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Resisting the poisonous language of fascism

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how language has become one of the central battlegrounds in the rise of American fascism. Drawing on the insights of Morrison, Ngũgĩ, Klemperer, and others, it argues that Trump’s rhetoric is not simply inflammatory but functions as a weapon of authoritarian statecraft, a “dead language” designed to erase memory, suppress critical thought, and normalize violence. The piece explores how fascist rhetoric intertwines with neoliberal pedagogy, white supremacy, and profound inequality, shaping a culture of disposability where dehumanization is institutionalized and cruelty governs. Through a layered analysis of state terror, racial cleansing, attacks on immigrants, the militarization of civil society, and the collapse of moral imagination, the article exposes how authoritarian politics transforms civic life into a war zone sustained by propaganda, fear, and spectacle. Against this descent, it calls for reclaiming language as a site of critique, memory, and democratic resistance. Only by forging a new, insurgent vocabulary, one capable of naming the crisis and envisioning emancipatory futures, can democratic agency be revived and the machinery of fascist politics be confronted.

KEY WORDS

fascism, authoritarianism, *Gleichschaltung*, language, state terror

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Introduction: Language in the Age of Fascist Politics

In an age when authoritarianism corrupts meaning itself, language no longer merely communicates, it disciplines, deceives, and divides. As Toni Morrison (1993) has noted, “language is not only an instrument through which power is exercised,” it also shapes agency and functions as an act with consequences. These consequences ripple through the very fabric of our existence. For every word we speak carries the weight of meaning and truth, and with them, the fate of our collective future. Each syllable, phrase, and sentence becomes a battleground where truth and power collide, where silence breeds complicity, and where justice hangs in the balance. Throughout history, from George Orwell to James Baldwin, critical theorists have made clear that the role of language is central to matters of politics, culture, agency, and action. As Eric Kin (2025) notes, “Words shape perception, perception shapes reality. Strip a people of the words they need to name their pain, and you disarm them. You blind them. You atomize their resistance.”

In response, we find ourselves in desperate need of a new vocabulary, one capable of naming the fascist tide and militarized language now engulfing the United States. This is not a matter of style or rhetorical flourish; it is a matter of survival. The language required to confront and resist this unfolding catastrophe will not come from the legacy press, which remains tethered to the very institutions it ought to expose. Nor can we turn to the right-wing media machines, led by Fox News, where fascist ideals are not just defended but paraded as patriotism.

Toni Morrison’s warning in her Nobel Lecture resounds with renewed force: the language of tyrants, saturated with violence, deception, and moral rot, is “a dead language.” For her “a dead language is not simply one that is no longer spoken or written,” it is an unyielding language “content to admire its own paralysis.” (Morrison 1993). It is a repressive language infused with power, censored and censoring. Ruthless in its policing duties and dehumanizing language, it has no desire or purpose other than maintaining the free range of its own narcotic narcissism, its own exclusivity and dominance. “Though moribund, it is not without effect” for it actively thwarts the intellect, stalls conscience, and “suppresses human potential.” (Morrison 1993). Unreceptive to interrogation, it cannot form or tolerate innovative ideas, shape other thoughts, tell another story, or fill baffling silences.

This is the language of official power whose purpose is to sanction ignorance and preserve it. Beneath its glittering spectacle and vulgar performance lies a language that is “dumb, predatory, sentimental.” It offers mass spectacles, a moral sleepwalking state of mind, and a psychotic infatuation for those who seek refuge in unchecked power. It forges a community built on greed, corruption, and hate, steeped in a scandal of hollow fulfillment. It is a language unadorned in its cruelty and addiction to creating an architecture of violence. It is evident in Trump’s discourse of occupation, his

militarizing of American politics (Ganz 2025), and in his use of an army of trolls to turn hatred into a social media spectacle of swagger and cruelty (Pemberton 2025).

Even the liberal mainstream now echoes this language of evasion, dressing cruelty in the rhetoric of civility (Stanley 2016; Chomsky & Waterstone 2021; Chomsky & Robinson 2024; the classic work on propaganda is Bernays 2004). Language, once a powerful instrument against enforced silence and institutional cruelty, now too often serves power, undermining reason, normalizing violence, and replacing justice with vengeance.

