a 1995 Howard University speech on “Racism and Fascism”), its ongoing police-state brutalization of its minority populations, its construction of a giant, mass-murderous and racist global empire, its direct and indirect murder of tens of millions of world citizens, and its creation of a massive surveillance state at home and abroad, the real and by no means glorious story of American history, when properly examined, suggests that in many ways *fascism might, like violence, be, to paraphrase the 1960s Black radical H. Rap Brown, “as American as cherry pie”*.<sup>7</sup>

Adolph Hitler and his fellow Nazis seemed to think so. Their vile racist project to make Germany great again was inspired to no small degree by the history of American genocide, slavery, continental conquest, and Jim Crow segregation, whose grisly record of racist lynching was alive and well when Hitler seized power in Germany. The USA’s racial separatism and terror policies and practices served as key role models for Hitler and other European fascists, who also admired American mass-production and the potent means of thought- and feeling-control developed by American

advertisers and Hollywood. European fascism was Americanism to no small degree. Hitler's Nuremberg Race Laws were significantly based on the example of the "exceptional" United States' Jim Crow South.<sup>8</sup>

## **"An Aberrant Moment?" Two Different Takes on "*This Is America*"**

Among the various misconceptions that have kept US-Americans blind to the fascist threat in their midst has been the comforting notion that the Trump presidency was a despotic and racist "aberration" outside the mainly liberal and democratic contours and currents of American history. This soothing idea lay at the heart of the dramatic political advertisement in which Joe Biden announced his bid to run against Trump in the spring of 2019:

Charlottesville, VA, is home to the author of one of the great documents in human history. We know it by heart: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights." We've heard it so often, it's almost a cliché. But it's *who we are*.

Charlottesville is also home to a defining moment for this nation in the last few years. It was there on August of 2017 we saw Klansmen and white supremacists and neo-Nazis come out in the open, their crazed faces illuminated by torches, veins bulging, and bearing the fangs of racism. Chanting the same anti-Semitic bile heard across Europe in the '30s. And they were met by a courageous group of Americans, and a violent clash ensued and a brave young woman lost her life.

And that's when we heard the words from the president of the United States that stunned the world and shocked the conscience of this nation. He said there were "some very fine people on both sides." Very fine people on both sides?

With those words, the president of the United States assigned a moral equivalence between those spreading hate and those with the courage to

stand against it. And in that moment, I knew the threat to this nation was unlike any I had ever seen in my lifetime.

I wrote at the time that we're in the battle for *the soul of this nation*. Well, that's even more true today. We are in the battle for *the soul of this nation*.

I believe history will look back on four years of this president and all he embraces as an aberrant moment in time. But if we give Donald Trump eight years in the White House, he will forever and fundamentally *alter the character of this nation – who we are* – and I cannot stand by and watch that happen.

The core values of this nation, our standing in the world, our very democracy, everything that has made America, America, is at stake.

That's why today I'm announcing my candidacy for President of the United States.

Folks, America's an idea, an idea that's stronger than any army, bigger than any ocean, more powerful than any dictator or tyrant. It gives hope to the most desperate people on earth, it guarantees that everyone is treated with dignity and gives hate no safe harbor. It instills in every person in this country the belief that no matter where you start in life, there's nothing you can't achieve if you work at it.

That's what we believe. And above all else, that's what's at stake in this election.

We can't forget what happened in Charlottesville. Even more important, we have to remember who we are. *This is America.*<sup>9</sup>

Speaking in a December 8, 2020 online forum held by Refuse Fascism on “Why did 74 Million Americans Vote for Trump”, the Black Philadelphia civil and human rights attorney Michael Coard had a *very different take on American history and “the soul of this nation”*:

*Trump is America and America is Trump.* He's NOT an aberration ... As horrific as *Trump is America*. Let's start in 1492, the beginning of America. On the first day, pre-America, you see what happened there ... Fast forward to 1619, pre-America, British colonial America enslaving people like me. That's America. Fast forward to 1704, the beginning of today's municipal police departments because it was in 1704, with the colony of Carolina, that the slave patrols began ... with white men age 21 years and older being deputized to beat the Hell out and control Black people. Fast forward to 1776: we've got 56 white male property owners signing the "Declaration of Independence" and 27 of them were involved in the slave trade. Fast forward to 1789, we get to the founding document of this country, the United States Constitution. That documents looks at Black folks as subhuman, as 3/5 of a human being and allows the continuation of the slave trade for another 20 years ... we're not gonna end slavery in 20 years, we're just going to stop bringing in Africans. That's written down in the fundamental law of the land. Then there's the runaway return clause saying that if you escape to free state or free territory from a slave state or slave territory, then that free territory must send you back into slavery. Then we got the Electoral College and so many other things.

Fast forward to 1790 right here in Philadelphia. George Washington enslaved 316 Black men, women, and children in Virginia and then in 1790 comes to Philadelphia where America's first White House stood and illegally held 9 Black, men, women and children. That's the God of America.

Fast forward to Dred Scott, 1857 [a reference to the Supreme Court decision which held that slaves could not become U.S. citizens because the U.S. Constitution was meant only for whites] ... In 2016, the solicitor general, the top of the state of Kansas, cited the Dred Scott decision in his legal brief to violate the rights of women .... No Supreme Court has ever overturned Dred Scott ... In 2013, *Shelby County vs. Eric Holder*, the attorney general under Obama, [the Supreme Court] basically gutted the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

So we look at American history, we say that Trump is part and parcel of the same thing ....<sup>10</sup>

## Twelve Ugly Lessons

The notion that Trump and Trumpism are out of step with “who we are” is badly out of step with dark truths of American history. Dealing with those harsh realities – cold truths white nationalists want wiped out of the collective memory – is fundamental to cracking the American fascist and authoritarian code.

“To understand one of the root causes of polarization today”, political scientist Matthew C. MacWilliams writes in his book *On Fascism: 12 Lessons From American History*, “set aside the fairy-tale story of American history. Like smallpox and other Old World diseases that ravaged the Native populations in the New World, authoritarianism migrated with the first settlers to America ... Our fervent belief in the myth of American exceptionalism”, MacWilliams writes, “persuades us that we are uniquely immune to the activation of authoritarianism. Some of us contend that we are different from people in every other part of the world ... We are not”. McWilliams’ bracing volume presents 12 tutorials illustrating how “divisive rhetoric, strongman tactics, violent othering, and authoritarian attitudes” have “course[d] through American history and compete[d] with our egalitarian, democratic aspirations”:

- US Senator Stephen Douglas’s open 1858 argument (in his famous debates with Abraham Lincoln) that the Declaration of Independence applied to whites only.
- The recurrent use of “the tools of fear and conspiracy” to stir up mass paranoia in support of authoritarian clampdowns on accused and perceived enemies of traditional values and social order.
- The wide popularity of the fascistic Catholic priest Charles Coughlin’s conspiracist and paranoid hate radio broadcasts in the late 1920s and 1930s.

- The openly absurd and partisan prosecution and incarceration of Republican-Democratic dissenters, including numerous newspaper editors, under the repressive Alien and Sedition Act of 1798.
- The savage and lawless removal of the Cherokee Nation and other Indigenous people from their homelands.
- The lynching of untold thousands (the official estimate of 4,742 is certainly too low) of predominantly Black and other non-white Americans by racist white mobs between 1882 and 1968.
- The racist pogroms conducted against Chinese Americans and immigrants in the American West during the late 19th century.
- The federal government's 1919 Palmer Raids, which joined nativism to anti-radicalism in rounding up and incarcerating thousands of disproportionately Eastern and South Central European Americans for the supposed crime of being "Reds".
- A giant Nazi event that was billed as a "pro-American rally" and promoted as "a mass demonstration for true Americanism" and held before 22,000 at New York City's Madison Square Garden in 1939.
- The absurd and racist US internment of Japanese Americans during World War II.
- US Senator Joe McCarthy's reign of paranoid anti-communist terror and accusation
- The National Security Agency and other US intelligence agencies "wholesale snooping on Americans".<sup>11</sup>

(MacWilliams is right to remind us of these terrible episodes and their relevance to contemporary despotic threats. Still, he is too eager to conflate authoritarianism with fascism. MacWilliams also needed to more explicitly include *systemic* racism, nativism, sexism, classism/capitalism, ecocide, and genocide in his understanding of the authoritarianism that has shaped North American and US history.)

## **A Little Matter of Genocide**

## ***Beneath the Heroic Mythology of a “Settler State”: Dehumanization, Extermination and Enslavement***

When was America “great” for Amerikaner white nationalists? Above all during the great 19th-century expansion, when a rugged white male republic pushed its territorial frontier ever further westward, violently subjugating nature and society to its will. Perhaps nobody has captured the brutal and racist savagery of this expansion more eloquently than the prolific cultural historian Richard Slotkin, who said the following to Bill Moyers in December of 2013:

The United States is a settler state. And this begins with colonial outposts in the wilderness... How did we go from being these small outposts to being the mightiest nation on planet earth? Well, we did it by pushing the boundaries of the settlement out into Indian country. We did it by ultimately fighting wars against Native Americans, driving them out, displacing them, *exterminating* them in some cases.

And in the process of pushing our boundaries out, we acquired certain “heroic” virtues – an ability to fight cleverly both as individuals and cooperatively, and a connection with nature which is particularly critical. As a country develops you get a kind of American exceptionalist notion of progress which is that American progress is achieved not by man exploiting man, but it’s achieved by conquering nature, by taking resources from nature, farmland originally, timber resources, ultimately gold, minerals, oil and so on. In the American model, in order for it to work, you have to say *that Native Americans, Indians, are not quite human. And therefore they, like trees in the forest, are legitimate objects of creative destruction. And similarly blacks, African Americans, are legitimate objects of exploitation because they are considered to be not fully human.*

So what you get in this, the evolution of the American national myth, really up through the Civil War is the creation of America as a white man’s republic in which, different from Europe, if you’re white, you’re all right. You don’t have to be an aristocrat born to have a place in the

society. You don't absolutely even have to be Anglo-Saxon, although it helps.

But so among whites you can have democracy. *But the white democracy depends on the murder, the extermination, the driving out of Native Americans and the enslavement of blacks. Both of those boundaries, the western frontier, the Indian frontier, and the slave frontier, are boundaries created and enforced by violence, either literal or latent, potential violence.*<sup>12</sup>

## ***Savagely and Mercilessly Exterminating “the Common Enemy of the Country”***

Let's take a closer look at “the soul of this nation”, the exterminist “white democracy” that “settled” America. How new is lethal racist cruelty in the supposedly once “great” US-American experience? North American white “settlers” eradicated millions of the continent's original inhabitants (in what the Indigenous scholar Ward Churchill once called “a little matter of genocide”)<sup>13</sup> and populated their southern colonies and states with Black slaves they tortured, raped, maimed, and murdered in forced labor camps that provided the critical raw material for the rise of American capitalism.<sup>14</sup> Trump's favorite president prior to himself, Andrew Jackson, first rose to prominence in the early 19th century as the head of the Tennessee militia who exterminated the Creek Nation. As the prolific Yale historian Greg Grandin writes:

Jackson instructed his men ... to “pant with vengeance” and turn themselves into “engines of destruction.” Jackson laid waste to Creek villages and declared himself “Justifiable.” He threatened to continue burning houses, killing warriors, mutilating their bodies (he ordered his men to cut off the noses of the Indian corpses, so as to more easily tally the dead), and enslaving their women and children “until I do obtain a surrender,” ... [thereby] previewing the misery he would later, as president, nationalize [with the 1830 Indian Removal Act] ... Jackson kept the skulls of Indians he killed as trophies, and his soldiers cut long



strips of skin from their victims to use as bridle reins ... “We have seen the ravens and the vultures preying upon the carcasses of the unburied slain,” Jackson told his troops, following an especially gruesome 1814 massacre. “Our vengeance has been glutted.”<sup>15</sup>

Jackson as president ordered the 1830s “Trail of Tears”, a giant and sadistic death march that finalized the *ethnic cleansing* of the Cherokee Nation from the nation’s Southeastern seaboard. The terrible story of this genocidal policy is one Google search away on [History.com](http://History.com), where one can learn the following:

By 1838, only about 2,000 Cherokees had left their Georgia homeland for Indian Territory. President Martin Van Buren sent General Winfield Scott and 7,000 soldiers to expedite the removal process. Scott and his troops forced the Cherokee into stockades at bayonet point while whites looted their homes and belongings. Then, they marched the Indians more than 1,200 miles to Indian Territory. Whooping cough, typhus, dysentery, cholera and starvation were epidemic along the way, and historians estimate that more than 5,000 Cherokee died as a result of the journey.<sup>16</sup>

Consider the conclusion of the one-sided “Black Hawk War” – just one of many examples of a ferocious white history of North American extermination. The Sauk and Fox Indians lost 600 people, including hundreds of woman and children. Just 70 white US soldiers and settlers were killed. The conflict culminated in the so-called Battle of Bad Axe, on the eastern shore of the Mississippi River, near the present-day community of Victory in southwest Wisconsin. Better described as a massacre than a battle, this American military triumph involved US General Henry Atkinson killing every Indian who tried to run for cover or flee across the Mississippi River. On August 1, 1832, Black Hawk’s band reached the Mississippi at its confluence with the Bad Axe River. What followed was an atrocity, committed despite the Indians’ repeated attempts at surrender. “While the Sauk refugees were preparing rafts and canoes”, writes historian Kerry Trask, “the armed [US] steamboat *Warrior* arrived, whereupon Black Hawk tried to negotiate with its troops under a flag of truce. The Americans opened fire, killing twenty-three warriors”. “As we neared them”, one US officer

who “served” in the US assault recalled, “they raised a white flag and endeavored to decoy us, but we were a little too old for them”.

Hundreds of Sauk and Fox men, women, and children were shot, clubbed, and bayoneted to death. US soldiers scalped most of the dead. They cut long strips of flesh from dead and wounded Indians for use as razor strops. The slaughter was supported by cannon and rifle fire from the aptly named US *Warrior*, which picked off tribal members swimming for their lives. The USA suffered 5 dead and 19 wounded in the “Battle of Bad Axe”. In a popular account of the “battle” published two years later, US Major John Allen Wakefield offered some interesting reflections. “It was a horrid sight”, Wakefield wrote:

to witness little children, wounded and suffering the most excruciating pain, although they were of the savage enemy, and the common enemy of the country ... It was enough to make the heart of the most hardened being on earth to ache. [But, Wakefield wrote] ... I must confess, that it filled my heart with gratitude and joy, to think that I had been instrumental, with many others, in delivering my country of those merciless savages, and restoring those [invading white] people again to their peaceful homes and firesides.

“Our Great Father”, a government agent told the Sauk Indians, “will forbear no longer. He has tried to reclaim [Native Americans] and they grow worse. He is resolved to sweep them from the face of the earth .... If they cannot be made good, they must be killed”. By Wakefield’s account, the US troops at Bad Axe “shrank not from their duty. They all joined in the work of death for death it was. We were by this time fast getting rid of those demons in human shape ... the Ruler of the Universe, He who takes vengeance on the guilty, did not design those guilty wretches to escape His vengeance ...”<sup>17</sup> (Such sentiments were common among American army and militia members, who reveled in the mass murder of indigenous people.)

This was just one of many such genocidal moments in the rapacious white “settlement” of North America – the abject annihilation and ethnic cleansing of native people. This gruesome history is pock-marked with such horrid atrocities as the razing of 20 Cherokee towns in 1776, the forced removal of the Cherokee, Choctaw, and Seminole nations to Oklahoma (1828–1840), the

savage clearance of the Sauk nation from their ancestral home in northern Illinois (1832–1833), the massacre of at least 75 Pomo Indians trapped on an island in the Russian River area of California (1850), the mass hanging of 38 Lakotas in 1862, the brutal murder of as many as 200 Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians at Sand Creek, Colorado (1864), the slaughter of more than 100 Cheyenne, including women and children, by Lieutenant George Armstrong Custer’s Seventh US Cavalry at Washita (in Oklahoma in 1868), the openly extermination-ist clearance of Lakota Sioux from the Black Hills (1876–1877), and the Seventh Cavalry’s massacre of 350 unarmed Lakota at Wounded Knee (1890).<sup>18</sup>

The USA’s first and heralded president, the “father of the country”, George Washington was a determined butcherer of Native Americans known to the Iroquois as Conoctocaurious, meaning “Town Taker”, “Burner of Towns”, “Village Destroyer”, and “Town Destroyer”. In 1779, during the American War for Independence, Washington ordered and organized the Sullivan Campaign, which carried out the genocidal destruction of 40 Iroquois villages in New York. Along the way, Washington owned more than 300 Black slaves. He expected the Black chattel on his 1790s Mount Vernon estate to work from before sunrise to after sunset six days a week. At the end of the US “revolutionary” war, he demanded that the British return all escaped slaves in their possession to their “rightful owners”.<sup>19</sup>

### **“Teutonic Conquest”**

This genocidal history received hearty approval in future US President and Spanish-American War instigator Theodore Roosevelt’s epic six-volume white nationalist turn-of-the-century panoramic history *The Winning of the West*. Penned by a heralded symbol of “the American soul”, *The Winning of the West* was a white-supremacist paean to Anglo-America’s near-eradication of North America’s original civilizations. “During the past three centuries”, Roosevelt opined, “the spread of English-speaking people over the world’s waste spaces” (meaning spaces not occupied by “progressive”/capitalism-developing Caucasians) was a great and welcome “feat of power”, for which the “English-speaking race” could justly feel proud. No such noble act of “race power” was more laudable for the “Bull

Moose” than “the vast movement by which this continent [North America] was conquered and peopled” – the “crowning and greatest achievement of a series of mighty movements”. The Anglo-American pioneers conducted what Roosevelt called the virtuous civilizing “work” of “overcoming the original inhabitants”. The North American settlers performed the most heroic “work” of all, for they “confronted the most formidable savage foes ever encountered by colonists of European stock”.

No 20th century fascist had anything on Roosevelt’s *Winning of the West* when it came to the heralding of white supremacist violence. “The settler and pioneer”, the future war president wrote,

have at bottom had justice on their side; this great continent could not have been kept as *nothing but a game preserve for squalid savages* .... The most ultimately righteous of all wars is a war with savages, though it is apt to be also the most terrible and inhuman (emphasis added).

Roosevelt considered the destruction of the continent’s original civilizations to be part of Teutonic Saxons’ long and noble crusade to master inferior races. “Let the sentimentalist say what they will”, Roosevelt wrote, “the man who puts the soil to use must of right dispossess the man who does not”, with “put the soil to use” understood to mean enclosing the earthly commons, fencing it off as private property and exploiting natural resources and human labor power.

“American and Indian, Boer and Zulu, Cossack and Tartar, New Zealander and Maori, – in each case the victor”, *The Winning of the West* instructed, “horrible though many of his deeds are, has laid deep the foundations for the future greatness of a mighty people”.

“It is of incalculable importance”, Roosevelt opined,

that America, Australia, and Siberia should pass out of the hands of their red, black, and yellow aboriginal owners, and become the heritage of the dominant world races ... The world would have halted had it not been for the Teutonic conquests in alien lands; but the victories of Moslem over Christian have always proved a curse in the end. Nothing but sheer evil has come from the victories of Turk and Tartar.