In Trump's oligarchic culture of authoritarianism, language becomes a spectacle of power, a theater of fear carefully crafted, televised, and performed as a civic lesson in mass indoctrination. It is a language that embraces censorship, fears the power of the imagination, and rages against the independence of the mind. It thrives on cruelty and chaos, deploying a rhetoric of hate that silences dissent and erodes democratic values. As Leon Wieseltier (2025) observes, this authoritarian style is now amplified by the "technological instruments of manipulation and demagoguery [designed to promote a] uniformity that autocratic (and theocratic) regimes desire. They harbor a top-down fantasy of perfect consensus."

Drawing a chilling parallel between Trump's regime of censorship and the linguistic engineering of Nazi ideology, Wieseltier points to the concept of *Gleichschaltung*, which he defines as

synchronization, regimentation, integration, coordination, the unification of disparate elements in government and society under a single ideological description, so that all diversity and dissonance is banished and smoothed out into a seamless and coercive general will that reflects the ideals of the regime (Wieseltier 2025).

Language, in this view, is no longer a medium for critical reflection or civic dialogue but a weapon of ideological conformity.

This is not merely a matter of political rhetoric; it is about survival. To reclaim language from the grip of authoritarian distortion, as Jared Marcel Pollen (2025) reminds us in a different context, is to reclaim "the preservation of dignity, the overcoming of ignorance and degradation, and ultimately... survival." Resisting this linguistic violence means refusing to accept the imposed reality of despotic power and instead recovering the imaginative, emancipatory possibilities of language. It means defending language as a site of memory, critique, and resistance in the face of rising political and moral catastrophe.

If language is the vessel of consciousness, then we must forge a new one--fierce, unflinching, and unafraid to rupture the fabric of falsehood that sustains domination, disposability, and terror. The late famed novelist, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (in

Feng 2025), was right in stating that “language was a site of colonial control,” inducting people into what he called “colonies of the mind.”

Ngũgĩ’s reflection on the power of language offers a profound understanding of its role in shaping histories of domination and resistance. He writes:

Language has always been a battlefield of ideas, It is a war zone in the struggle between enslavement and empowerment, between the dominated and the dominating, the colonized and the colonizing. The history of language... is often a story of possession and dispossession, territorial struggle, and the establishment or imposition of a culture. Language has been as much the tool of conquest and resistance as the sword. Indeed, some of the fiercest battles have been fought and continue to be fought in this zone (Thiong’o 2025: 30).

Building on Ngũgĩ’s insight, we must recognize that this linguistic struggle now defines the broader political landscape, where democracy itself is under siege. The institutions that once nurtured the social imagination and civic dialogue are being dismantled, replaced by a toxic language of hate and exclusion. This is the grammar of fascism reborn: a vocabulary of punishment that transforms politics into spectacle and conscience into casualty.

As growing numbers of people rebel against this dystopian order, neoliberal ideology fuses with the forces of fascist politics to contain and distort their rage, to turn legitimate grievances against ruling elites and the cruelties of capitalism into instruments of fear, distraction, and division. What emerges is a machinery of misdirection that transforms public discontent into private despair (I take up this issue in great detail in Giroux 2025). The current crisis, of agency, representation, values, and language itself, demands more than resistance; it calls for a new vocabulary of critique and possibility, one capable of dismantling the cultural and ideological architecture through which neoliberal capitalism renews its own savagery. For under Trump, the cynical language of neoliberalism has been weaponized, feeding directly into a politics of disposability that deems entire populations expendable.

State terror and Trump’s politics of disposability

As Trump’s regime concentrates power, he invokes a chilling convergence of law, order, and violence, a cornerstone of his politics of disposability (Giroux & DiMaggio 2024; Ackerman 2022). His acts of cruelty and lawlessness, abducting and deporting innocent people, branding immigrants as “vermin,” claiming they are “poisoning the blood” of Americans, and even proposing the legalization of murder for twelve hours, make clear that his violent metaphors are not just rhetorical flourishes. They are policy blueprints. In Trump’s hands, rhetoric becomes a weaponized prelude to atrocity, a tool of statecraft. Threats, hatred, and cruelty are transformed into instruments of governance (Applebaum 2021).

This is not careless talk; it is a brutal and calculated expression of power. Trump's threats to arrest and deport critics such as Zohran Mamdani reveal his willingness to use the machinery of the state for political repression and disposability (Tucker & Ellison 2025). His targets are predictable: immigrants, Black people, educators, journalists, LGBTQ+ individuals, and anyone who dares to challenge his white Christian nationalist, neoliberal, and white supremacist vision. His language does not merely offend, it incites harm, enacts repression, and opens the gates to state-sanctioned violence. It extends the reign of terror across the United States by labeling protesters as terrorists and deploying the military to American cities, treating them as if they were "occupied territories." (Owen 2025).

Trump is not alone. Many of his MAGA follower use these same hateful discourse. For instance, conservative pundit Ann Coulter wrote "in response to a speech by Melanie Yazzie, a Native artist and professor, about decolonization, "We didn't kill enough Indians." This is not simply harsh rhetoric; nor is it a performative display of emboldened hatred and historical forgetting; it sets the stage for state-sanctioned repression and mass violence. What is at stake is more than civic respect. It is democracy itself. When language loses meaning and truth is blurred, tyranny thrives (Finchelstein 2020). Trump's and too much of MAGA discourse is not about persuasion; it is about dehumanization and domination. It functions as statecraft, laying the groundwork for a society where suffering becomes spectacle and repression masquerades as law and order. Language is the canary in the coal mine, warning us that democracy dies without an informed citizenry.

We now live in a country where class and racial warfare both at home and abroad is on steroids, exposing the killing machine of gangster capitalism in its rawest, most punitive form (Goodman & Shaikh 2024). Trump supports the genocidal war waged by Israel, which is led by Netanyahu, a convicted war criminal. And is complicit in the thousands of children slaughtered in Gaza (Giroux 2026).

At home, misery and death come not in the form of bombs, but in the passing of heartless policies ensuring that millions of Americans, including poor children, will hover on the edge of losing their healthcare. In addition, funds for feeding hungry children are being slashed, sacrificed to feed the pockets of the ultra-rich. Thousands will die, not by accident, but by design from Trump's mean-spirited, brutal, and harsh budget bill (Greenhouse 2025). Terror, fear, and punishment have replaced the ideals of equality, freedom, and justice. Childcide is now normalized as the law of the land. The lights are dimming in America, and all that remains are the smug, ignorant smirks of fascist incompetence and bodies drained of empathy and solidarity.

Gangster capitalism and the death of empathy

Gangster capitalism lays the foundation for Trump's racist and fascist politics. The United States has descended into a state of political, economic, cultural, and social

psychosis, where cruel, neoliberal, democracy-hating policies have prevailed since the 1970s. (see Giroux 2023; 2021; 2019). Underlying this authoritarian shift lies a systemic war on workers, youth, Blacks, and immigrants, increasingly marked by mass violence and a punishing state both domestically and internationally. The U.S. has transformed into an empire dominated by a callous, greedy billionaire class that has dismantled any remnants of democracy, while embracing the fascistic ideology of white Christian nationalism and white supremacy (Hedges 2019). Fascism now marches not only beneath the flag but also under the shadow of the Christian cross.

At the center of this moral decay stands the billionaire class, a ruling elite that has turned cruelty into its civic religion. The moral compass of America has shifted from the cult of unrestrained individualism, celebrated in Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*, to the worship of greed and violence embodied by Gordon Gekko's credo "greed is good" and Patrick Bateman's psychotic excesses in *American Psycho*. What began as a philosophy of selfish ambition has curdled into a theology of domination, where cruelty becomes virtue and profit the highest form of grace (Rand 1999).