Destroying the Indian “savages”, Roosevelt claimed, was white North America’s third greatest work to date, exceeded only by “the preservation of the Union itself and the emancipation of the blacks” – this as African-Americans suffered under the terrorist Jim Crow regime in the former US slave states and faced countless indignities throughout the USA.<sup>20</sup>

## ***Raping and Screaming Like Fiends***

The “winning of the West” also included savage racist and sexist war crimes against Mexico, which lost the land that makes up current day Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, Wyoming, and Utah to the USA in the one-sided 1846–1848 Mexican American War. Ulysses S. Grant would later call it “one of the most unjust [wars] ever won by a stronger against a weaker nation”.<sup>21</sup> He would have known a thing or two about that since he was an officer in the US- white-Protestant assault on brown-skinned and Catholic Mexico, which had committed the unpardonable sin of abolishing slavery years before. Here is Grandin’s account of just two of many atrocities that US-American soldiers committed during the conflict, long before the No Gun Ris,<sup>22</sup> Operation Tiger Forces,<sup>23</sup> My Lais, Bola Boluks,<sup>24</sup> and Abu Ghraibs<sup>25</sup> of future centuries:

On February 9, 1847, for one example, a member of the Arkansas volunteer regiment raped a Mexican woman near the regiment’s camp at Agua Nueva, in the state of Coahuila, and Mexicans retaliated by killing a U.S. soldier. Afterwards, over one hundred Arkansans cornered a group of war refugees in a cave. According to one eyewitness, the volunteers screamed “like fiends” as they raped and slaughtered their victims, with women and children “shrieking for mercy.” By the time the killing had ended, scores of Mexicans lay dead or dying on the cave floor, which was covered with clotted blood. Many of the dead had been scalped (more than a few volunteers in the U.S. Army had, before the war, made their living on the borderlands scalping Apaches for bounty money, or “barbering,” as one infamous Texas scalp-hunter called his trade.)<sup>26</sup>

The march of “Saxon civilization” in its glorious campaign against “savagery” was something to behold. Just more than six decades after the vanquishing and dismemberment of Mexico, murderous anti-Mexican US savagery broke out on now US-American soil. When the anti-US-imperialist 1911 Mexican Revolution brought refugees from the fighting into Texas, the Texas Rangers and “their sheriff adjuncts carried out ‘mass executions’”. As Grandin writes, “bodies of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans piled up, victims of a killing spree that was welcomed ... and instigated at the highest levels of society and government.” The Refusing to Forget Project reports that US political elites “proposed putting all those of Mexican descent into ‘concentration camps’ ... For a decade, people would come across skeletons in the south Texas brush, marked with execution-style bullet-holes in the backs of their skulls”.<sup>27</sup>

## **Because God: “The Sword of the Lord”**

Evangelical Christianity wedded to lethal American white nationalism? This, too, is nothing news. American evangelicals have been terrorizing their fellow Americans and others around the world for as long as the USA has existed – and indeed before that. The historically astute political sociologist Carl Boggs reminds us that contemporary American right-wing Christianity is “an extension of traditional, homespun, God-fearing Protestantism that historically intersected with racist, colonial, and exceptionalist currents of Manifest Destiny”. Further:

We know that slavery, along with every step toward extermination of Native Americans, was justified and even celebrated as part of God’s will. Did not President William McKinley, as the U.S. was preparing for a war in the Philippines that would slaughter hundreds of thousands of civilians, inform Americans that this was a Christian duty? ... Replete with images of great violence, hatred, and repression, [the Christians’ ancient holy text] the Bible in fact justifies all forms of mass murder, torture, warfare, and slavery. We have a text, ...that takes enormous gratification in the mass slaughter of humans and animals, with few limits. In the Bible we find executions for taking God’s name in vain,

death to practitioners of ‘idolatry,’ and horrific punishment for adulterers not to mention genocidal military attacks on heathen nations and culture. Such fundamentalist views, resonant of the Dark Ages, Michael Parenti *correctly likens to a modern fascist outlook* (emphasis added).<sup>28</sup>

Nearly two decades ago, the evangelical Christian George W. Bush, neo-fascistically turbo-charged by the Reichstag Fire-like gift of the Islamist 9/11 attacks, concluded that God had told him to invade Mesopotamia.<sup>29</sup> The invasion led to more than a million Iraqi deaths accompanied by countless explicitly racist and often evangelically infused acts of torture and murder committed by feral US military forces.

The use of messianic Christianity to justify murdering and maiming people of color *en-masse* goes back to the original British invasion of what would be called New England. The US Declaration of Independence’s description of North America’s original inhabitants as “merciless Indian savages” anticipated Orwell by projecting onto Native Americans the genocidal practices that white “settlers” exhibited from day one. Consider the historian Eric Foner’s textbook description of the grisly and religiously infused Mystic River Massacre of 1637:

A force of Connecticut and Massachusetts soldiers, augmented by Narraganset allies, surrounded the main Pequot fortified village at Mystic and set it ablaze, killing those who tried to escape. Over 500 men, women, and children lost their lives in the massacre. By the end of the war [of New England settlers on the once powerful Pequot tribe], most of the Pequots had been exterminated or sold into Caribbean slavery. The treaty that restored peace decreed that their name should be wiped out from the historical record ... The colonists’ ferocity shocked their Indian allies, who considered European military practices barbaric. A few Puritans agreed. “It was a fearful sight to see them frying in the fire,” the Pilgrim leaders William Bradford wrote of the raid on Mystic. But to most Puritans, including Bradford, the defeat of a “barbarous nation” by “the sword of the Lord” offered further proof that they were on a sacred mission and that Indians were unworthy of sharing New England with the visible saints of the church.<sup>30</sup>

The Puritans wept with joy and thanked “God” for helping them flame-broil Indian women and children who stood on ground they would turn into a heavenly “City on the Hill”. A glorious moment in the unfolding of the great democratic “Saxon” ideal<sup>31</sup> that American historians before Frederick Jackson Turner considered to be the distinctive genius of the USA and its British-colonist forbearers!

After a cruel campaign of ethnic cleansing (at the conclusion of “King Phillips’ War”) in which the white (un-) settlers pushed most of the last Indians they had not killed out of New England in the mid-1670s, “the image of Indians as bloodthirsty savages”, Foner writes, “became firmly entrenched in the New England mind”.<sup>32</sup>

“America” (the USA) was born lethal, merciless, and savage.

## **“Crimes Which Would Disgrace a Nation of Savages”**

Even worse than killing Native-Americans *en-masse* but also receiving “Christian” justification was the torture and exploitation of millions upon millions of African-Americans as slaves – the highly profitable and hidden secret to America’s rise to prominence in the world of capitalist nations by the mid-19th century.

## ***The Slave Origins of American Capitalism***

Contrary to the paligenetic-nationalist right’s refusal (seen in its obsessive opposition to the *New York Times*’ “1619 Project”) to acknowledge the central significance of Black oppression to the making of “great” America, historian Edward Baptist’s Bancroft Prize-winning 2014 study *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Rise of American Capitalism* challenges the standard national idea of North American chattel slavery as a quaint and archaic “pre-modern institution” that had little to do with the USA’s rise to wealth and power. In this historically whitewashed notion, slavery is seen as something “outside of US history”, even an antiquated “drag” on that history. This replicates a fundamental misunderstanding curiously shared by anti-slavery abolitionists and slavery advocates before the Civil War. While the two sides of the slavery debate differed on the system’s morality, they both



saw slavery as opposed to the industrial and profit requirements of modern capitalism.

Nothing, Baptist shows, could have been further from the truth. Unlike what many abolitionists thought, the savagery and torture perpetrated against slaves in the South was about much more than sadism and psychopathy on the part of slave traders, owners, and drivers. It was highly profitable. Slavery, Baptist demonstrates was an incredibly cost-efficient method for extracting surplus value from human beings, far superior in that regard to “free” (wage) labor in the onerous work of planting and harvesting cotton. It was an especially brutal form of capitalism, driven by ruthless yet economically “rational” torture along with a dehumanizing ideology of racism.

It wasn't just the South, home to the four wealthiest US states on the eve of the Civil War, where investors profited handsomely from the forced cotton labor of Black slaves. By the 1840s, Baptist shows, the “free labor North” had “built a complex industrialized economy on the backs of enslaved people and their highly profitable cotton labor”. Cotton picked by southern slaves provided the critical cheap raw material for early Northern industrialization and the formation of a new Northern wage-earning populace with money to purchase new and basic commodities. At the same time, the rapidly expanding slavery frontier itself provided a major market for early Northern manufactured goods: clothes, hats, cotton collection bags, axes, shoes, and much more. Numerous infant industries, technologies, and markets spun off from the textile-based industrial revolution in the North. Along the way, the mass shipment of cotton to England (the world's leading industrial power) and other European states produced fortunes for Northern merchants while innovative new financial instruments and methods were developed to provide capital for, and speculate on, the slavery-based cotton boom.

All told, Baptist calculates, by 1836 nearly half the nation's economic activity derived directly and indirectly from the roughly 1 million Black slaves (just 6 percent of the national population) who toiled on the nation's southern cotton frontier. Sectional differences aside, *The Half Has Never Been Told* shows that “the commodification and suffering and forced labor of African Americans is what made the United States powerful and rich” decades before the Civil War. Capitalist cotton slavery was how the USA *seized control of the lucrative world market for cotton*, the critical raw material for the Industrial Revolution, emerging thereby as a rich and

influential nation in the world capitalist system by the second third of the 19th century.

The returns were wrung through soul-numbing exploitation overlaid with savage racist torture. Chronicling the horrifying violence and terror inflicted on millions of Black Americans who suffered in bondage over the eight decades between US national independence (1783) and the US Civil War (1861–1865), Baptist documents how the southern slave engine of American capitalist accumulation murdered Blacks in huge numbers and “stole everything” from surviving slaves through “the massive and cruel engineering required to rip a million people from their homes, brutally drive them to new, disease-ridden places, and make them live in terror and hunger as they continually built and rebuilt a commodity-generating empire ...” Over a generation, *The Half Has Never Been Told* shows, the infant US South grew from a thin coastal belt of burnt-out tobacco plantations into a giant continental Empire of Cotton. This remarkable expansion was rooted in regular and ferocious white violence. The brutality and bloodshed included mass-murderous Indian Removal (cotton slavery required constant westward territorial extension), forced slave migrations, the endemic fracturing of slave families, and the ubiquitous and systematic torture of Black slaves. As Baptist observes:

In the sources that document the expansion of cotton production, you can find at one point or another almost every product sold in New Orleans stores converted into an instrument of torture [used on slaves]: carpenters’ tools, chains, cotton presses, hackles, handsaws, hoe handles, irons for branding livestock, nails, pokers, smoothing irons, singletrees, steelyards, tongs. *Every modern method of torture was used at one time or another*: sexual humiliation, mutilation, electric shocks, solitary confinement in ‘stress positions,’ burning, even waterboarding ... descriptions of runaways posted by enslavers were festooned with descriptions of scars, burns, mutilations, brands, and wounds (emphasis added).<sup>33</sup>

“What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July?” the great abolitionist Frederick Douglass asked in 1852. “A day”, Douglass answered, “that

reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim”. Further:

To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciations of tyrants, brass-fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade, and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy – a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices, more shocking and bloody, than are the people of these United States, at this very hour ... Go where you may, search where you will, roam through all the monarchies and despotisms of the old world, travel through South America, search out every abuse, and when you have found the last, lay your facts by the side of the everyday practices of this nation, and you will say with me, that, for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without a rival.

### ***Trump's Beloved Confederacy***

The slave state Confederacy (1861–1865) was formed, seceded from the USA, and waged a Civil War against the nation’s non-slave states – an epic struggle that cost more than half a million lives – precisely to defend and preserve “the gross injustice and cruelty” of Black chattel slavery.<sup>34</sup> The “cornerstone” of the southern secessionist government, Confederacy Vice President Alexander Stephens explained on March 21, 1861, was “the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man, that slavery subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal condition”.<sup>35</sup> The Nazi regime of the 1930s and 1940s also believed (to say the least) in the natural inferiority of certain subordinated races (as did late 20th-century right-wing US academics like Charles Murray, Richard Herrnstein, and Stephen Pinker).<sup>36</sup> Such was the harsh reality of the treasonous breakaway southern government whose “beautiful monuments and statues” Trump called “ours” (the USA)

and considered “part of a Great American Heritage” of “Winning, Victory, and Freedom”.<sup>37</sup>

## **The Long Shadow of Racial Fascism**

### ***Red Hot Iron Brands and Kerosene***

The torture of Black Americans did not end with the demise of formal chattel slavery during and after the US Civil War. Consider another among countless horrendous US racist atrocities that occurred on US soil long before Mussolini invented fascism and Hitler rose to power in the Old World. In 1893, a Black man falsely accused of molesting a white child was burned at the stake before 10,000 cheering white people in Paris, Texas. A New York reporter described the Hellish sight:

The negro was placed upon a carnival float in mockery of a king upon his throne, and, followed by an immense crowd, was escorted through the city so that all might see the ... inhuman monster ... Smith was placed upon a scaffold, six feet square and ten feet high, securely bound, within the view of all beholders. Here the victim was tortured for fifty minutes by red-hot iron brands thrust against his quivering body. Commencing at the feet the brands were placed against him inch by inch until they were thrust against the face. Then, being apparently dead, kerosene was poured upon him, cottonseed hulls placed beneath him and set on fire. In less time than it takes to relate it, the tortured man was wafted beyond the grave to another fire, hotter and more terrible than the one just experienced.

After this grisly spectacle, many crowd members took away pieces of “Smith’s” body as souvenirs.<sup>38</sup>

In November 1898, Grandin reports, “thousands of white men” in Wilmington, North Carolina, celebrated news of Lisbon’s surrender to Washington in the Spanish-American War by

stag[ing] a coup against the elected, multi-racial coalition governing [Wilmington]. The white mob, many of them veterans of the Cuban campaign [the U.S. seizure of Cuba from Spain] just returned from the war, killed between sixty and three hundred African Americans, ransacked African American businesses, and set fire to African American homes.<sup>39</sup>

Many such ghastly if usually smaller occurrences took place across the US South during the late 19th and 20th centuries – a time when images of Blacks who were lynched and/or burned to death before large and cheering white crowds were popular on American postcards. Between 1889 and 1918, 3,224 Americans were lynched within the USA, mostly in the South. Seventy-eight percent of these atrocity victims were black. In most cases the victims were hung or burned to death by mobs of soulful white “vigilantes”, commonly in front of thousands of gleeful spectators. The horrendous southern practice continued into the New Deal era. As historian Ira Katznelson notes:

This form of violence was ebbing by the early 1930s, but it hardly had disappeared. The United States witnessed 28 lynchings in 1933, the first year of the New Deal. In November, one year after FDR’s election, [the Black man] Lloyd Warner was burned alive before a cheering crowd of ten thousand in Princess Anne, Maryland, after the attempt to hang him had failed. [The Black man] David Gregory was lynched in Kountze, Texas, his body burned and genitals carved from his corpse. [The Black man] Cord Creek, of Columbia, Tennessee, was found hanging from a tree limb after a grand jury had refused to indict him for [allegedly] molesting an eleven-year-old white girl. [The Black man] Freddy Moore was killed in Assumption Parish, Louisiana, for the murder of a white girl (another man, who was white, later admitted to the killings) ... *This type of [so-called] justice was a significant feature of the South’s racial order during the early New Deal, much as it had been since the close of Reconstruction.* Lynching suggested both an ultimate commitment to white domination and the region’s fixation on Black sexuality [and] ... fears of racial mixing (emphasis added).<sup>40</sup>

The belatedly launched US war against the racist and fascist Axis powers (1941–1945) would not end the scourge of American-style racist fascism in the South. On February 12, 1946, just hours after being honorably discharged from the US Army, having served in the Pacific theater during World War II, the Black man Isaac Woodard was assaulted while still in his military uniform by South Carolina police as he was travelling home by bus. The attack left Woodard permanently blind. Thanks to South Carolina's refusal to indict Woodard's maimers, President Harry S. Truman ordered a federal investigation. The South Carolina sheriff was taken to a federal trial in South Carolina, only to be acquitted by an all-white jury.<sup>41</sup> Young Emmett Till, visiting southern relatives from Chicago, would be infamously murdered, tied to a cotton gin and thrown into a river, his killers exonerated by an all-white jury, on the charge of having whistled at a white woman in the Mississippi Delta in the summer of 1955.<sup>42</sup> Lynching continued in the South through 1968, the year in which Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed by a deranged white racist in Memphis, Tennessee.

### ***“Fascism Has Happened Before in America”***

Another example of lethal racist (and classist) Americanism took place in the rural Arkansas town of Elaine in the fall of 1919, when hundreds of Blacks were massacred after Black sharecroppers had tried to organize a union. The *Smithsonian Magazine* reports that:

Governor Charles Brough called for 500 soldiers came from nearby Camp Pike to, as the *Arkansas Democrat* reported on Oct 2, “round up” the “heavily armed negroes.” The troops were “under order to shoot to kill any negro who refused to surrender immediately.” They went well beyond that, banding together with local vigilantes and killing at least 200 African-Americans (estimates run much higher but there was never a full accounting). And the killing was indiscriminate – men, women and children unfortunate enough to be in the vicinity were slaughtered.<sup>43</sup>

These extra-legal and ritualistic executions enforced an American version of something very much like fascism. As Ezekiel Kweku and Jane Coastan

noted two months after Trump was inaugurated:

If full-throated fascism should rise in the United States, it will be an American fascism, animated by American concerns and with antecedents in American history. *Fascism has happened before in America ... For generations of black Americans, the United States between the end of Reconstruction, around 1876, and the triumphs of the civil rights movement in the early 1960s was a fascist state.* Local and federal governments enforced an authoritarian regime that curtailed the movements and advancement of black Americans, and black Americans only. America has been governed by the heavy hand of white nationalism before. The lessons learned by black Americans living under a restrictive and domineering regime a century ago are ones we can take now, too. *If we want to know what it looks like when the worst happens, we don't have to look to the old world; we have a rich history of horror in the new* (emphasis added).<sup>44</sup>

It wasn't just about the South. Mass-murderous white mob violence against Black Americans was inflicted against Blacks in numerous northern US cities and towns during and after World War One and well into the 20th century. Racial terrorism, discrimination, and apartheid were imposed on ghettoized Black northerners while hundreds of all-white northern and border state "Sundown Towns"<sup>45</sup> were formed and sustained with the threat and reality of racist violence in the late 19th and 20th Centuries.