This descent into barbarity reaches its apex in theocratic hatred masquerading as moral renewal. In pulpits across the country, reactionary preachers sanctify violence as virtue. One chilling example comes from Justin Zhong of Sure Foundation Baptist Church in Indianapolis, who called for the deaths of LGBTQ+ individuals during a sermon, citing biblical justification and branding them "domestic terrorists." (Shoaib 2025). It gets worse. During a Men's Preaching Night at Sure Foundation Baptist Church, Zhong's associate, Stephen Falco, suggested that LGBTQ+ people should "blow yourself in the back of the head," and that Christians should "pray for their deaths." (Perry 2025). Another member, Wade Rawley, advocated for violence, stating LGBTQ+ individuals should be "beaten and stomped in the mud" before being shot in the head. Fascism in America, nourished by the toxic roots of homophobia, now cloaks itself not just in the poisonous banner of the Confederate flag, but also in the sacred guise of the Christian cross (Shoaib 2025).

Welcome to Trump's America, where empathy is derided as weakness and the market becomes the measure of all human worth. Elon Musk, Trump's erratic ally, expresses this ethos most nakedly: "The fundamental weakness of western civilization is empathy." (Wolf 2025). In a single sentence, he gives voice to the moral bankruptcy of neoliberal fascism. As Julia Carrie Wong (2025) observes in *The Guardian*, the stakes extend far beyond casting empathy as a "parasitic plague." Empathy's true power lies in its ability to disrupt the conditions that make dehumanization possible. Rather than enabling violence, it challenges the narrowing of moral boundaries and insists on expanding the "definition of who should be included in a democratic state." (Wong 2025; see also Boonen 2020).

The assault on empathy is no minor lapse; it is a prelude to barbarism. In stripping away our capacity to feel for the Other, it provides a moral vacuum in which

genocidal violence not only unfolds in Gaza and beyond, but is met with silence, indifference, even justification. It is how cruelty is normalized and conscience extinguished. The assault on empathy is the underside of the rise of the criminogenic state.

Naming the deep roots of the police state

Ruth Ben-Ghiat has warned that “America has been set on a trajectory to become a police state,” pointing to the passage of the Brutal and Bellicose Bill (BBB), which handed ICE a budget larger than the militaries of Brazil, Israel, and Italy combined (Ben-Ghiat 2025). Yet the roots of this state violence run far deeper. They stretch back through the bipartisan war on terror, mass incarceration, and racialized policing that normalized cruelty as governance long before Trump.

The foundation was laid under Bush and Cheney, whose “war on terror” birthed Guantánamo, Abu Ghraib, black sites, mass surveillance, and extraordinary rendition (Giroux 2005). What Trump has done is strip these earlier authoritarian practices of pretense, transforming them into open governing principles. The state of exception has become the rule.

The police state did not begin with Trump, it reached maturity through him (Giroux & DiMaggio 2024). Today we see its terrifying evolution: racial cleansing disguised as immigration policy, hatred normalized as political speech, dissent criminalized, birthright citizenship threatened, and everyday life militarized. This is not politics as usual; it is fascism rebranded for the twenty-first century

Trump’s fascist politics grow even more dangerous when we recognize that his language of colonization and domination has helped transform American society into what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (2025) chillingly describes as a “war zone.” This war zone extends from city streets to digital networks, from classrooms to courthouses. It now spans the internet, podcasts, social media, and educational platforms, breeding grounds for fascist symbols, reactionary fantasies, and the algorithmic resurrection of colonial logics.

In this battlefield of meaning, the language of colonization does more than obscure truth, it erodes critical thinking, silences historical memory, and disarms the possibility of agency. What remains is a nation scarred by suffering, haunted by loneliness, bound by fear, and anesthetized by the numbing rituals of a punishing state.

As noted earlier, America’s transformation into a war zone finds its most visible expression in the rise of Trump’s omnipresent police apparatus. This authoritarian machinery reveals itself through the mechanisms of state-sponsored terror (Valdez 2025). ICE now functions as an occupying army rather than a law-enforcement agency, conducting raids, abductions, and mass detentions that echo the logic of counterinsurgency rather than civil administration. The rapid expansion of detention centers increasingly resembles a network of forced-labor compounds (Snyder 2025).

As Fintan O'Toole (2025) warns, Trump's deployment of troops onto the streets of Los Angeles is not merely symbolic, it is "a training exercise for the army, a form of reorientation.". In this reorientation, soldiers are no longer defenders of the Constitution but are being retrained as instruments of authoritarian power, bound not by democratic ideals but by obedience to a singular will. In this instance, the militarizing of American politics cannot be separated from the weaponization of the American military, an ongoing project for Trump. According to O'Toole (2025):

Donald Trump's desire to militarize American politics and politicize the American military is unfinished business. Militarizing American politics means defining all those who do not conform to his version of normality as mortal enemies to be confronted as though they were hostile foreign nations. Politicizing the military means dismantling its self-image as an institution that transcends partisan divisions, is broadly representative of the US population, and owes its primary loyalty not to the president but to the Constitution. These aims are intertwined, but the first cannot be consummated until the second has been accomplished. Trump failed to do this in his first term, but he is determined not to be thwarted again.

Nevertheless, mainstream media and much of the academic establishment continue to shrink from naming the fascist threat. They recoil from calling the Trump regime what it is: a neoliberal-fascist state engaged in domestic terrorism. In doing so, they remain blind to the reality that economic inequality, global militarism, and the genocidal logics of empire are not peripheral, they are central to America's crisis.

Why is it so difficult to admit that we are living in an age of American fascism? Why do the crimes of the powerful pass without scrutiny while the victims are blamed or erased? These questions cut to essence of moral failure: the refusal to link everyday repression to the long continuum of empire, racial capitalism, and settler colonialism that made the police state possible in the first place.

The collapse of moral imagination

What the United States faces is not only a political crisis, partly in the collapse of conscience and civic courage, it is also a profound moral collapse (I address this issue in detail in Giroux 2025). The Trump regime's war on immigrants, the poor, and the marginalized is at once a war on thought, on historical memory, and on the courage to dissent. This is a war against conscience itself, a deliberate campaign to extinguish the moral and intellectual capacities that sustain democracy.

It is a war not merely against individuals but against the very idea of a just future. Trump's politics of cruelty seeks to make compassion appear naïve, to render critical thought subversive, and to turn moral indifference into the new civic virtue. This is a genocidal war for stupidity, for the death of reflection, for the annihilation of any robust sense of justice.

Viktor Klemperer, in his seminal work *The Language of the Third Reich*, offered a crucial warning that resonates with chilling accuracy today: “With great insistence and a high degree of precision right down to the last detail, Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* teaches not only that the masses are stupid, but that they need to be kept that way, intimidated into not thinking.” (Klemperer 2006: 167). Klemperer revealed that Nazi politics did not arise in a void; it was cultivated in a culture where language became the breeding ground of fear, lies, and conformity. He understood that civic illiteracy, propaganda, and manufactured ignorance were not mere tools of fascism, they were its preconditions.

Trump’s language recalls the genocidal campaigns against Indigenous peoples, the enslavement of Africans, and the systematic exclusion of those deemed disposable. It is a necrotic lexicon resurrected in service of tyranny, a vocabulary of extermination disguised as renewal. It gives birth to politicians with blood in their mouths, who weaponize nostalgia and bigotry, cloaking brutality in the false promises of patriotism and “law and order.” The moral collapse of the nation is inseparable from the collapse of language itself. When words lose meaning, atrocities become thinkable. When cruelty is aestheticized, it becomes contagious. Trump’s fascism thrives on this moral inversion: it makes violence appear virtuous, ignorance heroic, and compassion suspect.

Language as war and the return of Americanized fascism

Trump’s language is not mere rhetoric; it is a call to arms. Trump’s words do not simply shelter fascists; they summon them. They silence dissent, normalize torture, and echo the logic of death camps, internment camps, and mass incarceration. His discourse, laden with hatred and lies, is designed to turn neighbors into enemies, civic life into war, and politics into a death cult and zone of terminal exclusion. Undocumented immigrants, or those seeking to register for green cards or citizenship, are torn from their families and children, cast into prisons such as Alligator Alcatraz, a grotesque manifestation of the punishing state. As Melissa Gira Grant (2025) writes in *The New Republic*, this “American concentration camp” [was] “built to cage thousands of people rounded up by ICE,” constructed on Indigenous Miccosukee land without consultation, an act of colonial violence layered upon colonial violence. Here, fascism fuses the past and present, reviving the colonial logics of conquest in the name of national security.