### ***"In America, Negroes Do Not Have to be Told What Fascism Is"***

Contrary to Dylan Matthews and most of his "fascism experts'" overdrawn attachment to understanding fascism as "an analogy to a specific moment in European history", numerous American Black radicals have long understood fascism as quite American indeed, for good reasons. In a 2020 *Boston Review* essay titled "The Long Shadow of Racial Fascism", the cultural critic Alberto Toscano challenged readers to move "talk of [American] fascism" off the familiar track of "asking whether present phenomena are

analogous to those familiar from interwar European dictatorships”. Toscano reminds us that Black American radicals have long identified “a distinctly American” form of fascism understood as “a continuation of colonial dispossessions and slavery” and of “the overthrow of Reconstruction”, which “enacted a ‘racial fascism’ that long predated Hitlerism in its use of racial terror, conscription of poor whites, and manipulation of (to quote the famous definition of fascism by Georgi Dimitrov) ‘the most reactionary, most chauvinistic, and most imperialist sector of finance capital.’”<sup>46</sup>

“In America, Negroes do not have to be told what fascism is”, the Black poet and activist Langston Hughes told an audience in the 1930s. “We know”. This longtime US “racial fascism” hatched the bloody, noose-haunted Jim Crow South, the urban Black ghetto, Sundown Towns across America, and racial pogroms in East St. Louis (1917), Chicago (1919), and Tulsa, Oklahoma, where racist whites levelled the 35-block “Black Wall Street”, a thriving Black business district, killing hundreds in June of 1921.<sup>47</sup> It currently takes form in the globally unmatched US racist mass incarceration system, a critical arm of the counter- and anti-revolutionary white “law and order” response to the Black and brown “insurgencies of the 1960s and early 1970s”. As Toscano notes, Black radicals like George Jackson and Angela Davis reasonably saw American fascism not merely by comparison with past “European exemplars” but rather “from within a prison-judicial system that could [can] accurately be described as a racial state of terror”. This enduring American “racial fascism” has proven especially sinister and intractable because it has developed alongside, largely hidden within the sinews of outward “liberal democracy”. “For those [Americans] racially cast outside liberal democracy’s system of rights”, the anti-fascist scholars Bill Mullen and Christopher Vials write, “*the word ‘fascism’ does not always conjure up a distant and alien social order*”. The following reflection from the martyred Black Panther Jackson illustrates the point very well:

When I am being interviewed by a member of the old [Marxist Left] guard and point to the concrete and steel, the tiny electronic listening device concealed in the vent, the phalanx of goons peeping in at us, his barely functional plastic tape-recorder that cost him a week’s labor, and *point out that these are all manifestations of fascism*, he will



invariably attempt to refute me by *defining fascism simply as an economic geo-political affair where only one party is allowed to exist aboveground and no opposition political activity is allowed.*<sup>48</sup>

Jackson was killed (shot by a white prison guard) by American “racial fascism”, along with many other Black Panthers including Chicago’s charismatic Marxist revolutionary Fred Hampton (murdered in a straight-up fascist-style police state assassination conducted by Chicago and Cook County police in December of 1969),<sup>49</sup> during the racist presidency of Richard Nixon (which initiated the mass carceral “War on Drugs”). Jackson died just two weeks before New York governor Nelson Rockefeller ordered the bloody suppression of the Black-led September 1971 Attica prison rebellion<sup>50</sup> in upstate New York – an act of racist mass murder welcomed by president Nixon because, as Nixon explained to his staff, “you see it’s the Black business ... the whole thing was led by the Blacks”. After state troops and police dropped tear gas and fired 3,000 rounds, killing 39 people and wounding more than 80, conducting acts of torture and humiliation, Nixon hoped it would send a message to Black Power activists, who he described as “the Angela Davis crowd”.<sup>51</sup>

White “racial fascism” was nothing new to upstate New York when the infamous racist drug warrior Rockefeller warmed Nixon’s heart by butchering rebellious Black inmates in Attica. Four years after the conclusion of American’s “good war” against the fascist regimes of Germany, Italy, and Japan, the Black communist Paul Robeson confronted a frothing white fascist mob and fascist police not in the US South but in upstate New York. As literature professor Gustavus Stadler writes:

On the chaotic Sunday afternoon of September 4, 1949, truncheon-wielding police officers and stone-throwing rioters descended on cars belonging to the racially integrated audience of an outdoor performance by the singer and activist Paul Robeson. Minutes after relaxing on blankets listening to Let My People Go and other songs from Robeson’s well-known repertoire, drivers and passengers girded themselves as rioters screamed at them: “Dirty Jews!” “Lynch Robeson!” and “Go back to Russia!”

Some exited their cars to fight back; others were dragged from them and beaten. The violence left at least 150 audience members with broken bones, lacerations, bruises, black eyes and other injuries. That no one died was a marvel. Concert attendee Woody Guthrie, riding back to New York City on a bus filled with shards of shattered window glass, confessed to his seat neighbor, “This is the worst I’ve ever seen, and I’ve seen a lot.”

State troopers beat a man leaving Paul Robeson’s concert in Peekskill on September 4; troopers and police, who were supposed to protect concertgoers from anti-Robeson protesters, joined in attacking them instead.

Speaking at a news conference in Harlem the following day, a still-shaken Robeson indicted the violence, singling out the police in particular as “fascist storm troopers”. Of course, it was only four years since the end of World War II, what many of Robeson’s leftist colleagues called the “war against fascism” ... In a speech at Harvard University a few weeks after the riots, Robeson’s friend and associate William Patterson, head of the radical, Black-led Civil Rights Congress, affirmed this focus, insisting that “the men who rule us are bent on fascism. They brought about the anti-Negro and anti-Jew demonstrations at Peekskill just to see how the people would react to their big step to fascism.”<sup>52</sup>

We can be certain that many of those who terrorized Robeson, Blacks, leftists, and Jews in upstate New York in 1949 backed Wisconsin Senator Joe McCarthy’s proto-fascistic crusade against supposed Communist infiltration of American society and government during the 1950s and voted for the authoritarian racist Nixon in 1960, 1968, and 1972<sup>53</sup> Following the “southern strategy” of racist and white-nationalist reaction against the Civil Rights, Black Power, and antiwar movements of the 1960s,<sup>54</sup> Nixon launched the War on Drugs to criminalize Blacks and antiwar protesters. In a 1994 interview, Nixon’s top domestic policy chief, John Ehrlichman, admitted that the drug war was designed to criminalize Blacks and the New Left. In a 1994

interview, Mr. Ehrlichman said, “You want to know what this was really all about?” He continued:

The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had *two enemies: the antiwar left and Black people*. You understand what I’m saying? We knew we couldn’t make it illegal to be either against the war or Black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and Blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did.<sup>55</sup>

## **Crushing Labor and the Left**

As the assault on Robeson and Ehrlichman’s confession reminds us, past American proto-fascism hasn’t just been about race and ethnicity. The original European fascism was an organized assault on working class resistance and the Left. And European fascists could find much to draw models and inspiration from in that regard, too, from the USA, home to the bloodiest industrial relations in the capitalist world in the late 19th and early 20th centuries – and to a long history of violently repressing working-class activists and radicals. The grisly highlights include the execution of ten Irish-American “Molly Maguires” union militants at the behest of the Pennsylvania employer class on June 21, 1877 (the activists were hanged in two separate prisons surrounded by state militia with fixed bayonets) and the inhumane short-rope hanging of four leftist Eight Hour Day activists (the “Haymarket Martyrs”) at the behest of the Chicago bourgeoisie on November 11, 1887.<sup>56</sup> Just a month after ten Molly Maguires were murdered by the state as punishment for organizing coal miners and railroad workers, the one-sided “Battle of the Viaduct” took place on Halsted Street on the Near Southwest Side of Chicago. Federal troops called in from slaughtering Sioux Indians in the Dakota Territory joined local police and state militia in bloodily repressing striking workers. After the two-day “battle”, 30 working class Chicagoans lay dead; the federal troops experienced no fatalities.<sup>57</sup>

The Gilded Age slaughter of rebellious wage-earners came with a heavy dose of racialized dehumanization in the capitalist press. As the labor historian James Green noted in his classic study *Death in the Haymarket: A Story of Chicago, the First Labor Movement, and a Bombing That Divided America*:

Many [U.S.] editorialists relied [in 1886] on animal metaphors to describe the anarchists, whom they branded “ungrateful hyenas,” “incendiary vermin,” and “slavic wolves.” ... the alien incendiaries were often compared to other hated groups like the menacing Apache Indians. The *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* applied an old frontier adage about ‘savage’ tribes to the new menace. “There are no good anarchists except dead anarchists,” it proclaimed.<sup>58</sup>

As mostly white US workers rose against their ruthless exploitation under the rule of “wage slavery” in the rapidly expanding new industrial capitalism of the post-Civil War years, the capitalist press not uncommonly justified the bloody repression of striking and marching proletarians and the killing of their radical leaders by describing them as “white savages”, merged in shaded dehumanization with Native American “red savages” and ex-slave “Black savages”.<sup>59</sup>

Commenting from his ranch in the Dakota Territory during the left-led US Eight Hour strike wave of 1886, the future US president, war instigator, and celebratory chronicler of Native American ethnic cleansing Theodore Roosevelt reflected on how he would have liked to deploy his rugged frontier ranch hands against Chicago’s swarthy labor anarchists: “My men ... are hardworking laboring men who work longer hours for no greater wages than the strikers but they are Americans through and through ... *Nothing would give them greater pleasure than a chance with their rifles at one of these mobs*” (emphasis added). By Grandin’s account, Roosevelt’s eliminationist sentiments were shared by the western novelist Owen Wister, who applauded the deployment of “United States troops, just come from fighting Indians”, to murder radicals, described as “rats” who “*swarm over the body social*” (emphasis added).<sup>60</sup> It’s hard to imagine a more perfect

example of the Amerikaner mindset behind what Grandin calls “frontier fascism”.<sup>61</sup>

In April of 1914, one can learn from the undergraduate history student’s favorite source *Wikipedia*,

The Colorado National Guard and Colorado Fuel and Iron (CFI) Company guards attacked a tent colony of 1,200 striking coal miners and their families at Ludlow, Colorado, on April 20, 1914, with the National Guard using machine guns to fire into the colony. Approximately twenty-one people, including miners’ wives and children, were killed.

The ruthless massacre was ordered by the legendary American capitalist John D. Rockefeller, Jr., the chief owner of the CFI mine.

Three years later came the notorious “Bisbee Deportation”. Again one needs to look no further than *Wikipedia* for a useful introduction:

The Bisbee Deportation was the illegal kidnapping and deportation of about 1,300 striking mine workers, their supporters, and citizen bystanders by 2,000 members of a deputized posse, who arrested these people beginning on July 12, 1917. The action was orchestrated by Phelps Dodge, the major mining company in the area, which provided lists of workers and others who were to be arrested in Bisbee, Arizona, to the Cochise County sheriff, Harry C. Wheeler. These workers were arrested and held at a local baseball park before being loaded onto cattle cars and deported 200 miles (320 km) to Tres Hermanas in New Mexico. The 16-hour journey was through desert without food and with little water. Once unloaded, the deportees, most without money or transportation, were warned against returning to Bisbee ... As Phelps Dodge, in collusion with the sheriff, had closed down access to outside communications, it was some time before the story was reported .... no individual, company, or agency was ever convicted in connection with the deportations.

The end of the “Great War” (during which the eloquent US Socialist presidential candidate Eugene Debs was held in federal prison for the sin of opposing inter-imperialist slaughter) was followed by the nation’s “First Red

Scare”. A massive government and employer class crackdown on the Left included the capture and deportation of hundreds of suspected anarchists and communists, Otherized and demonized as subversive and alien anti-Americans.<sup>62</sup>

## **“Stabbed in the Back”**

A full accounting of lethal American historical racist and authoritarian savagery and white nationalism prior to the Trump years would include topics for which there is not space in the present volume: the recurrent application of the nation’s virulent white-nationalist, evangelical, and racist culture to US global imperialism from the Spanish American War and the suppression of the Philippines through the US “crucifixion of Southeast Asia”, the monumentally criminal, racist. and mass murderous US invasion and occupation of Iraq (sold to the US populace on the basis of blatant and repeated Big Lies that Goebbels would have appreciated), the disastrous US bombing of Libya, the assassination (or execution) of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (one year to the day after he came out against the US war on Vietnam and called the American Empire the “leading purveyor of violence in the world”), the racist post-WWII mayoral administrations of such fascist-like big city Democratic mayors as Chicago’s Richard J. Daley (who told his city’s police force to “shoot to kill” accused arsonists and “shoot to maim”<sup>63</sup> accused looters during the riots that followed King’s murder) and Philadelphia’s Frank Rizzo (who ordered the mass-murderous bombing of a Black radical group’s headquarters, destroying 61 homes, killing 11 people including 5 children in a Black ghetto neighborhood in May of 1985<sup>64</sup>), worldwide US sponsorship and support of Third World Fascist<sup>65</sup> regimes in the name of Cold War anti-communism, government repression of the Black Panthers and New Left, the launching of the racist War on Drugs and the emergence of a giant racist mass arrest, incarceration, supervision, and police and surveillance state and more.

Speaking of merciless racist savagery in a time still within the living memory of tens of millions of Americans, consider Grandin’s account of how the mass-murderer and war criminal William Calley (the commanding officer behind the infamous My Lai Massacre) became a political folk-hero to

Confederate flag-waving southerners while being embraced by Nixon during Tricky Dick's noxious re-election campaign. As Grandin writes:

The Confederate flag stopped flying as the pennant of reconciliation, the joining of the southern military tradition to northern establishment might to spread Americanism abroad [by the early 1970s]. It now was the banner of those who felt that the establishment had sacrificed that tradition, "stabbed it in the back." The battle flag became the banner not of a specific Lost Cause but of all of white supremacy's lost causes ... The working-class Floridian lieutenant William Calley, for instance, the only soldier convicted for taking part in the March 1968 My Lai Massacre [one of dozens if not hundreds of village massacres carried out by U.S. imperial troops in Vietnam – P.S.] became the representational bearer of this aggrieved standard. He was popular throughout the country, especially in the South; his supporters rallied under the Confederate Flag and Richard Nixon embraced Calley in his reelection campaign. As a result, the massacre of over five hundred Vietnamese civilians was transformed from a war crime into a cultural wedge issue, used to nationalize southern grievance and weaponize the wartime coarsening of sentiment for electoral advantage.

The nation's fascistic president Nixon had an interesting take on Calley's My Lai action: "Most people don't give a shit whether he killed them or not". Even worse was the commentary of Louisiana senator Allan Ellender, who said 'The villagers got what they deserved'.<sup>66</sup>

## **Two Regional Paranoid Post-/Anti-New Deal Republican Right Antecedents**

Trump seems less like the aberration that Biden claimed he was when he is examined alongside his often para-fascistic presidential and racist predecessors Nixon, Ronald Reagan (who, like Trump crossed into politics from visual entertainment and amusement culture, and who ran in 1980 on the slogan "Let's Make America Great Again"<sup>67</sup>), and the two George Bushes, and the paranoiac white nationalism of post-New Deal Republican

insurgencies in the past century, not to mention the “paranoid-style” Tea Party phenomenon<sup>68</sup> of 2009–2015. Two excellent historical monographs published the year before Trump’s election merit mention here. Historian Kathryn Olmsted’s study *Right Out of California: The 1930s and the Big Business Roots of Modern Conservatism* shows how California’s reigning agricultural *barons combined* violence, espionage, racism, nativism, and sexism and virulent anti-Communism into a toxic, fascist-like stew of hatred and untruth as they accused the New Deal, the Democrats, unions, and the left of trying to destroy the family, traditional gender roles, and whites’ ability and supposed right to dominate non-whites. This ugly and not un-Trumpy mix came to shape and inform the Republican Party’s world view and political strategy through the rise of Nixon, Reagan, and beyond.

In a similar vein and focusing on post-World War II Dallas, Texas, historian Edwin Miller’s expertly crafted volume *Nut Country: Right-Wing Dallas and the Birth of the Southern Strategy* shows how “anti-government” right-wing oilmen and other affluent white Texans created a conspiratorial and paranoid-style white nationalist Republican insurgency that mainstreamed formerly “extremist” right-wing narratives accusing presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson of being totalitarian “socialists” trying to ram “big government” and supposedly anti-white civil rights measures down the throat of the nation’s virtuous and hard-working white people. The new Dallas rightist Republicans of the late 1950s and early 1960s also helped set the historical stage for the present day neofascistic “Republican Gomorrah” that Max Blumenthal wrote about in the wake of Obama’s 2008–2009 ascendancy. They pioneered Nixon’s not-so-subtly racist “southern strategy” and epitomized what the renowned American historian Richard Hofstadter described as “the paranoid style” of far right (“pseudo-conservative”) Republican politics in the 1950s and early 1960s. “Paranoid” Republicans in the McCarthyite mode assaulted their fascistically merged liberal and radical Left opponents with “heated exaggeration, suspicion, and conspiratorial fantasy” combining, in Hofstadter’s words, racialized and “systematized delusions of [white middle- and upper-class] persecution” at the hands of liberals and leftists joined in the project of imposing a “one world socialistic government”. For Olmsted, Miller, Neiwert, and others who have carefully studied the intertwined



histories of the Republican Party and the radical right since the rise of the New Deal, Trump and Trumpism seem less than anomalous or aberrant and all too curiously familiar in American history.<sup>69</sup>

## **Coming to or from American History?**

Fascism can't happen here, in the "democratic" USA? American chattel slavery persisted for nine decades past the writing of the Declaration of Independence in "the land of the free" and was succeeded (after the defeat of Reconstruction) by the white-supremacist Jim Crow regime (an inspiration for the founders of the German Third Reich) in the US South. The genocidal racial and ethnic cleansing of the nation's original indigenous inhabitants continued in "liberal", "democratic", and constitutional America. Women, consigned to inferior and separate spheres of civil and domestic oppression, were not granted the elementary bourgeois-democratic right to vote in the USA until 1920. The bloody and racist seizure of the current Southwestern US, the lynching and massacre of untold thousands of Blacks and Mexican-Americans, the vicious racist seizure and suppression of the Philippines (replete with veteran US military Indian killers calling their new victims "injuns", "Apaches", and "niggers"<sup>70</sup>), and the whole mass-murderous and deeply racialized record of the American Empire from the Spanish American War to mass-extremist and atrocity-filled US wars on Korea, Vietnam, and Iraq and the post-9/11 US Global War "on" [and of] Terror were all carried out in the name of American "democracy" and "rule of law".<sup>71</sup> In a poignant memoir written one year before Trump's election, the former US Marine and antiwar activist Vince Emanuel recalled "the hundreds of prisoners we took captive and tortured in makeshift detention facilities staffed by teenagers from Tennessee, New York and Oregon" during the occupation of Iraq. By Emanuel's account:

I never had the misfortune of working in the detention facility, but I remember the stories. I vividly remember the marines telling me about punching, slapping, kicking, elbowing, kneeing and head-butting Iraqis. I remember the tales of sexual torture: forcing Iraqi men to perform sexual acts on each other while marines held knives against their testicles,

sometimes sodomizing them with batons. However, before those abominations could take place, those of us in infantry units had the pleasure of rounding up Iraqis during night raids, zip-tying their hands, black-bagging their heads and throwing them in the back of HUMVEEs and trucks while their wives and kids collapsed to their knees and wailed. Sometimes, we would pick them up during the day. Most of the time they wouldn't resist. Some of them would hold hands while marines would butt-stroke the prisoners in the face. Once they arrived at the detention facility, they would be held for days, weeks, and even months at a time. Their families were never notified. And when they were released, we would drive them from the FOB (Forward Operating Base) to the middle of the desert and release them several miles from their homes.

After we cut their zip-ties and took the black bags off their heads, several of our more deranged marines would fire rounds from their AR-15s into their air or ground, scaring the recently released captives. Always for laughs. Most Iraqis would run, still crying from their long ordeal at the detention facility, hoping some level of freedom awaited them on the outside. Who knows how long they survived. After all, no one cared ... Amazingly, the ability to dehumanize the Iraqi people reached a crescendo after the bullets and explosions concluded, as many marines spent their spare time taking pictures of the dead, often mutilating their corpses for fun or poking their bloated bodies with sticks for some cheap laughs. Because iPhones weren't available at the time, several marines came to Iraq with digital cameras. Those cameras contain an untold history of the war in Iraq, a history the West hopes the world forgets. That history and those cameras also contain footage of wanton massacres and numerous other war crimes, realities the Iraqis don't have the pleasure of forgetting. Unfortunately ... Innocent people were not only routinely rounded-up, tortured and imprisoned, they were also incinerated by the hundreds of thousands, some studies suggest by the millions.<sup>72</sup>

How lethal and fascist was that? Most of the many thousands if not tens of thousands of soldiers who perpetrated such crimes in Iraq live in the heavily

armed US now.

All of this and more terrible to contemplate happened here – and (on a monumentally and terrifying scale) under the USA’s “democratic” banner abroad.<sup>73</sup> America did not become a lethal society in fascism-fueling ways under Donald Trump, Barack Obama, or any other single president. It was born lethal and stayed that way across its long blood-soaked history.