This is the face of modern cruelty draped in the American flag. Language becomes the weapon through which violence is orchestrated, refined, and made ordinary. Culture is no longer peripheral to politics; it is the central medium through which authoritarianism seduces, disciplines, and legitimates itself. The fascist lexicon turns civic life into a theater of fear and public cruelty into political performance.

In Trump's America, the language of domination becomes policy, and policy becomes spectacle. Dehumanizing metaphors, "vermin," "invaders," "animals", prepare the public imagination for the machinery of deportation, detention, and death. These linguistic assaults create what Hannah Arendt once called the "banality of evil," where atrocity becomes thinkable because it has been linguistically normalized.

Trump's regime of propaganda and punishment collapses the distance between speech and violence. To speak in fascist language is to act in fascist ways; words here are not expressions but weapons. Laura Loomer's grotesque remark that the "wild animals surrounding Trump's new immigration center will have at least 65 million meals" is not a rhetorical flourish, it is a death wish wrapped in irony (Keane 2025). Her language enacts violence by turning suffering into entertainment, murder into metaphor.

Change.org, along with others such as *Pod Save America* co-host Tommy Vietor noted that her comment "is not only racist, (but also) a direct emotional attack and veiled threat against Hispanic communities. This kind of speech dehumanizes people of color and normalizes genocidal language." (Keane & Miller 2025). Her racist remark not only reveals the profound contempt for human life within Trump's inner circle but also highlights how cruelty and violence are strategically used as both a policy tool and a public spectacle. Loomer's remark is not an aberration, it is a symptom of the fascist logic animating this administration, where death itself becomes a political message. Her blood-soaked discourse is symptomatic of the criminogenic politics fundamental to the working of the Trump regime.

Such discourse belongs to the lineage of extermination. Loomer's invocation of death recalls the Nazi designation of *Vernichtungslager*, extermination camps, where, as Primo Levi (2005) observed, "imprisonment and execution were inseparable." In this repetition of history, language again becomes the accomplice of atrocity. The United States' internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, often sanitized in public memory, functioned through a similar grammar of suspicion and disposability.

Judith Butler (2009) reminds us that some lives are rendered invisible, lives deemed "ungrievable," stripped of the right to be mourned. In fascist regimes, this erasure of empathy is not an accident but a project: a pedagogy of cruelty that teaches who deserves protection and who can be discarded. In Trump's America, cruelty has become pedagogy, and pedagogy a form of political terror.

For Trump, J.D. Vance, and their enablers, fascism is not a ghost to exorcize but a banner to wave. The spirit of the Confederacy, the corpse of white supremacy, and the symbols of militarized nationalism have been resurrected and sanctified. Neo-Nazis march openly; Confederate flags adorn public parades; and Trump renames U.S. warships and bases after Confederate generals as acts of racial provocation and political theater (Bennett 2025).

In a direct nod to its embrace of white supremacy, the Trump administration is restoring and reinstalling the stature of a Confederate official, Albert Pike, who not only “sided with the Confederacy during the civil war and fought to protect slavery as an institution,” he was also allegedly a member of the Ku Klux Klan (Cameron 2025). As Peter Wade (2025) points out in *Rolling Stone*, in a desperate attempt to deflect attention “about his relationship with the deceased sex trafficker,” Jeffrey Epstein, Donald Trump boldly proclaims his full-throated nativism, calling on sports teams to restore their racist legacies. In one instance, he demands, with great fanfare and zero shame, that the Washington Commanders Football team reinstate their racist “Redskins” name, which is not about sports, it is about reviving a language of domination, legitimizing insult as identity. This obsession with symbolic violence mirrors his broader project: to normalize the obscene, to aestheticize cruelty, to make the unthinkable acceptable.

The American public, numbed by spectacle, has become captive to this theater of authoritarianism. Powerful disimagination machines, mainstream media, right-wing propaganda platforms, and tech billionaires, have saturated public consciousness with conspiracy theories, historical amnesia, and spectacularized images of immigrants and others being deported to prisons, foreign gulags, and modern-day black holes (Giroux 2022). These are not merely entertainment outlets; they are pedagogical weapons of mass distraction, cultivating civic illiteracy and moral paralysis.

Under their influence, the United States has entered what might be called a moral coma, a state of paralysis where citizens can no longer distinguish truth from deceit or justice from cruelty. This is not apathy; it is learned helplessness, the result of decades of neoliberal conditioning and fascist spectacle.

The rise of these reactionary pedagogical machines is not accidental. They are the cultural arm of gangster capitalism, enriching the few by brutalizing the many. Their profit depends on civic ignorance and the algorithmic monetization of rage. In this economy of cruelty, violence becomes the ultimate currency, traded daily across platforms of distraction and despair.

White nationalism and reproductive control

Nowhere is this more evident than in the mainstream media’s failure to address the racial and ideological foundations of Trump’s agenda. His attacks on Haitian immigrants, the travel ban on seven African countries (Thomas 2025), the shutting down of refugee programs, and his open-door policy for white Afrikaners from South Africa are not merely racist (Kanno-Youngs & Aleaziz 2025); they are explicitly white nationalist. The same ideology drives attacks on women’s reproductive rights, revealing the deep racial and gender anxieties of a movement obsessed with white demographic decline. These are not isolated skirmishes; they are interconnected strategies of domination.

These converging assaults, white nationalism, white supremacy, patriarchal control, and militarized life, manifest most vividly in the war on reproductive freedom. White nationalists encourage white women to reproduce, to hold back demographic change, while punishing women of color, LGBTQ+ people, and the poor. It is a violent calculus, animated by fantasies of purity and control.

The systemic assault on democracy

This is a full-spectrum assault on democracy. Every act of cruelty, every racist law, every violent metaphor chips away at the social contract. A culture of authoritarianism is now used to demean those considered other, both citizens and non-citizens, critics and immigrants, naturalized citizens and those seeking such status. They are labelled as unworthy of citizenship now defined by the Trump regime as a privilege rather than a right. Meanwhile, a media ecosystem built on clickbait and erasure renders both such fascists as legitimate while making invisible the roots of suffering mass suffering and fear, all the while, turning oppression into spectacle and silence into complicity.

In this fog, language itself is emptied of meaning. Truth and falsehood blur. As Paulo Freire warned, the tools of the oppressor are often adopted by the oppressed. We now see that the logic of fascism has seeped into the culture, eroding civic sensibility, destroying moral imagination, and rendering resistance almost unspeakable.

The normalization of tyranny

Trump's authoritarian fantasies do not alienate his base, they galvanize it. What was once unthinkable is now policy. What was once fringe has become mainstream. Cruelty is not something to be deplored and avoided at all costs, it is a central feature of power, wielded with theatrical and spectacularized brutality. Under the current acting ICE Director, Todd Lyons, this punitive logic has intensified: Lyons oversees a \$4.4 billion Enforcement and Removal Operations apparatus staffed by over 8,600 agents across 200 domestic locations, using militarized tactics, surprise raids, and aggressive targeting of immigrant communities to sustain a regime of fear (Dunbar 2025). ICE's presence is at the heart of Trump's hyper-police state, and its funding has been greatly expanded to \$170 billion under Trump's new budget bill, creating what journalist Will Bunch calls Trump's "own gulag archipelago of detention camps across a United States that's becoming increasingly hard to recognize." (Bunch 2025).

Meanwhile, figures like Tom Homan, who led ICE under Trump's first term, laid the groundwork with Gestapo-style operations, midnight raids, family separations, and public declarations that undocumented immigrants "should be afraid". As the "border tzar" under Trump, Homan has initiated deportation policies that are even more aggressively violent and cruel than those that took place in Trump's first term as

president. As Bunch notes, take the case of “the 64-year-old New Orleans woman, Donna Kashanian, who fled a tumultuous Iran 47 years ago, volunteered to rebuild her battered Louisiana community after Hurricane Katrina, never missed a check-in with U.S. immigration officials, and was snatched by ICE agents in unmarked vehicles while she was out working in her garden and sent to a notorious detention center.” (Bunch 2025). These Gestapo-like abductions have seized children on their way to school, at sports events, even while entering immigration offices with their parents, transforming everyday acts into haunting echoes of authoritarian terror. These horror stories now take place daily in cities extending from Los Angeles to Providence, Rhode Island.