“When fascism comes to America”, someone (possibly Huey Long) is supposed to have said or written in the 1930s, “it will be wrapped in the American flag and carrying a cross”. That is certainly true – every variant of national fascism bears the imprint of the specific nation in which it arises and that it seeks to “make great again” and the evangelical “Christian” imprint is especially strong in the US-American version. Still, it would have been better to say that “When American *develops and comes to its own breed of fascism*, it will be wrapped in the Star-Spangled Banner and carrying a cross”. Fascism won’t simply *come to America. It will emerge out of American history.*

No small part of that history, it is worth noting, includes the construction of an historically unmatched global empire requiring the development of tools and techniques of repression abroad that have inevitably blown back on what passes for democracy in the “homeland”.<sup>74</sup>

Yes, “it could happen here”, to paraphrase Sinclair Lewis eighty-seven years ago. But let us not turn away from how terrible and dangerous what has already happened here was, from what is happening now, or from the intimate connections between past, present, and potential future American authoritarian crimes. White-ruled North and United States of America was never great. To embrace a whitewashed, palingenetic-nationalist narrative on the British colonial and US-American past is to embrace a false and whitewashed American present and future. Those who can’t or won’t see the crimes of the past are unlikely to see and resist the crimes of the present and future. The authoritarian nationalist culture of selective amnesia fuels mass appeasement and indifference, deleting past transgressions and depriving us of positive lessons on how masses of people have united to fight and resist oppression, exploitation, division, tyranny, authoritarianism, class dictatorship, imperialism, and fascism at home and abroad.<sup>75</sup>

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## Chapter 7

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# De-Trumping America

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The Black revolution is much more than a struggle for the rights of Negroes. It is exposing evils that are rooted deeply in the whole structure of our society. It reveals systemic rather than superficial flaws and suggests that the radical reconstruction of society itself is the real issue to be faced.

–Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “A Testament of Hope,”  
1968.

The Trump administration did not rise, *prima facie*, like Venus on a half shell from the sea. Donald Trump is the result of a long process of political, cultural and social decay. He is a product of our failed democracy. The longer we perpetuate the fiction that we live in a functioning democracy, that Trump and the political mutations around him are somehow an aberrant deviation that can be vanquished in the next election, the more we will hurtle toward tyranny. The problem is not Trump. It is a political system, dominated by corporate power and the mandarins of the two major political parties, in which we don't count. We will wrest back political control by dismantling the

corporate state, and this means massive and sustained civil disobedience ... If we do not stand up we will enter a new dark age.

–Chris Hedges, “The Coming Collapse,” May 20, 2018<sup>1</sup>

## What Great Democracy?

During the Trump years, it was common to hear and read Democratic Party politicians and mainstream media commentators bemoan Trump and Russia’s assaults on “our great democracy”. Trump and the Russian government (which wanted Trump in the White House and did in fact try to put and keep him there) were and are authoritarian and did in fact collude<sup>2</sup> (with how much impact on the 2016 and 2020 elections is unknown), of course, but there was no grand American democracy to subvert. Accusing the Trump and/or the Kremlin of having torpedoed American democracy is like the present author – a five-foot nine inch gym rat who never made his high school basketball team – claiming that Russian basketball great Andrei Kirilenko ruined my chances of success in the National Basketball Association.<sup>3</sup> By historian Ronald Formisano’s rigorous account in his important book *American Oligarchy: The Permanence of the Political Class*, US politics and policy during and before the Obama years were under the control of a “permanent political class” – a “networked layer of high-income people” including Congressional representatives (half of whom were millionaires), elected officials, campaign funders, lobbyists, consultants, appointed bureaucrats, pollsters, television celebrity journalists, university presidents, and executives at well-funded nonprofit institutions. This “permanent political class”, Formisano warned, was taking the nation “beyond [mere] plutocracy” to “the hegemony of an aristocracy of inherited wealth”. It:

drives economic and political inequality not only with the policies it has constructed over the past four decades, such as federal and state tax systems rigged to favor corporations and the wealthy; it also increases inequality by its self-dealing, acquisitive behavior as it enables, emulates, and enmeshes itself with the wealthiest One Percent and .01

percent ... [It engages in] the direct creation of inequality by channeling the flow of income and wealth to elites [while] ... its self-aggrandizement creates a culture of corruption that infects the entire society and that induces many to abuse positions of power to emulate or rise into the One Percent ... [it] contributes to continuing high levels of poverty and disadvantage for millions that exceed almost all advanced nations.<sup>4</sup>

Formisano was one of many distinguished and relatively mainstream US-American thinkers who understood 21st-century America as an essentially oligarchic nation. As the leading liberal political scientists Benjamin Page and Marin Gilens showed in their expertly researched 2017 book *Democracy in America?*:

the best evidence indicates that the *wishes of ordinary Americans actually have had little or no impact on the making of federal government policy*. Wealthy individuals and organized interest groups – especially business corporations – have had much more political clout. When they are taken into account, it becomes apparent that *the general public has been virtually powerless ... The will of majorities is often thwarted by the affluent and the well-organized, who block popular policy proposals* and enact special favors for themselves ... Majorities of Americans favor ... programs to help provide jobs, increase wages, help the unemployed, provide universal medical insurance, ensure decent retirement pensions, and pay for such programs with progressive taxes. Most Americans also want to cut “corporate welfare.” Yet the wealthy, business groups, and structural gridlock have mostly blocked such new policies [and programs] (emphasis added).<sup>5</sup>

A perfect example of American oligarchy was the arch-regressive Republican tax bill signed by Trump in December of 2017 despite the measure’s public approval rating of 25 percent.<sup>6</sup> Predictably enough in a nation where the top tenth of the upper One Percent already possessed nearly as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent,<sup>7</sup> the tax law was opposed by three

in four US citizens. But so what? The oligarchy wanted a tax-cut the nation hated and could ill-afford. The measure passed.

Some political scientists argue that regular elections with competitive contests for citizens' votes are all that is required for a nation to be a democracy. This is badly mistaken. "Elections alone", Page and Gilens note, "do not guarantee democracy".<sup>8</sup> Majority US opinion is regularly *trumped* by a deadly complex of forces. The list of interrelated and mutually reinforcing culprits behind the defeat of majority sentiment in the US is extensive. It includes the campaign finance, candidate-selection, lobbying, and policy agenda-setting power of wealthy individuals, corporations, and interest groups; the special primary election influence of full-time party activists; the disproportionately affluent, white, and older composition of the active (voting) electorate; elite manipulation of voter turnout; the widespread dissemination of distracting, baffling, misleading, and false information; absurdly and explicitly unrepresentative political institutions like the Electoral College and the unelected Supreme Court; the over-representation of the predominantly white rural population in the US Senate and the badly gerrymandered US House and state legislative districts; the fragmentation of governmental authority; corporate ownership of the reigning media, which frames current events in accord with the wishes and world view of the nation's real owners.<sup>9</sup>

Yes, Americans vote, but mammon reigns nonetheless in the USA. American government policy largely enacts the will of the wealthy corporate and financial Few, not that of the many millions of ordinary working- and middle class voters who come out on a strictly time-staggered basis to "choose" their "leaders" from among the narrow spectrum of major party candidates who have been vetted in advance by politically engaged members of the ruling capitalist class.<sup>10</sup>

Thanks to the American oligarchy, the USA ranks at or near the bottom of the list of rich nations when it comes to key measures of social ill-health: economic inequality, intergenerational social immobility, racial inequality, racial segregation, infant mortality, poverty, child poverty, low life expectancy, violence, incarceration, depression, illiteracy, and environmental pollution, among other negative categories.<sup>11</sup>

It's a vicious circle. As Page and Gilens note, "When citizens are relatively equal [economically], politics has tended to fairly democratic. When a few individuals hold enormous amounts of wealth, democracy suffers".<sup>12</sup> Savage inequality and oligarchy are two sides of the same class-rule coin in New Gilded Age America, as in previous eras. As the US Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandies is supposed to have said or written in 1940, "We must make our choice. *We may have democracy, or we may have wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have*".<sup>13</sup>

## **On Democracy, Inequality, and Authenticity**

The meaning of all this in relation to the subject matter of this volume is not simply that claims of a great US-American democracy are false. A key point here is that a functioning democracy – cancelled by such extreme economic disparities and related institutional barriers as exist in the USA – is the antidote to fascism. And stark inequality is fertile soil for fascist movements and politicians. In *How Fascism Works*, Jason Stanley notes that one of political fascism's key taproots is the extreme concentration of wealth and income:

Ever since Plato and Aristotle wrote on the topic, political theorists have known that democracy cannot flourish on soil poisoned by inequality ... the resentments bred by such divisions are tempting targets for demagogues ... *Dramatic inequality poses a mortal danger to the shared reality required for a healthy liberal democracy* ... [such] inequality breeds delusions that mask reality, undermining the possibility of joint deliberation to solve society's divisions ... Under conditions of stark economic inequality, when the benefits of liberal education, and the exposure to diverse cultures and norms are available only to the wealthy few, liberal tolerance can be smoothly represented as elite privilege. *Stark economic inequality creates conditions richly conducive to fascist demagoguery*. It is a fantasy to think that liberal democratic norms can flourish under such conditions.<sup>14</sup>



Liberal politicians' claim to speak for popular and egalitarian ideals and programs is exposed as inauthentic and untrustworthy in a society and political order where democracy is negated by such harsh disparities in wealth and hence power as exist in the USA today. The political culture of pseudo-democratic duplicity and disingenuousness generated by the wealthy Few's domination creates space for fascist strongmen who "appear to be sincere" and thrillingly honest and plain-spoken by "standing for division and conflict without apology". Such dark actors, Stanley writes, "might openly side with Christians or Muslims over atheists, or native-born [white] Americans over immigrants, or whites over blacks ... They might openly and brazenly lie ... [and] *signal authenticity* by openly and explicitly rejecting what are presumed to be sacrosanct political values". They come off to many jaded voters as "a breath of fresh air in a political culture that seems dominated by real and imagined hypocrisy". Fascist politicians' open rejection of plutocratically discredited and devalued democratic values is taken by some as "political bravery, a signal of authenticity".<sup>15</sup> Extreme inequality is a critical part of how malevolent far-right authoritarians rise to power.

Though Stanley did not say so, an opening for such ascendancy in the USA has been provided in the 21st-century USA by neoliberal capitalism with no small help from the Democratic Party. The "dismal, dollar-drenched Democrats"<sup>16</sup> ritual claims to speak as the "party of the people" on behalf of the popular majority and democracy are repeatedly discredited and exposed as inauthentic by their underlying commitment to dominant capitalist and imperial hierarchies.

The corporate and imperial presidency of the "deeply conservative" Barack Obama<sup>17</sup> is a classic case in point, as I have demonstrated in two previous books,<sup>18</sup> and as I predicted in an earlier one.<sup>19</sup> Recall Obama's warning to the Economic Club of Chicago in December of 2017, discussed in Chapter 4: Americans must "tend to this garden of democracy" if they didn't want their country to "fall apart fairly quickly" like Nazi Germany in the 1930s.<sup>20</sup> Consider also Obama's statement five months earlier when he received a "Profiles in Courage" award from the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation in Boston. "We live", Obama said in his acceptance speech at the Kennedy Library, "in a time of great cynicism about our institutions ... It's a cynicism that's most corrosive when it comes to our system of self-

government, that clouds our history of jagged, sometimes tentative but ultimately forward progress, that impedes our children's ability to see in the noisy and often too trivial pursuits of politics the possibility of our democracy doing big things". Obama then inveighed against those in elected office who showed cowardice by serving the wealthy few instead of the common good. *"It actually doesn't take a lot of courage",* Obama observed, *"to aid those who are already powerful, already comfortable, already influential"*.<sup>21</sup>

These were disingenuous comments, not unlike Obama's public claim the day after Trump's election to believe that his successor would honor the nation's constitutional and "democratic" norms as president. Did Obama seriously expect his audiences and biographers to believe that he had "tended to" the supposed American "garden of democracy" and refused to assist and protect the "already powerful, already comfortable, [and] already influential" during his time in the White House? Beneath expertly crafted faux-progressive branding, overlaid with a thick dose of liberal identity politics, Obama rose to power in Washington with remarkable, record-setting financial backing from Wall Street and K Street election investors.<sup>22</sup> As Obama knew, cultivating popular self-rule, social justice, and environmental sanity was not the mission behind his campaign bankrollers' investment in his political career. He honored their backing across a militantly neoliberal "Citigroup presidency" that protected the financial elites who had crashed the economy (in 2007 and 2008) while coldly dismissing progressive calls for Single Payer Health insurance, massive federal housing assistance and mortgage relief, student debt abolition, a \$15 an hour federal minimum wage, and the re-empowerment of robust union organizing and collective bargaining.<sup>23</sup> No such bold and popular policy initiatives issued from the Obama White House, which opted instead to give the citizenry what William Greider memorably called "a blunt lesson about power, who has it and who doesn't". Americans, Greider wrote:

watched Washington rush to rescue the very financial interests that caused the [economic] catastrophe. They learned that government has plenty of money to spend when the right people want it. "Where's my bailout," became the rueful punch line at lunch counters and construction

sites nationwide. Then to deepen the insult, people watched as establishment forces re-launched their campaign for “entitlement reform” – a euphemism for whacking Social Security benefits, Medicare and Medicaid.<sup>24</sup>

The upward concentration of wealth and income continued unabated under Obama, who enlisted the Department of Homeland Security in the liquidation of the populist Occupy Wall Street movement,<sup>25</sup> to the point where Senator Sanders could accurately point out that the nation’s top thousandth had nearly as much wealth as the nation’s bottom 90 percent during his primary campaign against Hillary Clinton in 2016.

Obama’s “blunt lesson”, consistent with the equally Wall Street-friendly Bill Clinton presidency,<sup>26</sup> combined with the infamously uninspiring, vapid, curiously candidate-centered and policy-bereft, and corporately super-funded Hillary Clinton campaign<sup>27</sup> to depress Democratic voter turnout in 2016. It wasn’t that the “populist” Trump “stole” the Democrats’ progressive thunder and working- and lower-class base in 2016. It was that the Democrats shrank that base out of captivity to the rich and powerful. The corporate-imperial Democrats’ “progressive neoliberalism” (to use historian Nancy Fraser’s suggestive if oxymoronic phrase)<sup>28</sup> demobilized broad swaths of the multi-racial and multi-ethnic working- and lower-class electorate on whose turnout Democrats depend to overcome both Republicans’ anti-democratic advantages in the US electoral system (to be discussed in detail below) and the ubiquitous de-politicization, mass-consumerist infantilization, and atomized individuation<sup>29</sup> of much of the populace.

## **The Manipulative Essence of American Politics**

This reflected an ancient problem: the cancellation of political democracy by economic inequality. Like Bill Clinton in 1992, Obama had been forced to find a difficult balance between two contradictory imperatives: the need to garner enough popular votes to win and stay in office and the need to win financial and media backing from the nation’s corporate and financial masters, who do not support the progressive policies favored by most

Americans. The result of this difficult tightrope walk is rampant prevarication on the part of the political class, what Christopher Hitchens in 1999 called “the essence of American politics ... the manipulation of populism by elitism”. As Hitchens explained:

That elite is most successful which can claim the heartiest allegiance of the fickle crowd; can present itself as most “in touch” with popular concerns; can anticipate the tides and pulses of public opinion; can, in short, be the least apparently “elitist.” It’s no great distance from Huey Long’s robust cry of “Every man a king” to the insipid “inclusiveness” of [Bill Clinton’s slogan] “Putting People First,” but the smarter elite managers have learned in the interlude that solid, measurable pledges have to be distinguished by a “reserve” tag that earmarks them for the bankrollers and backers.<sup>30</sup>

The “reserve tag” that exposes the promises of Hope and Change (the keywords of both Bill Clinton’s 1992 campaign and Barack Obama’s 2008 campaign) as inauthentic creates administrations that serve and protect big capital and its global military Empire while claiming to represent ordinary citizens. Cynicism and political withdrawal are natural citizen responses to the recurrent betrayals.

The charismatic Democratic trapeze artists Bill Clinton and Barack Obama walked the wire well in 1992, 1996, 2008, and 2012. By the time their presidencies were concluded, however, the tightrope had loosened and new neoliberal wannabe Democratic acrobats – Al Gore in 2000 and Hillary Clinton in 2016 – were neither skilled nor bold enough to make up for the lost tension. The results were the disastrous presidencies of George W. Bush and Trump, both enabled by the Electoral College, an archaic and anti-democratic 18th-century electoral institution (placed in the Constitution to appease southern slaveowners<sup>31</sup>) that permits right-wing candidates to win the White House after losing the popular vote.

Joe Biden, a longtime corporate Democrat, showed as a presidential candidate that he understood Hitchens’s “reserve tag”. He promised elite Manhattan donors in 2019 that he would not “demonize” the rich and promised and that “no one’s standard of living will change, *nothing would*

*fundamentally change*”<sup>32</sup> when he became president – a noxious thing to be caught saying in a nation where (even before the upwardly distributive COVID-19 recession) the top thousandth had roughly the same net worth as the bottom 90 percent. A year before that, Biden proclaimed that he had “no empathy, give me a break”<sup>33</sup> for the plight of Millennials in the environmentally exterminist plutocracy he’d helped create over four decades of US-Senatorial service to the rich and powerful.<sup>34</sup> He suggested as a candidate that he’d veto Medicare for All – supported by 7 in 10 Americans<sup>35</sup> – if it came to his desk as president.<sup>36</sup>

As this book reached its conclusion in mid-May of 2021, Biden had shown little desire to substantively break the standard corporate-neoliberal mold of manipulative inauthenticity and become the progressive neo-New Deal president liberal commentators like Nick Kristof<sup>37</sup> and Jonathan Alter<sup>38</sup> imagined him to be. Working cautiously in the standard grooves of Democratic appeasement, Biden showed few signs of willingness to use his bully pulpit to enlist the populace in a serious confrontation with either the concentrated wealth and power that blocks majority-backed progressive policies or the neofascist forces that feed off that negation.<sup>39</sup>

## **Trump Rallies as Retired Military Brass Denounce the “Marxist” Biden**

It does not bode well. Trump and his acolytes have secured white-nationalist control over the Republican Party. Few of the GOP’s Congressional members seems likely to oppose a future Trumpist coup,<sup>40</sup> which would be aided by the voter suppression laws red states have passed under the pretext of Trump’s “election fraud” claims. Biden and his Attorney General Merrick Garland have shown no signs of wanting to act on the Philadelphia attorney Michael Coard’s reasonable admonition: Trump “is a monster who must be put in a cage”.<sup>41</sup> By all indications, as of this writing, Trump will escape federal prosecution<sup>42</sup> for his many crimes, including “pandemicide” and instigation of the January 6th Attack on the Capitol. Trump remains free to roam the land, planning to resume his noxious, fascist-style hate rallies in the

summer of 2021. According to one early May 2021 report, titled “Trump Rallies Set to Return Any Day Now”:

Red MAGA hats and [a] ticked off Trump will be making their way back to center stage.

There is plenty of evidence to suggest he will continue to claim the 2020 election was stolen. On Tuesday morning, Trump released a statement where he compared the 2020 election to that of a diamond heist: “If a thief robs a jewelry store of all of its diamonds (the 2020 Presidential Election), the diamonds must be returned. The Fake News media refuses to cover the greatest Election Fraud in the history of our Country. They have lost all credibility, but ultimately, they will have no choice!”<sup>43</sup>

In another ominous early May sign, 124 retired US generals and admirals including retired Vice Adm. John Poindexter of Iran-Contra infamy and retired Army Brig. Gen. Don Bolduc, who is running for the US Senate in New Hampshire, signed a fascistic open letter repeating Trump’s big election lies and preposterously accusing the Biden administration of moving that nation toward a “Marxist form of tyrannical government.” Released under the banner of a group called “Flag Officers 4 America”, the letter absurdly claimed that “under a Democrat Congress and the Current Administration, our Country has taken a hard left turn toward Socialism ... which must be countered now by electing congressional and presidential candidates who will always act to defend our Constitutional Republic.” Also signed by retired Army Lt. Gen. William Boykin, the letter warned against passage of the For the People Act, a liberal voting rights measure that the ex-generals and admirals ludicrously claimed would “destroy election fairness and allow Democrats to forever remain in power, violating our Constitution and ending our Representative Republic.” It was what Refuse Fascism activist Jay Becker called “a significant and troubling turn: a public letter, at this moment, beating the drum for a regrouping fascist movement”.<sup>44</sup>

## **Beyond Trumpenproletarian Tomfoolery**

What is to be done to de-Trump America and keep the specter of white-nationalist neofascism at bay in the USA – to ensure that the January 6th Capitol Riot is not, on the model of the German Nazis’ 1923 Beer Hall Putsch, a foretaste of more horrific fascist things to come? A standard progressive argument is that America needs to overcome the extreme economic inequality and insecurity that has been created over four-plus decades of neoliberal politics and policy, which reversed the short-lived downward distribution of American wealth and income – what the leading liberal economist and *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman and other economists have called “the Great Compression”<sup>45</sup> – that took place between the 1930s and the 1970s. From this perspective, the way to safeguard America against what Krugman was willing at least twice to call “fascism” is to reduce economic disparity and anxiety so as to lessen the material fear and insecurity that fuel white nationalism.

The solution to the authoritarian menace, then, is to reduce the class disparities and economic insecurities experienced by ordinary Americans. Such is the logic advanced by leading social-democratic progressives like Bernie Sanders and Noam Chomsky, who see the Trump base as comprised largely of economically aggrieved proletarians and semi-proletarian petit-bourgeois “victims of neoliberalism” to whom the Democrats should “reach out” with progressive policies amounting to a new and improved New Deal.<sup>46</sup>

There are four difficulties with this approach. First, while the agenda supported by progressive Democrats like Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez – a significantly increased minimum wage, the relegalization of union organizing, progressive taxation, green jobs, expanded public health insurance and more – is likely to attract votes from previously demobilized lower- and working-class Americans, the Trump base does not (as we saw in Chapter 5) fit the analysis. Hillary Clinton may have made a glaring political mistake when she called Trump’s backers racist and sexist “deplorables”, but she wasn’t entirely off-base. The relatively affluent, not particularly proletarian, and conventionally Republican Trump base and the neofascist movement that has fed off and fueled Trumpism have been driven first and foremost by revanchist white-supremacism and related, overlapping tendencies of male chauvinism, authoritarianism, “Christian”

fundamentalism, and palingenetic nationalism, *not economic anxiety*. Few among the Amerikaner Republican grassroots will be won over by progressives' call for a Green New Deal and Single Payer health insurance (or for that matter by Pete Buttigieg and Joe Biden's infrastructure programs).

Believing otherwise is simply magical thinking. The militantly hyper-partisan, paranoid-style, and pseudo-conservative right-wing Trump-Republican cohort hates "socialism". Inhabiting a chilling world of alternative facts, many Trumpeters certainly believe right-wing propaganda claiming that Biden, not just Sanders, is a "radical socialist" and that the neoliberal Kamala Harris is a "communist" – and of course that these are terrible, "anti-American" things to be. The Republican-neofascist noise machine portrays Democrats as "politically correct" atheist Marxists working to "weaken America" by handing it over to "criminal" Mexican and Muslim immigrants, indolent ghetto residents, urban gang members, and uppity feminist women ("troublemakers" in the words of an affluent exurban white Trumpeter I know), and gays who want to subject the nation to the rule of a mysterious globalist cabal of China-accommodating elites.

The notion that progressives can and should make positive contact with white-nationalist neofascists who are understood as downtrodden victims of neoliberal capitalism is deeply problematic. It's not just that trying to do so means wasting time, money, and energy on a largely futile enterprise based on an empirically false understanding of the Trumpist base. It's also that success in such an endeavor is contingent on an undesirable dilution of democratic and humanist principles since the Amerikaner cohort will not be won over without concessions to their white nationalism, sexism, irrationality, fundamentalism, and authoritarianism. Trumpenleftish "red-brown" fantasies of productive progressive collaboration with the eliminationist right – often linked to the wrongheaded notion that the Trump-Republican base is working-class – amount to collaboration with neofascism.

## **Plutocratic Minority Rule, Courtesy of Our Holy Founders**



Second, there's the problem of the right's drastic over-representation in the nation's archaic, democracy-trumping system of political representation – a legacy of the nation's slave origins.<sup>47</sup> Trump won the presidency with votes from just a quarter of the nation's adult population. Even at his ballot pinnacle in November 2020, Trump won votes from just 29 percent of the US adult population. The Trump-captive white-nationalist Republican Party holds 49 percent of the US House's 433 seats as of this writing (early May of 2021) even though its House candidates won votes from just 28 percent of the US adult population in 2020, up from 24.7 percent in 2016 (when a majority Republican House was elected). Democrats easily won more votes for the U.S Senate in 2016 and 2018 even as the party of Trump Republicans controlled the upper body of Congress (making removal impossible via impeachment) across the entire Trump administration.

Insofar as some Republicans must be “reached out” to for the non-fascist US major party (the Democrats) to win elections, this is largely because a vast swath of the US electorate is too alienated and indifferent to vote<sup>48</sup> and because *the archaic and distorting, right-leaning American electoral and representation system massively inflates the political voice of the nation's most reactionary and racist regions*. The Republicans have been able to win high elective offices while standing far to the right of US public opinion largely because they are *absurdly over-represented in American political institutions that openly violate the elementary democratic principle of one person, one vote*. Rampant partisan and right-leaning US House district gerrymandering, the granting of two US Senators to every state regardless of population size (which bloats the electoral voice of the nation's most right wing states), and the nation's archaic “winner-take-all” Electoral College presidential election system (which inflates the voting power of the nation's rightmost states and regions while working to concentrate “national” campaigning in a relatively small collection of “contested states”) mean that Democrats must significantly out-perform neofascist Republicans in popular turnout to prevail in Congress and the White House.<sup>49</sup>

The outsized and disproportionate voice of a reactionary minority has been exacerbated by the movement of much of the population residing in the *grotesquely over-represented* “red state” (more white, rural, and Republican) hinterland to the *badly under-represented* “blue” (more multi-

racial, multi-cultural, urban, and Democratic) coastal regions. The result is a frankly mind-bending violation of core democratic principles. As political scientists Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt observed in in *The New York Times* 11 days before the 2020 elections:

Democracy is supposed to be a game of numbers: The party with the most votes wins. In our political system, however, *the majority does not govern*. Constitutional design and recent political geographic trends – where Democrats and Republicans live – have unintentionally conspired to produce what is *effectively becoming minority rule*.

Our Constitution was designed to favor small (or low-population) states. Small states were given representation equal to that of big states in the Senate and an advantage in the Electoral College. What began as a minor small-state advantage evolved, over time, into *a vast overrepresentation of rural states*. For most of our history, this rural bias did not tilt the partisan playing field much because both major parties maintained huge urban and rural wings.

Today, however, American parties are starkly divided along urban-rural lines: Democrats are concentrated in big metropolitan centers, whereas Republicans are increasingly based in sparsely populated territories. This gives the Republicans an advantage in the Electoral College, the Senate and – because the president selects Supreme Court nominees and the Senate approves them – the Supreme Court.

Recent U.S. election results fly in the face of majority rule. Republicans have won the popular vote for president only once in the last 20 years and yet have controlled the presidency for 12 of those 20 years. Democrats easily won more overall votes for the U.S. Senate in 2016 and 2018, and yet the Republicans hold 53 of 100 seats. The 45 Democratic and two independent senators who caucus with them represent more people than the 53 Republicans.

*This is minority rule. An electoral majority may not be enough for the Democrats to win the presidency this year either ... if Joe Biden wins*

the popular vote by one to two points, there is an 80 percent chance that Mr. Trump wins the presidency again. If Mr. Biden wins by two to three points, Mr. Trump is still likely to win. Mr. Biden must win by six points or more to have a near lock on the presidency. Senate elections are similarly skewed. *For Democrats today, then, winning a majority of the vote is not enough.*<sup>50</sup>

There's more. Widely gerrymandered US House districts and de facto "rotten borough" red state US Senate seats that are essentially guaranteed in advance to the Republican Party mean that Republican candidates and office holders in and from those districts face little compulsion to moderate their message in primary and general elections. The relatively low voter turnout that characterizes intra-party primaries to select candidates for legislative and executive branch races further empowers zealous, hard right, and super-politicized neofascistic forces within the Republican Party – arch reactionaries Trump has been able to use as a whip against moderating forces inside what is now for all intents and purposes his party.<sup>51</sup>

To make things even more undemocratic, the chances of Democrats consistently winning the voter margins they require to gain and keep office is further and strongly reduced by two decisions from the nation's high court, which is appointed for life and granted practically God-like policy power under the US Constitution. The Supreme Court's *Buckley v. Valeo* (1976) and *Citizens United* (2010) rulings decree in combination that wealthy corporate and financial donors have an essentially unlimited campaign finance stranglehold on both of the nation's two electorally viable political organizations. Since big money "backers and bankrollers" do not back the progressive measures supported by most Americans, this *de facto* "wealth primary" combines with other forms of ruling class influence to ensure that the Democrats don't seriously advance the kinds of measures required to rally enough voters to consistently overcome the rightmost party's structural electoral advantages.<sup>52</sup>

It is long past time to update the constitutionally encoded and archaic and deeply conservative<sup>53</sup> structure of American elections, politics, and representation. In a time when the whole American party system has moved lethally far to the starboard side of the US populace, with one of the parties

having crossed now into neofascistic space – arguably the only space left to it<sup>54</sup> in the competitive two party system given the neoliberal-era Democratic Party’s 40-plus year shift to the corporate right – it is not just absurdly anti-democratic for the nation’s most reactionary, revanchist, rural and white states and regions to be so preposterously over-represented in US government. It is also profoundly dangerous for such a “constitutional” order to persist. The Electoral College (introduced to appease 18th-century slave-owners who feared underrepresentation in US presidential elections since their unfree labor force was disenfranchised<sup>55</sup>) is an undemocratic atrocity that should be replaced by a presidential electoral system based on the *elementary democratic principle of one person, one vote*. Equally hazardous and in need of abolition is the granting of two Senators to every state regardless of population size. The partisan gerrymandering of US House districts must be federally prohibited. So must the at once partisan and racist “New Jim Crow” voter suppression laws being advanced by the white nationalist party at the state and local levels across the country. Also requiring abolition is private campaign funding, which must be replaced by full publicly funded elections. Along the way, the racist, arch-reactionary “kill switch” Senate filibuster<sup>56</sup> must be swept into the dustbin of history. The US Supreme Court, loaded down with a supermajority of Republican-appointed justices far to the Christian white nationalist right of the populace – including two appointed by “the most dangerous criminal in human history” – must be expanded to dilute the absurdly exaggerated power of “the most dangerous political organization in the world”(Noam Chomsky’s accurate description of the Republican Party). To become an actual functioning democracy in which the progressive neo-New Deal reforms Sanders, Ocasio-Cortez, Chomsky, and other progressives favor could have their desired fascism-proofing and de-trumping/Trumping effect, the nation may need, among other things, a new Constitution, either through massive amendment (itself almost prohibitively impossible under Article V<sup>57</sup>) or actual replacement.

## **The Inauthentic Opposition Party of Hollow Resistance**

The third problem is the Weimar-like Democratic Party. It is a fatally flawed vehicle for the noble progressive agenda favored by Sanders, Ocasio-Cortez, Naomi Klein, Chomsky, and other progressives. In his 2008 book *Democracy Incorporated: Corporate-Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism*, published just half a year before Obama was elected, the Princeton philosopher Sheldon Wolin laid out what was to come. “Should Democrats somehow be elected”, Wolin prophesied, they would do nothing to “alter significantly the direction of society” or “substantially revers[e] the drift rightwards ... The timidity of a Democratic Party mesmerized by centrist precepts”, Wolin wrote, “points to the crucial fact that *for the poor, minorities, the working class and anti-corporatists there is no opposition party working on their behalf*” (emphasis added). The corporatist Democrats would work to “marginalize any possible threat to the corporate allies of the Republicans”.<sup>58</sup>

These were prescient words. Later that year, a nominal Democrat was elected president, and Democrats comprised the majorities of both houses of Congress. What followed under Obama (as under his Democratic presidential predecessor Bill Clinton) was the standard “elite” corporate and financial manipulation of campaign populism and identity politics in service to the reigning big-money funders and their global empire. The nation’s first Black president advanced Wall Street’s control of Washington and the related imperial agenda of the ‘Pentagon System’ more effectively than stiff and wealthy white Republicans like John McCain or Mitt Romney could have done. The reigning US system of corporate and imperial “inverted totalitarianism” (Wolin) received a deadly, fake-democratic rebranding.<sup>59</sup> The underlying “rightward drift” sharpened, fed by a widespread sense of popular abandonment and betrayal, which Republicans promptly exploited as the Democrats depressed and demobilized their own purported popular base.

Joe Biden and the congressional Democrats’ early COVID-relief and infrastructure bills helped elicit hope from progressives that the new party in tenuous power might be moving back closer to its pre-neoliberal New Deal legacy and bringing about real egalitarian change. This was wishful thinking. The removal of the noxious fascist and narcissist Trump from the White House is a great and welcome relief, of course. Biden has taken numerous welcome actions, including the reversal of many of Trump’s worst policies.

Still, the Biden administration has offered little more seriously progressive in policy terms than what has been minimally required by for the corporate system to stay afloat in the wake of the COVID-19 recession. Biden has largely honored his 2019 pledge to Manhattan donors (“nothing will fundamentally change”) by refusing to fight for any lasting institutional and policy changes to make the nation a functioning democracy instead of a corporate and financial oligarchy.

The Biden White House has undertaken no substantive frontal push to abolish the stark economic and related racial and ethnic inequalities that provide fertile, democracy-disabling soil for neofascist politics. As the Left historian and journalist Terry Thomas wrote in mid-May of 2021:

If Biden was really a progressive New Deal type, we would be talking about an updated Glass-Steagall Act (real regulation of the financial sector), a substantial wealth tax and heavily progressive income and corporate tax system, single-payer health insurance, and perhaps as important as anything here: the Protect the Right to Organize [unions] Act (which would serve as an updated Wagner Act). We are getting none of this, except a little mealy-mouthed rhetorical support on the PRO Act. Hell, he wouldn't fight to get a \$15 minimum wage through. And of course, Biden would be pushing the Green New Deal, a complete revamping of our energy system. All this stuff together could amount to an updated New Deal, but we are not going to get it. The fact is, Biden doesn't want that stuff. This infrastructure bill, like the stimulus package, is just a lot of government money being pumped into the private sector. There's no reform of the private sector itself at all.<sup>60</sup>

Biden and much of his party hid early on behind the arcane and dispensable institution of the “Senate parliamentarian” to back down from fighting for a serious increase in the federal minimum wage.<sup>61</sup> He refused to utilize his unilateral power to forgive a significant portion of the nation's crippling college student loan debt.<sup>62</sup> He has refused to take up political arms against the Senate filibuster, thereby dooming<sup>63</sup> critical and essentially liberal and progressive US-House-passed measures as the For the People Act and the Protect the Right to Organize Act. The former bill would dramatically

expand and protect voting rights and democratic representation in the USA. The latter legislation would essentially relegalize union organizing, helping spark a significant expansion of the badly battered American labor movement. Biden has made no effort to exercise his and his party's constitutional right to expand the size and thereby dilute the far right tilt of the US Supreme Court, signaling indifference to the high court's reactionary composition by appointing a blue-ribbon commission to "study the matter" – this as the Supreme Court seems primed to abolish women's right to an abortion.<sup>64</sup> Biden says and does nothing about the authoritarian, right-leaning absurdity of the Electoral College or the anti-democratic absurdity of US Senate apportionment. He doesn't even appoint a commission to study these anti-democratic outrages.

Along the way, Biden continued to talk pathetically about "reaching across the aisle" to an amoral, arch-partisan opposition party that continues to run firmly in neofascist Trumpist grooves. By early April of 2021, Republican legislators had introduced 361 bills to restrict voting rights in 47 states, with 55 voter suppression bills moving through the legislatures in 24 states.<sup>65</sup> These were clear Amerikaner-fascist efforts to quash non-white and urban votes in response to the Big "election fraud" Lie and a sense that white Americans are being endangered and "replaced" by non-whites due to demographic change.

Biden did little if any of what a genuine progressive would have done in the White House. But he and his party continued to talk about their desire to reach out in a spirit of bipartisanship – translation: appeasement – to a neofascist party that votes as a militantly partisan white-nationalist bloc against even the mildest reforms, even against the setting up of a militantly bipartisan commission meant to investigate the attempted fascist putsch of January 6, 2021. The Democrats even bent over backwards to make their proposed, filibuster-killed commission bipartisan,<sup>66</sup> remarkably enough given the fact that most Republicans in Congress voted against the certification of Biden's election just hours after the Capitol Riot. Around the same time the GOP killed the bid for an independent January 6th commission, Biden lamely hacked \$600 billion off his infrastructure bill<sup>67</sup> to placate the party that absurdly called his recovery and stimulus measures dangerously "socialist" and "Marxist".

Notwithstanding Biden's opening campaign commercial identifying Trump with the hateful racism of the Third Reich, Biden showed little inclination to undertake a serious federal crackdown on the ever more lethal and dangerously armed American far right (about which he says little if anything). Biden appeared pleased to let the pandemo-fascist, putsch-plotting crime-boss Trump evade federal indictment. He had yet to use his office to meaningfully confront the nation's continuing problem of racist police violence and murder, highlighted by a stunning report showing that US police had killed 32,542 people, 60 percent of them people of color, since 2000.<sup>68</sup> Or to confront the gun violence that has plagued the nation at an accelerating pace<sup>69</sup> since he took office and challenge the neofascistic National Rifle Association,<sup>70</sup> the powerful national gun lobby that has worked to saturate the nation with firearms in ways that help fuel both American fascism and police-statism.<sup>71</sup>

It was all very Weimar Germany-like to this author, consistent with Wolin's designation of the Democrats as "the inauthentic opposition". Even as it holds the White House and a slim Congressional majority, the Democratic Party remained in a posture of "hollow resistance" in a relation to both the other major party, now fascist, and the corporate and imperial system that fuels authoritarian menace on the right.

It was one and very defensible thing for progressives and leftists (including the present author) to advocate Lesser Evil voting in order to fire Trump and thereby cancel the potentially terminal nightmare of a second Trump term. The understandable idea here was to buy some "breathing space" – quite literally in light of Trump's fanning of a deadly respiratory pandemic – for the formulation of progressive and radical strategies going forward. The momentary cancellation occurred. It was no small heroic accomplishment, very much worth dancing about on the evening of November 7th 2020.