A central player in this current regime of state terrorism, systemic racism, mass abductions, deportations, and the criminalization of dissent is Stephen Miller, Trump’s White House Deputy Chief of Staff. During Trump’s first term, Miller was the driving force behind the Muslim ban, the family separation policy, and assaults on birthright citizenship, all rooted in an unapologetic white supremacist and eugenicist worldview. In Trump’s second term, he has emerged as the architect of even more draconian measures, pushing for mass deportations, the abolition of birthright citizenship, and the revocation of naturalized citizenship for those who fall outside his white Christian vision of who deserves to be called American.

Far-right white nationalist such as Miller, Tom Homan and Todd Lyons, do not treat cruelty as a regrettable side effect. For them, cruelty is the currency of power. Suffering becomes a spectacle, and violence a ritual of statecraft. Tyranny is not inching forward in silence; it is advancing at full speed, cheered on by those who treat fear as a governing principle and pain as public policy. At stake here is the practice of fascist dehumanization.

Eddie Glaude Jr. builds on this argument and powerfully argues that Americans must confront a brutal truth: the creation and expansion of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), now the largest federal law enforcement agency, is not merely a matter of policy, it is a cornerstone of white supremacy (Glaude Jr. 2025). It is a racist institution, entrenched in an immigration policy designed to uphold the values of white nationalism. In the face of shifting demographics, ICE is tasked with an urgent mission, to make America white again, a calculated attempt to turn back the clock on progress, to preserve an imagined past at the cost of justice and humanity.

What is happening in the United States is not a passing storm. It is the death throes of a system that has long glorified violence, commodified everything, and fed on division. Trump’s language is not a performance, it is preparation. His words are laying the foundation for a society without empathy, without justice, without democracy.

Reclaiming the language of resistance, reclaiming democracy

In a decent society, language is the lifeblood of democracy, a vessel of solidarity, truth, and hope. But in Trump's America, language has become a weapon: dehumanizing, excluding, and dominating. His vision is not a warning; it is a blueprint. Words now function as instruments of governance, shaping consciousness while enforcing obedience. We must resist, or we risk losing everything. The stakes are nothing less than the survival of democracy, the retrieval of truth and the refusal to live in a world where cruelty is policy and silence equates to collaboration.

What is needed now is not only a rupture in language but a rupture in consciousness, one that joins critical illumination of the present with a premonitory vision of what lies ahead if fascist dynamics remain unchecked. As Walter Benjamin (2019) insisted, we must cultivate a form of profane illumination, a language that disrupts the spectacle of lies and names the crisis in all its violent clarity.

At the same time, as A. K. Thompson (2018) argues, we must grasp the future implicit in the present. His notion of premonitions urges us to read the events unfolding around us as warnings, as signs of catastrophe should we fail to confront and reverse the political and cultural paths we are on. It demands that we see the connections that bind our suffering, rejecting the fragmented reality that neoliberalism forces upon us.

The time for complacency is over (Thompson 2018). What is required is a new vocabulary of critique and possibility, one that names power, unmask violence, and rekindles moral imagination. A language capable not only of indicting the present but of envisioning a future rooted in justice, memory, and collective struggle.

As Antonio Gramsci (1971: 276) remarked in *Prison Notebooks*, "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum, a great variety of morbid symptoms appear." Those symptoms are here: propaganda as pedagogy, cruelty as entertainment, lies as civic currency. Yet amid decay lies possibility, the chance to reinvent the social imagination and to make language once again a site of solidarity rather than subjection.

This is the challenge and the opportunity for those who believe in the transformative power of culture, language, and education: to address not only the nature of the crisis but its deeper roots in politics, memory, and moral agency. When fascist politics no longer hide in the shadows but stride openly through our institutions, the defense of language becomes the defense of life itself. The fight for a just and democratic future demands not only outrage but an unwavering commitment to truth, critical consciousness, and collective resistance, before the interregnum hardens into tyranny.

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