It is another thing altogether to see the longtime corporatist Biden and his capitalist and imperialist party as progressive agents ready, willing, and able to do what needs to be done to de-trump/-Trump and fascism-proof America. Nothing Biden and the Democrats have done since Trump's defeat led the present author to question the basic underlying wisdom of Chris Hedges' judgement in May of 2018:



The Democratic Party, which helped build our system of inverted totalitarianism, is once again held up by many on the left as the savior. Yet the party steadfastly refuses to address the social inequality that led to the election of Trump and the insurgency by Bernie Sanders ... It will not fight to pay workers a living wage. It will not defy the pharmaceutical and insurance industries to provide Medicare for all. It will not curb the voracious appetite of the military that is disemboweling the country and promoting the prosecution of futile and costly foreign wars. It will not restore our lost civil liberties, including the right to privacy, freedom from government surveillance, and due process. It will not get corporate and dark money out of politics. It will not demilitarize our police and reform a prison system that has 25 percent of the world's prisoners although the United States has only 5 percent of the world's population ... The leadership of the party, the Clintons, Nancy Pelosi, Chuck Schumer, Tom Perez, are creations of corporate America ... They would rather implode the entire system than give up their positions of privilege. And that, I fear, is what will happen. The idea that the Democratic Party is in any way a bulwark against despotism defies the last three decades of its political activity. It is the guarantor of despotism.<sup>72</sup>

## Democracy vs. Capitalism

Fourth, there's the difficult matter of capitalism. It is questionable how much difference it would truly make at the end of the historical day *even if Biden and his plutocratic, pretend people's party* were more substantively aligned with majority-backed progressive goals and determined to roll back the extreme inequality and oligarchic extremes imposed by neoliberalism. There can be no full and final defeat of the fascist menace without a lasting and functioning **democracy**, something that is *inherently impossible under fascism's great historical breeder* (never overthrown under even the most extreme forms of fascist rule) **capitalism**.

What do these boldfaced terms mean? Regarding “**democracy**”, I offer, critique, and supplement *Webster's Dictionary's* online definition:

1. a government by the people *especially*: rule of the majority
  - b a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections
2. a political unit that has a democratic government
3. *capitalized*: the principles and policies of the Democratic party in the USA from emancipation Republicanism to New Deal *Democracy*—C. M. Roberts
4. the common people especially when constituting the source of political authority
5. the absence of hereditary or arbitrary class distinctions or privileges<sup>73</sup>

For the definition used here, definitions 2, 4, and 5 stand without supplement or correction. Definition 1a stands with the following supplement, added in italics: *on the basis of two core principles: one person, one vote and equal political and policymaking influence for all persons regardless of class, race, gender or other distinctions and hierarchies.*

Definition 1b is only partially accepted here since political democracy is commonly diluted beyond serious meaning under representational systems permeated and polluted by class disparity and other oppression structures in the modern capitalist world.

Definition 3 is completely rejected here. The corporate-managed and imperial Democratic Party conduct and history related in this book has nothing to do with real popular sovereignty, that is democracy, based on majority rule and one person, one vote.

The militantly capitalist USA has never been a functioning democracy. The dominant American ideology has long claimed that capitalism is about democracy. It isn't – and one need not be an anti-capitalist “radical” to know better. *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary* defines **capitalism** as “the economic system in which all or most of the means of production and distribution ... are privately owned and operated for profit, originally under fully competitive conditions: it has been generally characterized by a tendency toward concentration of wealth and, [in] its latter phase, by the growth of great corporations, increased government controls, etc.” There's nothing about popular self-rule (democracy) in that definition. And there shouldn't be. “Democracy and capitalism have very different beliefs about

the proper distribution of power”, liberal economist Lester Thurow noted in the mid-1990s:

One [democracy] believes in a completely equal distribution of political power, ‘one man, one vote,’ while the other [capitalism] believes that it is the duty of the economically fit to drive the unfit out of business and into extinction .... To put it in its starkest form, capitalism is perfectly compatible with slavery. Democracy is not.<sup>74</sup>

Thurow might have added that capitalism is perfectly compatible with and generative of fascism, racism, nativism, sexism, militarism, and imperialism among other authoritarian and anti-democratic forces and formations. More than being merely compatible with slavery, moreover, US-American capitalism arose largely on the basis of the Black cotton slave system in the nation’s pre-Civil War South. This is demonstrated at length in historian Edward Baptist’s aforementioned study *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*, which is richly consistent with something Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. observed in 1967:

Again we have deluded ourselves into believing the myth that Capitalism grew and prospered out of the Protestant ethic of hard work and sacrifice. The fact is that capitalism was built on the exploitation and suffering of Black slaves and continues to thrive on the exploitation of the poor – both Black and white, both here and abroad.<sup>75</sup>

Louis Brandeis’s purported admonition that Americans must choose between democracy and “wealth concentrated in the hands of a few” was perhaps unintentionally anti-capitalist. Consistent with *Webster’s*, the historically astute French economist Thomas Piketty has shown that capitalism has always been inexorably pulled by its very nature towards the concentration of wealth (and hence power) into ever fewer hands relative to the total human population.<sup>76</sup>

Anyone who thinks capitalism is about democracy ought to take a working-class job and report back on how much they and their fellow workers’ opinions matter in the design and execution of their work, the compensation they receive, and the overall management and conduct of their

employers' firms. As Ocasio-Cortez once remarked, people living under the "irredeemable" system of capitalism "check [their] rights at the door when they cross the threshold into the workplace".<sup>77</sup> Karl Marx wrote brilliantly about the "hidden abode" and veiled "despotism" of the capitalist workplace, where employees perform typically narrow and alienating, life-shortening tasks conceived and devised with no higher purpose in mind than the upward transfer of wealth (surplus value) to the investor class.<sup>78</sup> There's no democracy on an Iowa Beef Processors killing floor or a Wal-Mart check-out line.

The tyranny continues well beyond the workplace. Workers who do or say anything their employers don't like off as well as on the job put their employment and the benefits associated with their hire – commonly including their health insurance and that of their families (no small matter) – at risk. The absurdly long working hours<sup>79</sup> tens of millions of US workers put in leaves them with little time or energy for substantive political knowledge or engagement.<sup>80</sup> And majority public opinion on numerous key issues has long been largely irrelevant, so close, under American capitalism.<sup>81</sup> Most US-Americans have long wanted the progressive and social-democratic agenda advanced by Senator Sanders and Representative Ocasio-Cortez: guaranteed free and quality health care for all; a drastically increased minimum wage; a significant reduction of the nation's extreme economic inequalities; free college tuition; the removal of private money from public elections; large-scale green jobs programs to provide decent employment and help avert environmental catastrophe; massive investment in public schools and housing, and more.<sup>82</sup> Most US-Americans would probably go beyond Sanders and agree to drastic reductions in the massive US Pentagon budget (which accounts for more than half of federal discretionary spending<sup>83</sup>) to help (along with increased taxes on the preposterously wealthy and under-taxed Few) pay for these and other good things. Most US-Americans certainly think public opinion ought to influence policy every day, not just on those occasional and brief, savagely time-staggered moments when "we the people" supposedly get meaningful egalitarian "input" by marking ballots filled with the names of major party candidates who have generally been preapproved by the nation's unelected dictatorship of money.<sup>84</sup>

But so what? The commoners don't call the shots under capitalism. They never have and they never will. Not under the bourgeois system of class rule. Universal suffrage was granted in the West only with the understanding that commoners' participation in "democratic" politics would not challenge the underlying persistence of capitalist ownership and political-economic dominance. As the great Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm wrote in the introduction to his magisterial volume, *The Age of Capital*, "the global triumph of capitalism" meant "the triumph of a society" based on "buying everything (including labor) in the cheapest market and selling the dearest". It was (and remains) a society where "participation in politics [on the part] of the common people" takes place only "within such limits as would guarantee the bourgeois social order and avoid the risk of its overthrow".<sup>85</sup>

For all the monumental changes that have occurred since the period about which Hobsbawm was writing, the years 1848 to 1875, we still live very much in an age of capital, not merely a neoliberal era. The underlying *de facto* class dictatorship of capital is maintained through elite corporate and financial sector control and manipulation of various power levers including but hardly limited to campaign contributions, lobbying, media ownership, and the investment and "job creation" function.<sup>86</sup> Reflecting on American state capitalism today, the left theoretician and political sociologist Carl Boggs puts things very well in chilling book *Fascism Old and New*:

The main [authoritarian] historical forces emphasized by [left analysts C. Wright Mills and Sheldon Wolin] ... have grown stronger in succeeding decades [since the United States' rise to global Superpower status during World War II], after having gained postwar (and Cold war) momentum. An integrated [U.S.] power structure has given rise to predictable outcomes: broadened corporate domination and oligopolistic markets, military-industrial complex, security-state and surveillance order, widening authoritarianism across all institutions, a money-saturated political system, propagandistic media – all bolstered within a framework of neoliberal globalization. Against this harshly undemocratic backdrop, *citizen participation, popular decision-making, and institutional accountability have been reduced to a shameful charade, the celebrations of American democracy ringing*

*more hollow with each passing year. All the prevailing, self-congratulating tropes – democracy, free markets, independent media, government hostility toward big business – appear today as outright fictions (emphasis added).*<sup>87</sup>

In the USA and Europe, the profits system's long-term tendency towards ever deepening inequality and oligarchy (following the historically anomalous reduction of inequality that followed in the wake of the Great Depression and the Second World War) has been brutally re-asserting itself for most of the last half century, fueling authoritarian politics in numerous countries. What is commonly called the Neoliberal Era is to no small extent capitalism reasserting its longtime and inherent tendencies towards inequality, insecurity, and authoritarianism.

In the USA, the “Great Compression”, the reduction in inequality and the rise of working- and middle-class living standards that took place for a generation during and World War II<sup>88</sup> occurred in the context of America's emergence as a globally and historically unmatched Superpower with a uniquely favored position in the world economy and imperial order. Core corporate, financial, and managerial-capitalist prerogatives and assets were never dislodged, consistent with New Deal champion Franklin Roosevelt's boast that he had “saved the profits system” from radical change. Those prerogatives and that ownership have reasserted themselves with brutal force in the neoliberal era. When the USA's remarkable position and profit rates were inevitably challenged and rolled back by resurgent Western European and Japanese economic competition in the 1970s and 1980s, egalitarian trends were naturally reversed by capitalist elites who had never lost their critical command of the nation's core economic and political institutions. They undertook a *Great U-Turn*<sup>89</sup> from the top down – a change of direction that was in essence US capitalism returning to its historical wealth- and power-concentrating norm. Middle- and working-class Americans have paid the price ever since, with presidential candidates inauthentically and impossibly claiming to bring back a post-WWII “golden age” that global capitalism cancelled long ago.<sup>90</sup> To no small extent, the mythical and global American frontier Greg Grandin speaks of closed nearly half a century ago with the re-emergence of global economic competition, something that

challenged the USA's ability to continue its longstanding "Great Evasion"<sup>91</sup> of its own internal class, ethnic, racial, gender, and cultural conflicts and contradictions.

Next came America's victory in the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the drastic rollback of the American labor movement and New Deal, and the expansion of anarchic global competition, all of which combined to end the bipartisan ruling class cohesion that might have kept the Republican Party from going into arch-polarized neofascist white-nationalist space.<sup>92</sup> The new right and the post-1960s Republican base and its revanchist capitalist bankrollers backlashed both against deep social changes (a continuing Black migration from the US South to largely jobless northern urban ghettos, the rising movement of women into the labor market, the sexual revolution, a major immigrant influx from Latin America and Asia, increased secularism and more) generated by capitalism and against related human rights, cultural, and social movements during and since the 1960s and 1970s: the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, new wave feminism, the New Left, immigrant and Chicano rights movements, the American Indian Movement, the Antiwar movement, the gay rights movement, and the environmental movement.<sup>93</sup>

The liberal and progressive Democrat Robert Reich deserves credit for being one of the relatively small number of liberal and left intellectuals with (as we have seen in Chapters 2 and 3) the intelligence and courage to substantively identify, describe, and denounce Trump and Trumpism as fascist. Sadly, however, Reich's noble rejection of the standard American-exceptionalist "it can't happen here" fascism-denial was preceded by his preposterous denial of the profit's system inherently inegalitarian and authoritarian opposition to the democracy and equality that is required to fascism-proof America and the world going forward. Few things could be more misguided than the title of his best-selling 2015 book *Saving Capitalism for the Many Not the Few*.<sup>94</sup> Capitalism is about the upward distribution of wealth and power along with the ruthless exploitation of human beings and Nature more broadly to feed the bottom lines of investors, combined with the chaotic competitions of capitals. It can only give rise to authoritarian, barbarian, fascist, and environmental ruin at the end of the

historical day. It must not be saved. It cannot and will not be made to work for the common good.

## **Or Barbarism (Fascism) If We're Lucky**

In truth, the ultimate menace posed by the underlying unelected class dictatorship of capital is *worse than fascism, strange as that sounds to say*. It's "[eco-] socialism or [mere] barbarism if we're lucky", as the Marxist Hungarian philosopher Istvan Meszaros noted twenty years ago.<sup>95</sup> With each passing and ongoing "anthropogenic" – actually *capitalogenic*<sup>96</sup> – environmental and epidemiological<sup>97</sup> calamity and development, none more ominous than global warming, it becomes more undeniably clear that chaotic, growth-(accumulation-)addicted, "expand-or-die" capitalism<sup>98</sup> is systemically hard-wired to destroy livable ecology<sup>99</sup> and to catabolically feed on its own destruction of a livable planet.<sup>100</sup> It is possible nowadays to hear American mainstream politicians and media figures relate extreme weather events and even migration-driving despair in Central America to *anthropogenic* climate change. That's good, but one will look far and wide for any such public figures who go beyond the narrow corporate-policed parameters of permissible debate to reasonably discuss *capitalogenic* climate destruction – the cooking and poisoning of the planet thanks to capitalism's relentless drive to appropriate, commodify, and exploit every resource under the sun. The operative force here is the systemic imperative of accumulation and "growth" to counter capital's self-inflicted tendency towards a declining rate of profit. It is only on the margins, outside the official boundaries, that you will find properly scientific, historical-materialist warnings against historically unspecific and class-blind uses of "anthros" that project the eco-cidal age of capital onto the broad 100,000-year swath of human activity. As the brilliant Marxist environmental geographer and historian Jason W. Moore told Sasha Lilley more than a decade ago, "It was *not humanity as whole* that created ... large-scale industry and the massive textile factories of Manchester in the 19th century or Detroit in the last century or Shenzhen today. It was *capital*".<sup>101</sup>



It is only during the relatively brief period of history when capitalism has ruled the world system (since 1600 or thereabouts by some academic calculations, earlier and later by others) that human social organization has developed the capacity and inner compulsion to transform Earth systems with durable profitability dependent upon on the rapacious enclosure and appropriation of what Moore and Raj Patel call “cheap nature”: cheap food, cheap energy, cheap raw materials and cheap human labor power or cheap human nature.<sup>102</sup> Curiously enough, it is in the aforementioned post-World War II “golden age” – the triumphant American years of Trump’s youth, when US economic power and middle-class expansion was at its historical peak – that capitalism’s power to alter global ecology in disastrous ways took hold. Earth scientists have determined that a massive quantitative acceleration of human economic activity including “an explosive growth of fossil fuel use” (James Hansen), creating a qualitative transformation in *homo sapiens*’ impact on key planetary indices (levels of carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, methane, stratospheric ozone, surface ocean temperature, ocean acidification, marine fish capture, coastal nitrogen, tropical forest depletion, land domestication, and terrestrial biosphere degradation) took off around 1950. This “Great Acceleration” was not so much a new stage as the actual onset of “the Anthropocene” – an era in which “human” activities decisively and destructively) altered systems and upended “the web of life”. The Industrial Revolution of the 19th century pales before the gigantic expansion of world economic activity and the related third technological revolution launched during the post-WWII “golden age” when it comes to altering Nature in ways that place prospects for a decent future at serious risk, raising the real specter of human extinction.<sup>103</sup>

This is a reminder to ecosocialists and to anyone concerned with saving livable ecology that the greatest threat to life on Earth isn’t just the neoliberal (“de-regulated”, so-called free market) capitalism of the last four-plus decades. The “golden age” and “thirty glorious years” of Western and US-led global capitalism that launched the current exterminist Anthropocene/Capitalocene boasted a dramatically expansive, high-growth, mass-consumerist US-directed profits system operating at its Keynesian and welfare-statist “best”.<sup>104</sup> It brought us to precisely where some of post-WWII America’s leading left environmentalists (Barry Commoner, Rachel Carson,

and Murray Boochkin) warned at the time: the precipice of full-blown ecological catastrophe.<sup>105</sup>

Not just in the USA, but across the entire planet, we will break the chains of capital and its ideological superstructure, or we will lose all chances for a decent future within no short order. Here the issue is not just keeping fascism and other variants of authoritarianism at bay but actual human survival. At the same time, it is important to remember that there is no chance of decent environmental policy under fascism and, moreover, that fascist “tribalism” can be expected to draw strength from the “catabolic” chaos<sup>106</sup> inflicted by capital’s environmentally exterminist essence.

### **“We are Not Out of the [Trump] Woods Yet”**

With that in mind, we must resist any denialist tendencies to dismiss the seriousness of the threat that the neofascists might return to power because the nation’s corporate and financial ruling class doesn’t want that to happen. Following the Attack on the Capitol, the nation’s leading left intellectual Chomsky spoke to *Truthout*’s C.J. Polychroniou of his “surprise” at the “the quick reaction” against Trump on the part “of those who own the country and have a large share of responsibility for the malaise that broke forth on January 6. In no small part”, Chomsky continued, the attack was “a consequence of the neoliberal assault since Reagan, amplified by his successors, that has devastated the rural areas that are the homes of many who stormed the Capitol. Those who hold the levers of the private power that dominates the society and political system never liked Trump’s behavior”, Chomsky elaborated, “which harmed the image they project as humanists dedicated to the common good. But they were willing to tolerate the vulgar performance as long as Trump and his accomplices delivered the goods, lining their pockets by robbing the public”.<sup>107</sup> With the Attack on the Capitol, however, Trump had, in Chomsky’s view, gone too far for the owners/rulers and thereby sparked real repudiation on the part of the nation’s wealth and power elite.

This might seem like a sound judgement, despite Chomsky’s mistaken identification of the January 6th marauders as impoverished rural victims of neoliberalism<sup>108</sup> and his seeming willingness to credit the nation’s financial

and corporate elite with distaste for Trump when that elite was willing to go public with their disgust for Trump *only after he instigated a violent assault on the nation's electoral process and Capitol – only 99 percent of the way through his fascist presidency.*<sup>109</sup> But how much do we really want to make about the fact that “those who own the country” turned (so late) against Trump, whose noxious rule they certainly would have accommodated had he won a second term – and who they certainly would have backed over and over against Bernie Sanders had the senator from Vermont won the Democratic nomination? Chomsky himself seemed less than impressed by the corporate repudiation:

*Polychroniou:* Do you believe that Trump is finished as a political figure? Or, to put the question slightly differently, was the Washington putsch of January 6, 2021, the beginning the end of the rise of Trumpism?

*Chomsky:* Far from it. Whether Trump will survive the error of judgment that turned major power centers against him is unclear. He may well do so. The voting base of the Party seems to remain loyal, maybe with even greater fervor... Local officials too. He was cheered on his visit to the Republican National Committee the day after the Capitol riot. He has other resources. Whatever the fate of the individual, Trumpism will not be so easily contained ... *We are not out of the woods, by far.*<sup>110</sup>

Indeed, as Chomsky might have added, Trump's dedicated army of small donors may be sufficient along with the vast eliminationist right-wing media machine and the right-wing electoral rigging underway in numerous states across the nation, to grant him or some other noxious white nationalist/neofascist the 2024 Republican nomination and presidential election regardless of who the nation's big money owners choose to back.

## **Breathing Room**

It is of course highly desirable for American political hypocrisy to decline and for democratic authenticity to increase, making politicians' "populism" less manipulative in the USA. Significant progress should be made in countering the nation's savage economic disparities and its related oligarchic practices if the nation doesn't wish to see the return to presidential and Congressional power of "the most dangerous political organization in the word" and even perhaps "the most dangerous criminal in human history" himself. There's nothing mysterious about the liberal and progressive policies required to put some meat on the withered bones of American "capitalist democracy": a major increase in the federal minimum wage; the relegalization and federal empowerment of union organizing; the significant rollback if not abolition of crippling student debt; seriously progressive taxation; giant green jobs and green infrastructure programs; a massive extension of federally subsidized health insurance and a full public health insurance option heading to Improved Medicare for All; the abolition of gerrymandering and racist voter suppression; the democratic reapportionment or better yet the abolition of the US Senate; the public financing of elections; the expansion of the Supreme Court; the new and intense regulation or better the nationalization of the nation's leading, super-empowered financial institutions; the diversion of money from the nation's massive Pentagon System to the meeting of vast human and environmental needs; the breakup of the nation's violence and fascism-fueling corporate media oligopoly; the banning of military-style assault weapons and other widespread means of mass murder in the USA; giant new investments in public health, housing, and schools.

Would this free us from authoritarian and fascist menace in coming years, decades, and centuries? No. Thanks to the constant churning and anarchic competition of capitals and upward distribution of wealth and power that lay at the heart of the capitalist mode of production and its political and ideological superstructure, American and global society as currently constructed lack the resources, cohesion, vision, and institutions required to enact lasting, and sustainable solutions to the social, political, and environmental dilemmas of our time. All the solutions are regularly attacked by capitalist rule, with its inherent democracy-disabling tendencies towards inequality, oligarchy, plutocracy, disease, empire, war, barbarism, authoritarianism, fascism, and, last but not at all least, ecocide. Only the

abolition and transcendence of capitalism and its replacement by a society that elevates people, livable ecology, equality, social justice, and the common good over private profit and class disparity can bring the egalitarian and democratic stability required to fascism-proof America and the world. The only way to historically extinguish the fire of fascism is to deprive it of the oxygen of pre-existing inequality and oppression, a feat that can only be accomplished by millions upon millions joining together to create a socialist and then communist nation, continent, and world.

The ultimate polarization that needs to be is not that between fascist and non-fascist political forces but rather the deep systemic polarization between the capitalist ruling class and the rest of humanity. As Refuse Fascism argued, the 2020 election was a *showdown over what form of class dictatorship would prevail in the USA in the next four years: fascist authoritarianism seeking to consolidate itself on the path to maximal power or bourgeois constitutional rule of law and “representative democracy”*. It was a good thing that the second form won out, thanks largely to the willingness of millions of non-white voters to brave steep voting barriers (including a deadly disease) to make their hard-won voting rights count. No, not because we will find the answers we need from the dismal-collar-drenched Democratic Party, or in the presidency of Joe “Nothing Would Fundamentally Change” Biden. The real reason Biden’s victory was a welcome development was that it gave citizens some breathing room by removing the figurative and literal pandemo-fascist boot from our neck. A second Trump term would have been an almost unimaginable nightmare, very possibly terminal for human survival, much less democracy. *There was a fascist in the White House for four years. That happened here.* His defeat gave us some time, time we must not waste, to formulate and organize around and fight not merely for reforms to roll back neoliberalism but for a revolution to end capitalism, whose ugly offspring includes the mutually reinforcing syndromes of neoliberalism and neofascism.

We know, or at least should know, which way Germany went when that failed national contender for world capitalist supremacy (beaten out by the USA as successor to England in the role of the world system’s hegemonic power<sup>111</sup>) ran out of breathing room in the first half of the last century. Humanity paid the price with 50 million killed before Nazi-led global

fascism was defeated. The stakes are even bigger – the very prospect of a decent organized human existence – today in an age of eco-extremist, fossil fuel-driven global warming and deadly nuclear proliferation. It's (eco-) "socialism or barbarism if we're lucky" now, as Istvan Meszaros pointed out twenty years ago.

## Two Paths

As the Golden Age of American capitalism was winding down, as environmentalists warned of impending ruin, and the racist and fascistic "law and order" presidency of Richard Nixon loomed on the horizon in the wake of two assassinations – that of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., on April 4, 1968 (one year to the day after he came out against the US war on Vietnam) and that of presidential candidate Robert Kennedy (who would likely have defeated Nixon) two months later – Dr. King reflected on how "the black revolution" was forcing America "to face all its interrelated flaws – racism, poverty, militarism, and materialism. It is exposing evils that are rooted deeply in the whole structure of our society. It reveals systemic rather than superficial flaws and suggests that the radical reconstruction of society itself is the real issue to be faced".<sup>112</sup> That was an elegant way of calling for revolution beyond what King called "the triple evils that are interrelated:" racism, capitalism, and imperialism.<sup>113</sup> The alternative, King felt, in the wake of two straight summers of racial bloodshed, was continuing violence and "a rightwing takeover and a fascist state that will destroy the soul of the nation".<sup>114</sup>

Listen to the warning more than half a century later from medical doctor and social science professor Joan Benach, the codirector of the Johns Hopkins – UPF Public Policy Center, and a professor of sociology in the Department of Political and Social Sciences at the Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona. Here is Dr. Benach's conclusion to a reflection on what she considers the capitalist origins of the COVID-19 crisis:

After the initial shock of the crisis will come the post-pandemic economic shock, and the political decisions to be made will be the "social laboratory" in which the future of humanity will be at stake. It

will be a time of growing fear and insecurity, *a perfect breeding ground for demagogues and neofascists*. In his important book *Auschwitz, Does the 21st Century Begin? Hitler as a Precursor*, the German writer Carl Amery wrote that the struggle for scarce resources on a finite earth was the key theme of this century, warning of a world in which a superior neofascist group would want to impose their way of life on an inferior group that would be enslaved. Therefore, one possible path is the authoritarian path of total population control: a militarized society that would be characterized by social control, repression, and racism. An authoritarian techno-digital society that would bring us closer to the surveillance and control implemented in China and other Asian countries. The other general direction that we must imagine, promote, and fight for is a much more democratic society that takes care of all forms of life. COVID-19 teaches us the importance of public health and equity, and how fundamental it is to create *an economy that is organized around human well-being, care of all life, and ecological stability, rather than the incessant accumulation of capital*. The most powerful groups and elites of the world will not relinquish their power or their privileges; they have never done so nor will they do so. It is truly moving to see the many cooperative and social initiatives being formed today. But when the acute pandemic passes, it will be essential to have built an organized and conscious civil society to deal with the ubiquitous, systemic crisis that will follow: the “chronic pandemic.” The collective struggle must be unitary, persistent, intelligent, and extremely determined.<sup>115</sup>

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28. The somewhat oxymoronic phrase belongs to the left historian Nancy Fraser. “In its U.S. form,” Fraser writes, “progressive neoliberalism is an alliance of mainstream currents of new social movements (feminism, anti-racism, multiculturalism, and LGBTQ rights), on the one side, and high-end ‘symbolic’ and service-based business sectors (Wall Street, Silicon Valley, and Hollywood), on the other. In this alliance, progressive forces are effectively joined with the forces of cognitive capitalism, especially financialization. However unwittingly, the former lend their charisma to the latter. *Ideals like diversity and empowerment, which could in principle serve different ends, now gloss policies that have devastated manufacturing and what were once middle-class lives ...* Progressive neoliberalism developed in the USA over the last three decades and was ratified with Bill Clinton’s election in 1992. Clinton was the principal engineer and standard-bearer of the ‘New Democrats,’ the U.S. equivalent of Tony Blair’s ‘New Labor.’ In place of the New Deal coalition of unionized manufacturing workers, African Americans, and the urban middle classes, he forged a new alliance of entrepreneurs, suburbanites, new social movements, and youth, all proclaiming their modern, progressive bona fides by embracing diversity, multiculturalism, and women’s rights. *Even as it endorsed such progressive notions, the Clinton administration courted Wall Street. Turning the economy over to Goldman Sachs, it deregulated the banking system and negotiated the free-trade agreements that accelerated deindustrialization.* What fell by the wayside was the Rust Belt – once the stronghold of New Deal social democracy, and now the region that delivered the electoral college to Donald Trump” (emphasis added). Nancy Fraser, “The End of Progressive Neoliberalism,” *Dissent*, January 2, 2017, [https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online\\_articles/progressive-neoliberalism-reactionary-populism-nancy-fraser](https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/progressive-neoliberalism-reactionary-populism-nancy-fraser)
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## Afterword: A Sleepwalking Interregnum?

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As I completed this book in early June of 2021, the profound sense of relief that came over many Americans after Trump’s removal seemed increasingly misplaced. The feeling of relaxation, of new breathing room, was understandable of course. The pandemic was in significant retreat as summer dawned, thanks in part to the Biden administration’s vaccination efforts. The

improved US health outlook combined with Biden and the Congressional Democrats' large opening stimulus package to spark some modest economic recovery and hiring expansion. Significantly vaccinated fans, diners, drinkers, and shopper returned to major league baseball, basketball, and hockey games, beaches, bars, restaurants, and shopping malls.

On April 20th, a multiracial jury had delivered a guilty verdict on all murder counts in the trial of Derek Chauvin, suggesting that the previous year's giant George Floyd Rebellion might have helped advance the fight against racist police violence.

Since January 20th, the White House, the news cycle, and social media were no longer regularly menaced and dominated by a malignantly narcissist neofascist hate machine who had turned the US presidency into a frightening embarrassment that led even fascism-deniers like Bruce Neuborne to liken the 45th US president to Hitler. Trump had stirred the white nationalist hate and anti-truth pot on a regular basis, creating no small traumatic stress for untold millions of American and world citizens.

It was nice to hear that Biden ordered the attempted reunification of families that Trump had sadistically separated at the southern border, that Biden was putting the US back in the global Paris Climate Accord, that Biden proclaimed an end to US support for Saudi Arabia's "offensive operations" against Yemen (the cause of one the world's worst humanitarian crises), and that Biden was reversing numerous noxious Trump executive actions.

There was news in late May that the Trump Organization and perhaps Trump himself were under criminal and not merely civil investigation by the New York Attorney General's office, which was collaborating with the federal Manhattan District's Attorney office in a joint inquiry into Trump's fraudulent actions and tax evasion.<sup>1</sup>

The Department of Justice was preparing cases against hundreds of the January 6th Capitol marauders, who tried to nullify a presidential election at the instigation of their demented fascist leader.

Trump and many of his far-right backers were still thankfully banned from leading Internet venues of so-called social media. And Trump seemed to have had little success breaking into television or online media by June of 2021.

I could write much more about how and why many of us felt relieved to be living in a post-Trump America between January 20th and June 2021.

Beneath the surface calm and sense of recharging and recovery, however, the land fared more ill than it seemed. Numerous related dark clouds, including the continuing specters of neofascist authoritarianism and Trump himself, still hung over the political and material landscape of America, promising new turbulence in the not-so distant future. According to many public health experts, the Center for Disease Control's May 13th relaxation of masking and social distancing regulations for vaccinated people was dangerously premature given the large number of unvaccinated Americans, the lack of any rigorous system for differentiating those had gotten their shots from those who hadn't, the refusal of a fourth of the population to get vaccinated, and the spread of new COVID-19 variants in a world where the virus was still spreading.<sup>2</sup>

More than 7,500 Americans died from gun violence during the first five months and three weeks of 2021, a 23 percent increase over the previous year. The USA experienced 232 mass shootings (shootings involving four or more victims other than the shooter) between January 1 and May 25, 2021.<sup>3</sup> Obviously a gigantic problem in and of itself, the nation's maddening and ongoing epidemic of globally unmatched domestic gun violence is a key justification for the nation's gigantic, highly militarized, and arguably fascistic police state. "Armed Madhouse" America's firearm saturation intensified during Trump's last year in office, with gun and ammunition purchases pushed to record levels by the chaos of COVID-19 and fear of racial and political violence.<sup>4</sup>

Speaking of the fascistic police state, police shootings of people continued unabated during the new Biden era, even during the Chauvin trial. "Sadly", the Statista Research Department reported in early June, six weeks after Chauvin was found guilty, "the trend of fatal police shootings in the United States seems only to be increasing, with a total of 371 civilians having been fatally shot, 71 of whom were Black, in the first five months of 2021".<sup>5</sup> Shockingly enough, a white police officer unnecessarily killed the young Black man Daunte Wright in Brooklyn Center, a Minneapolis suburb, during Chauvin's trial.

Even more horrifying, it was reported in late May by the Raza Database Project that US police had killed 32,542 people since 2000. Sixty percent of the victims were people of color, who make up just 40 percent of the US population<sup>6</sup> – stark empirical proof that Trump and his fellow white nationalists were wrong to claim that whites are just as victimized by police violence as non-whites.

The Chauvin trial and verdict was itself problematic. The media's daily coverage of the proceedings created the illusion of a government and society committed to social and racial justice and to the disciplining of racist gendarmes who go too far. Chauvin was reasonably seen by some social and racial justice advocates as a sacrificial lamb for the preservation of an insidious regime of racial oppression that rarely punishes its worst on-the-ground perpetrators. "Another deep problem here", the Chicago anti-fascist activist Jay Becker wrote the present author in late April,

*is that people who haven't followed other 'trials' of cops who kill (the few there have been) will think that Chauvin's prosecution is typical when it is anything but. The chief of police testifying against him? Prosecutors actually prosecuting? Nope, it's really quite unprecedented and evidence of the deep, deep fear that last summer's rising against white supremacy has instilled in all law enforcement and the powers that be at large.*

The danger here was that knowledge-starved Americans and whites especially would see the Chauvin trial was characteristic of how racist cops are usually treated when they kill and cripple Black and brown people. Nothing could be further from the truth, as was suggested by a New York grand jury's February 23rd decision not to indict white Rochester, New York police officers who asphyxiated the Black man Jonathan Prude to death in March of 2020.<sup>7</sup>

Speaking of racialized and authoritarian violence, the Biden administration refused to reconsider the \$4 billion in annual military assistance Washington grants to the terrorist apartheid state of Israel after Tel Aviv murdered at least 230 Palestinians, including more than 60 children, over ten days of one-sided war with the Islamist group Hamas in May. The

White House approved a \$735 million guided missile sale to Israel on May 17, in the very midst of the slaughter.<sup>8</sup> And it turned out that Biden's Yemen shift wasn't all that humanitarian after all. Under Biden's "new" policy, US Department of Defense contractors would continue providing Riyadh's military jets "defensive" support. This meant that the USA could keep enabling the savage Saudi bombing of Yemen and the blockade of Yemen's ports, reflecting the Biden administration's determination not to disturb its strategic petro-imperial partnership with the arch-reactionary Saudi regime.<sup>9</sup>

Closer to home, Biden's response to the continuing migration crisis at the southern US border was rightly called "a cruel joke" by the historian and activist Aviva Chomsky. The Biden border plan, Aviva Chomsky noted, focused on "enlisting Central American governments, in particular their militaries, to prevent migration through the use of repression" while advancing a "free market" neoliberal policy model that worsened the economic misery and violence compelling Central American families to flee northward in the first place. Enlisting the Mexican and Guatemalan militaries as *de facto* proxies for Trump's wall, Biden's approach promised to fuel migration and worsen Central American repression.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, the border crisis remained alive and well as juicy fodder for the nativistic white nationalist propaganda machine.

Also very much alive in the new Biden era was of course the ecological crisis, with the climate disaster in the lead, just the biggest issue of our or any time. As I finished this book, the Western United States were mired in an historic drought linked to the ongoing capitalogenic climate catastrophe while another record wildfire season beckoned in Western woodlands. As *The New York Times* reported on May 9th:

In California, wells are drying up, forcing some homeowners to drill new ones that are deeper and costlier. Lake Mead, on the border of Arizona and Nevada, is so drained of Colorado River water that the two states are facing the eventual possibility of cuts in their supply. And 1,200 miles away in North Dakota, ranchers are hauling water for livestock and giving them supplemental forage, because the heat and dryness is stunting spring growth on the rangelands...The most significant, and potentially deadly, effect of a drought that is as severe

and widespread as any seen in the West is the wildfires that are raging amid hot and dry conditions. And this is well before the full blast of summer's heat arrives. California, Arizona and New Mexico have each had two large blazes, unusual for this early in the year. None has been fully contained, including the Palisades Fire, which has burned 1,200 acres on the outskirts of Los Angeles. Officials are predicting when the fire season ends – if it ever does, as warming conditions have made fires possible year-round in some areas – the total could exceed last year's of 10.3 million acres.<sup>11</sup>

Biden's climate plan, while abandoning Trump's absurd anti-science denialism, was "orders of magnitude lower than where we need to be", observed the executive director of the pro-Green New Deal Sunrise Movement.<sup>12</sup>

Also dangerously alive and well five months after Trump's departure from the White House was the threat of homegrown Amerikaner fascism. Four months after the Attack on the Capitol, the moderate Republican *New York Times* columnist David Brooks published a column titled "The G.O.P. is Getting Even Worse". By Brooks' chilling account:

It's as if the Trump base felt some security when their man was at the top, and that's now gone. Maybe Trump was the restraining force. What's happening can only be called a venomous panic attack. Since the election, large swaths of the Trumpian right have decided America is facing a crisis like never before and they are the small army of warriors fighting with Alamo-level desperation to ensure the survival of the country as they conceive it.

The first important survey data to understand this moment is the one pollster Kristen Soltis Anderson discussed with my colleague Ezra Klein. When asked in late January if politics is more about "enacting good public policy" or "ensuring the survival of the country as we know it," 51 percent of Trump Republicans said survival; only 19 percent said policy.



The level of Republican pessimism is off the charts. A February Economist-YouGov poll asked Americans which statement is closest to their view: “It’s a big, beautiful world, mostly full of good people, and we must find a way to embrace each other and not allow ourselves to become isolated” or “Our lives are threatened by terrorists, criminals and illegal immigrants, and our priority should be to protect ourselves.”

Over 75 percent of Biden voters chose “a big, beautiful world.” Two-thirds of Trump voters chose “our lives are threatened.” This level of catastrophism, nearly despair, has fed into an amped-up warrior mentality. “The decent know that they must become ruthless. They must become the stuff of nightmares,” Jack Kerwick writes in the Trumpian magazine *American Greatness*. “The good man must spare not a moment to train, in both body and mind, to become the monster that he may need to become in order to slay the monsters that prey upon the vulnerable.”

With this view, the *Jan. 6 insurrection was not a shocking descent into lawlessness but practice for the war ahead*. A week after the siege, nearly a quarter of Republicans polled said violence can be acceptable to achieve political goals. William Saletan of *Slate* recently rounded up the evidence showing how many Republican politicians are now cheering the Jan. 6 crowd, voting against resolutions condemning them.

With their deep pessimism, the hyperpopulist wing of the G.O.P. seems to be crashing through the floor of philosophic liberalism into *an abyss of authoritarian impulsiveness*. Many of these folks are no longer even operating in the political realm. The G.O.P. response to the Biden agenda has been anemic because the base doesn’t care about mere legislation, just their own cultural standing (emphasis added).<sup>13</sup>

Five months after January 6th, the GOP still belonged to its malignant cult leader Trump. It expelled the right-wing Rep. Liz Cheney (R-WY) from the number three position in the House Republican caucus. Her sin: insufficient loyalty to the Fearless Leader.

Congressional Republicans opposed a bipartisan commission to investigate the putsch attempt, even after the Democrats bent over backwards to make the proposed body bipartisan and to limit its scope.

The malevolent monster in Mar a Lago will decide who his party runs for federal and even some state elections. His choices are all about allegiance to Him.

State election officials who certified Biden's victory have been replaced<sup>14</sup> by Trump loyalists in "red" (Republican-controlled) states. By early April of 2021, Republican legislators had introduced 361 bills to restrict voting rights in 47 states,<sup>15</sup> marking a 43 percent increase in just a month, with 55 voter suppression bills moving through the legislatures in 24 states.

These are clear neofascist white-nationalist efforts to quash non-white and urban votes in response to the Big "election fraud" Lie and a sense that white Americans are being endangered and "replaced" by non-whites due to demographic change. With support from demented white Amerikaners who cling to such beliefs, Republifascist state legislators across the country are advancing and passing droves of arch-reactionary bills meant to suppress Black and LatinX voting, criminalize liberal and left protest, undermine COVID-19 protections, and prevent educators from talking about racism<sup>16</sup> in American history past and present. But of course. As the left historian and journalist Terry Thomas wrote me last May, "Erasing history and creating a national mythology are key parts of the fascist playbook".

In a distressing mid-May 2021 reflection, *The Week's* Damon Linker noted that "The Threat of Civil War Didn't End with the Trump Presidency". Noting that "a significant chunk of the American electorate now resides in an alternative universe of facts about the nation's elections", Linker warned about an entirely plausible scenario for 2024–25 in which Trump or another authoritarian white-nationalist presidential candidate is able to seize power, negating Biden's popular and Electoral College win with help of Republican control of the US House and key contested state legislatures:

Let's assume for the sake of a thought experiment that the 2024 election pits Joe Biden against Trump or a Trumpist Republican, that Biden prevails in the popular vote by a healthy margin, that the Electoral

College is decided by three states controlled by Republican officials where Biden prevailed by just a couple of percentage points, and that the GOP controls a majority of the state delegations to the House of Representatives. In this scenario, the three key state legislatures, citing unsubstantiated stories of election fraud, refuse to certify the official slate of Democratic electors and appoint an alternative slate ready to vote for the Republican candidate...This would throw the Electoral College into chaos, requiring the House to assume responsibility for the final outcome. Republicans are favored to take control of the House in 2022, but already they control a majority of the state delegations. That will very likely still be true on Jan. 6, 2025. Which means that they could declare the Republican the victor even if Biden wins the popular vote and the Electoral College – though they would of course claim to be acting on the conviction that in reality Biden lost the key states and so also fell short of the required electoral votes...<sup>17</sup>

Such a soft coup, likely accompanied by significant hard repression (to squelch mass protests), would be welcomed by the Republican base, 80 percent of whom continues to hold a favorable view of Trump three months after the attempted putsch.<sup>18</sup> Much of this base is fascist. An American Enterprise Institute poll conducted after the Attack on the Capitol found that 56 percent of the nation's Republicans (more than 36.5 million Americans) backed the "the use of force to arrest the decline of the traditional American way of life." Four in ten (39 percent) explicitly embraced political violence "to protect the nation". Nearly two in three (66 percent) Republicans said that Biden's election win was not legitimate. Nearly three in 10 Republicans believed that the wild fascistic QAnon claim that Trump was fighting a global child sex trafficking ring was mostly (17 percent) or completely (12 percent) true. Just 30 percent of Republicans rejected this insane claim as inaccurate. Half of Republicans believed the fantastic and Orwellian claim that "antifa was responsible for the attack on the Capitol".<sup>19</sup>

Five months after the January 6th putsch attempt, a Yahoo News/YouGov poll found that well less than half of Republicans (41 percent) believed that Trump supporters bore "some" or "a great deal" of the blame for the Capitol Riot. Less than a quarter (23 percent) of Republicans blamed Trump for the

riot and more than half (52 percent) believed Trump was “not at all” to blame.

Even more counterfactually surreal was the finding that nearly three-fourths (73 percent) of Republicans placed “some” or “a great deal” of responsibility on “left-wing protesters trying to make Trump look bad” – this even though the FBI and even Republican House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy had repudiated the falsehood that leftist protesters were involved. Also stunning was the finding that most Republicans (52 percent) believed that the January 6th rioters were “primarily peaceful and law-abiding”.

Less than one in five (18 percent) Republicans thought Biden “won the election fair and square”; nearly two-thirds (64 percent) believed the election was “rigged and stolen from Trump”. Nearly three-fourths (72 percent) thought there was enough “election fraud” in 2020 to “influence the outcome”. Widespread acceptance of the Fearless Leader Trump’s Big fascist Lie of a stolen election was no doubt part of why 43 percent of Republicans felt the bloody siege of the Capital was actually or possibly “justified”.<sup>20</sup>

Such chilling polling data was reminiscent of candidate Trump’s famous claim that his backers would stand behind even if he “went out on Fifth Avenue and shot somebody”. And it was part of why the Congressional Republicans had the chutzpah to vote down the proposed January 6th commission even after Congressional Democrats had bent over backwards to make the proposed body bipartisan and to limit its scope.<sup>21</sup>

That’s the Amerikaner GOP after Trump’s presidency, a real threat to carry out a more successful coup attempt in 2024–25 or, if Biden (or his Democratic successor) somehow wins the next election, in 2028–29, when presidential term limits mean that the Democrats would no longer enjoy the levers of executive branch incumbency.

And what did the Democrats, the “inauthentic opposition” party, propose to do about the authoritarian menace? Shockingly little, all things considered. It wasn’t for a lack of officially stated existential dread. In his first address to Congress last April, Biden said that the United States had recently undergone “The worst attack on our democracy since the Civil War”. He linked the January 6th Attack on the Capitol to the Republican campaign to delegitimize the 2020 election and a wider crisis of democracy. Senate

Majority Leader Chuck Schumer argued in March that the state-level voter restriction laws being passed by numerous red states in the wake of Biden's inauguration "smack of Jim Crow rearing its ugly head once again...If we don't stop these vicious and often racist actions", Schumer said, "*Third World autocracy* will be on its way"<sup>22</sup> – a curious way to describe the threat posed by First World neofascism in the world's most powerful country. In late May, Schumer cited a "concerted, nationwide effort to limit the rights of citizens to vote"<sup>23</sup> and even Tweeted that the Republican-controlled state legislatures were trying to "*create a dictatorship* in America".<sup>24</sup>

Schumer's warning was on point. Hundreds of racist and partisan voter restriction bills were working their way through state legislatures, obtaining passage in numerous Republican-controlled states, as I completed this book. "States have already enacted more than 20 laws this year that will make it harder for Americans to vote – and many legislatures are still in session", the Brennan Center for Justice reported at the end of May 2021.<sup>25</sup> A measure moving forward in ultra-red Arizona would give the state legislature the authority to override the popular presidential vote and block the certification of future presidential-election results by simple majority vote<sup>26</sup> – a stunningly authoritarian aspiration. White nationalist Amerikaner Republicans are clearly determined to use every weapon at their disposal to roll back non-white voting rights and thus Democratic Party electoral strength. A highly organized right-wing and white-supremacist campaign is underway to neuter what's left of electoral democracy in the US.

The Democratic Party legislation advanced by Schumer and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi with support from Biden and Congressional Democrats in Congress would meaningfully counter this neofascistic campaign. The John Lewis Voting Rights Act and the For the People Act (H.R.1) include automatic national voter registration, independent redistricting commissions to block the gerrymandering of House seats, enhanced mail-in voting, and policies to lessen the campaign finance power of the wealthy Few. Both measures enjoyed firm majority support. And yet neither was likely to pass, even with the Democrats in possession of majorities in both houses of Congress along and the White House.

What is to be done? The "dismal Dems" had no real answers as spring turned to summer in 2021. As Luke Savage noted in a mid-May *Atlantic*

essay titled “If Democracy is Dying, Why are Democrats so Complacent?”, the Democrats seemed unwilling to roll up their sleeves and match their rhetoric of existential menace with urgently required policy action. Savage blamed this on a combination of self-interested investment in gerrymandering, fear of progressive small donors, misplaced faith in bipartisanship, and a pathetic refusal to challenge the Senate’s arcane, authoritarian and racist filibuster rule:

Rhetoric about autocracy notwithstanding, some liberal lawmakers are quietly threatened by aspects of the legislation. A few Black representatives in the South, for example, worry that independent redistricting commissions may cost them their seats. And some establishment figures reportedly fear that more democratically structured contribution rules will embolden left-wing primary challengers propelled by small donations. Senator Joe Manchin, meanwhile, has reiterated his opposition to H.R. 1 on the deeply spurious grounds that any prospective voting-rights legislation ought to pass with bipartisan support – a DOA line of reasoning even when it comes to the watered-down version of the John Lewis Voting Rights Act that Manchin himself is proposing.

The single greatest obstacle, though, has to do with the rules governing the Senate, and *whether Democrats are ultimately willing to match their language of urgency with a strategy even remotely proportional to it*. Due to the chamber’s filibuster rules, most legislation requires 60 votes to pass – an impediment that effectively empowers lawmakers representing only a tiny sliver of the electorate to block policies they dislike at will, including those designed to make American democracy fairer and more inclusive. (Especially frustrating, as the voting-rights expert Ari Berman has pointed out, is that Republican-controlled legislatures face no such supermajority requirement when passing legislation designed to restrict the vote – a kind of “asymmetric warfare” in which those working to preserve minority rule have a majoritarian advantage.)

Although Biden has mused about the idea of reforming the filibuster, he has ruled out its elimination. Manchin, predictably enough, is resoundingly allergic to the idea of change, while his fellow conservative Democrat Kyrsten Sinema ironically stated her emphatic support for H.R. 1 within days of dismissing filibuster reform in an interview with *The Wall Street Journal*.

“What”, Savage asked, “is more important: the death of democracy, or the preservation of a Senate tradition that has been leveraged for decades to protect conservative minority rule?”<sup>27</sup>

Savage might also have brought up the crucial need for Supreme Court expansion, which Biden kicked down the road with a blue-ribbon commission (a standard ruling class evasion) to “study the matter”. Never mind that the high court seems very possibly poised to undo women’s right to abortion, already well under attack in red state America. Savage could also have noted that numerous other reform measures linked to the common good, not just the voting rights bills but also the PRO-Act (which would essentially re-legalize union organizing in the US) and more, were doomed by Congressional captivity to the minority rule practices of the US Senate and the right wing’s control of the Supreme Court. And he might also have included in his analysis the Biden Justice Department’s apparent unwillingness to prosecute Trump for any of his numerous crimes against humanity, democracy, and the general welfare.

The specter of Republican neofascist authoritarianism hung heavily over the land as the Trump-captive Republicans in late May used the reactionary filibuster to block the setting up of an independent commission to investigate the Capitol Riot. Asked by *VOX* reporter Sean Illing how concerned he was about the fate of the US “democracy” in light of the Republican’s authoritarian direction and the Democrats’ apparent unwillingness to counter the GOP’s antidemocratic action with forthright moves like the abolition of the reactionary filibuster in late May, political scientist David Faris said that he was thinking about other nations to live in after 2024 since the Republicans seemed determined to douse the last embers of electoral democracy and the Democrats seemed unable or unwilling to protect popular governance:

My current level of concern is *exploring countries to move to* after 2024. I'm deeply concerned about the direction that the Republican Party has taken, especially over the last year or so...Trump on his way out the door...took the Republicans' waning commitment to democracy and...weaponized it, and he made it much worse to the point where I think that a good deal of rank-and-file Republican voters simply don't believe that Democrats can win a legitimate election. And if Democrats do win an election, it has to be fraudulent.

So 2020 felt like a test run. The plot to overturn the 2020 election never had a real chance of working without some external intervention like a military coup or something like that, which I never thought was particularly likely. But the institutional path that they pursued to steal the election failed because they didn't control Congress and they didn't control the right governorships in the right places.

I worry complacency has set in on the Democratic side and people are lulled into thinking things are normal and fine just because Biden's approval ratings are good.

The structural problems are even worse than I anticipated. I also didn't fully anticipate the unapologetically authoritarian turn in Republican politics. But the fixes are still there. You have to abolish the filibuster in the Senate, you have to mandate national nonpartisan redistricting, you have to make voting easier, and you have to outlaw some of these Republican voter suppression tactics.

It's bleak. I don't know what else to say.

Democrats have to get extremely lucky next year. They either need to luck into the most favorable environment for the president's party that we haven't ever had for a midterm election or...I don't know. There's not much else they can do. None of these democracy reforms can get through on a reconciliation bill. If Democrats don't pass nonpartisan redistricting, they're going to be fighting at a huge disadvantage in the House. That's the ballgame.



The title of Illing’s chilling interview with Faris was “Are Democrats Sleepwalking Toward Democratic Collapse?” Faris seemed to think that it wouldn’t matter even if the Democrats were awake given the structural barriers posed by Senate apportionment rules and the refusal of two key “moderate” Democratic Senators – Joe Manchin (D-WV) and Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ) – to vote down the filibuster rule. For Faris, who ought to have anticipated the Republicans’ “unapologetically authoritarian turn” (well underway long before 2020 and 2021), the only hope was that Republicans might develop some conscience as they take power back in 2024 and 2025:

One thing I would ask Republicans: If it goes that way, what is it that you think you will have won? What are we even fighting about at this point? You got your corporate tax cuts. You got the Supreme Court. What is the purpose of this? Why do you want the power if it means alienating half the country and potentially breaking it up? I guess I just hope that there will be some introspection among party leaders when we’re approaching that precipice.<sup>28</sup>

This was a revealing comment, emblematic of the fascism-denial critiqued in Chapter 4 of the present volume. Professor Faris just didn’t get it: tax cuts for Big Business and plutocratic control of the nation’s high court were not the only things that mattered to the contemporary GOP. The Republican Party today is a neofascist, post-parliamentary Amerikaner outfit that views white nationalist power as a glorious “America First” goal in and of itself. It is perfectly happy to “alienate” and then repress “half the country” in defense and advance of white nationalist rule.

Looking ahead at the end of June 2021, it was hard to feel optimistic. The little burst of belated ruling-class campaign finance conscience that Chomsky noted after January 6th seemed to have ended half a year out from the failed Capitol Complex Putsch (ancient history!). *Al Jazeera*’ reported on how the military-industrial aviation giant Boeing Corporation had decided to resume campaign contributions to leading Congressional and state-level Big Lie Republifascists:

Boeing Co.’s political action committee resumed giving to federal candidates and committees in May after a three-month pause, including

donations to members who opposed certifying the 2020 election results for President Joe Biden. The aerospace giant joined dozens of other companies on January 13 in announcing that they would suspend and review their PAC donations in the wake of the January 6 riot by supporters of Donald Trump. But beginning on May 3, Boeing gave out nearly \$900,000 to political committees and candidates, according to its latest filing with the Federal Election Commission. Among sitting lawmakers who received \$5,000, the maximum amount a PAC can give per election, were House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy of California, Minority Whip Steve Scalise of Louisiana and Representative Vicky Hartzler of Missouri. Representative Jack Bergman, a Michigan Republican who also voted against certification, got \$2,500. All four were among the 147 Republicans who voted against certifying Electoral College votes for Biden in alignment with Trump's false claim that the 2020 election was rigged. Five people were killed as a result of the mob storming the building. Boeing's PAC also gave \$25,000 to the Republican Attorneys General Association. An affiliate of the group, the Rule of Law Defense Fund, helped organize protests on Jan. 6 that preceded the riot, paying for robocalls urging Trump supporters to attend the 'Stop the Steal' rally. The PAC's biggest donations went to the Republican Governors Association, which got \$200,000, and the Senate and House arms of the Democratic and Republican parties, each of which got \$105,000 – the maximum that a PAC can give to a party committee per year.<sup>29</sup>

If system and industry leader Boeing was opening its political checkbook back up for the white nationalist party of QAnon, other top American corporations were certainly not far behind. Other parts of Big Business don't want to lose out in the scramble to purchase influence with the neofascist wing of the neoliberal duopoly.

You didn't have to be a radical to find the American political future quite possibly grim. Here was a smart reflection from the centrist Obama friend and Biden ally Jeffrey Goldberg, editor of the mainstream magazine *The Atlantic*, on likely scenarios for 2024-25:

At least from where I sit, the most important and most relevant truth of the [January 6] riot is that it was not the culmination of the insurrection, but its prologue. If the Republican Party, as currently constituted, takes back the House and Senate next year (an outcome that is not only plausible but, history tells us, likely), and if a Democrat wins the presidency in 2024, it doesn't seem likely that Congress will certify the victory. And then the four horsemen will most certainly ride.<sup>30</sup>

The bipartisan defeat of the For the People Act, irrelevantly supported by most of the populace<sup>31</sup> – could help lock that outcome in. The killing of the bill in late June helped make a Republifascist return to power likely. The legislation had the potential to roll back racist voter suppression and right-wing gerrymandering and the insidious power of right-wing dark money in US electoral politics. The bill's defeat was a green light for “red” (white-supremacist) takeover in 2023 and 2025.

Meanwhile the underlying, inherently inegalitarian and chaotic capitalist system, seedbed of neofascism, heightened pandemic risks,<sup>32</sup> and the related but even more dire (strange as it feels to write) threat of ecocide, churns along, distributing wealth and hence power ever further upward. As “Sleepy” Joe “Nothing Would Fundamentally Change” Biden himself noted in his April 2021 address to Congress, dedicated to enhancing American “competitiveness” in the world capitalist and imperial system:

According to one study, CEOs make 320 times what their average workers make. The pandemic has only made things worse. 20 million Americans lost their jobs in the pandemic – working- and middle-class Americans. At the same time, the roughly 650 Billionaires in America saw their net worth increase by more than \$1 Trillion. Let me say that again. Just 650 people increased their wealth by more than \$1 Trillion during this pandemic. They are now worth more than \$4 Trillion.<sup>33</sup>

But of course. Having long ago “left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest”, “drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation”, and “resolved personal worth into

exchange value”,<sup>34</sup> capital has recurrently turned crisis and disaster to its advantage. Mere democracy and the common good, including livable ecology, have never been its concerns.

The breathing space afforded by Trump’s defeat and departure is welcome and worth celebrating. But modest adjustments of tax rates, bringing them back to George W. Bush levels,<sup>35</sup> can no more save us from neoliberal-era fascism than modest reductions in carbon emissions can rescue us from climate disaster. The solutions lay beyond the ideological purview and institutional reach of what the nation’s two major parties, either neoliberal-fascist (the Republicans) or neoliberal-constitutional (the Democrats), are willing or able to consider. As Dr. Benach suggests,<sup>36</sup> a major, mobilized, and collective intervention against the capitalist-imperial order is urgently and existentially required. We organize for radical societal reconstruction and transformative (eco-) socialism or its “barbarism if we’re lucky”. The imperative is indeed, “revolution, nothing less”.

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35. As Samuel Moyn noted in early May “The Democrats’ newfound tolerance of deficits for the sake of relief, infrastructure and care does move beyond the austerity economics of the last several decades. But as the journalist David Dayen points out, it has not affected a budget proposal promising to ‘restore’ discretionary nondefense spending to levels that are still less than those during the Ronald Reagan era (as a percentage of gross domestic product). Mr. Biden’s rebalancing of tax fairness for individuals takes the country back, as the president acknowledged Wednesday, to George W. Bush levels of under 40 percent for the top tax bracket, not Roosevelt levels of 94 percent at their height or even pre-Reagan levels of 70 percent.” Samuel Moyn, “What Kind of Fear Is Stopping Joe Biden?,” *New York Times*, May 2, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/02/opinion/joe-biden-100-days.html>
36. Benach, “We Must Take Advantage.”



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