2026: Vol. 25, No. 1

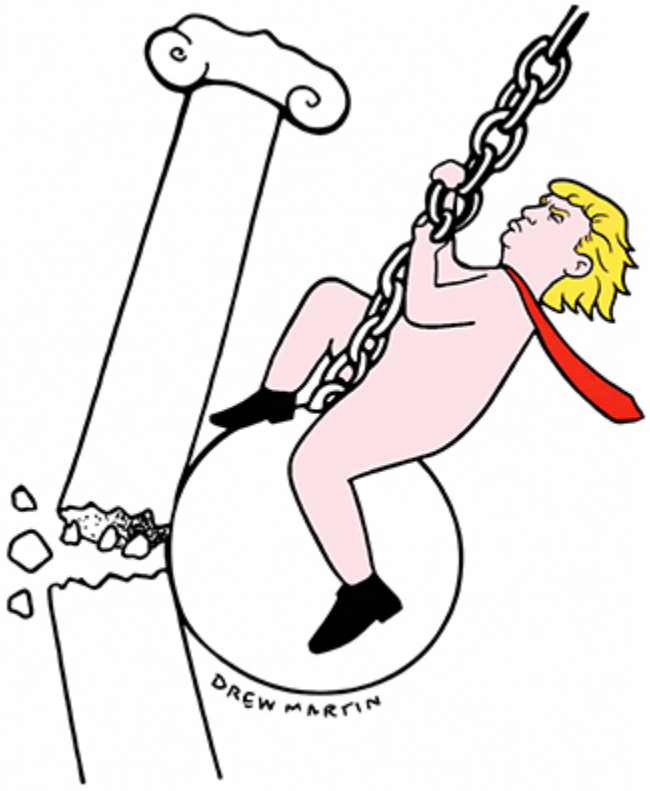
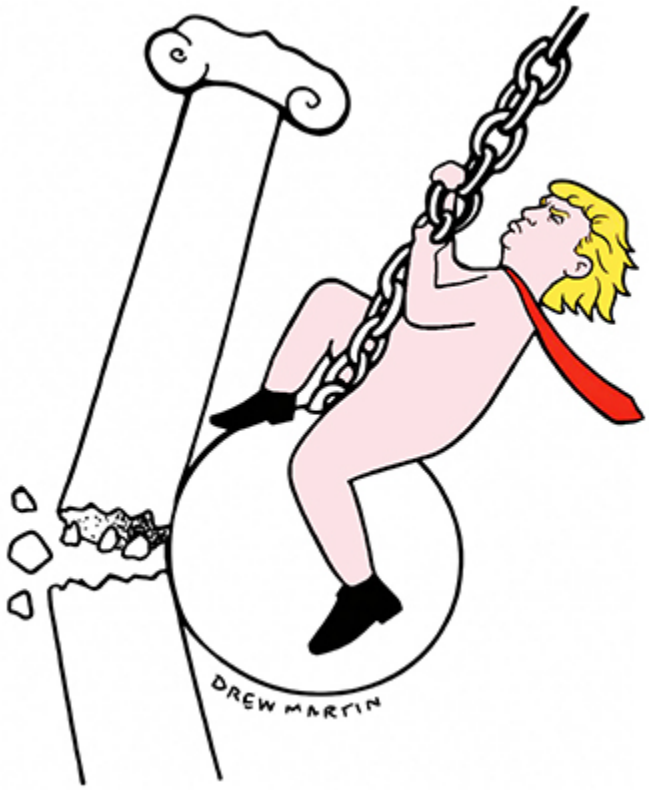


Table of Contents

Implementing Project 2025: Day One and After 1
Domination and Chaos: India's Radical Conservatism 14
Lula, Brazil, and a World in Flux 23
The Protestant Ethic after 120 Years 33
Frantz Fanon and the Crisis of Our Current Transitional Period 41
Fanon and Anti-Fascism 53
Masculine Rage at the End of the World 63
Making Racism and Misogyny Great Again: The Emptiness and Misplaced Meaning of Angry Young White Men 71
Crumb, Early and Late 86
Domenico Losurdo's Western Marxism: How it was Born, How it Died, How it Can Be Reborn 94
Meera Nanda's Postcolonial Theory and the Making of Hindu Nationalism 101
Timothy Scott Johnson's Repeating Revolutions: The French Revolution and the Algerian War 109
William M. Paris' Race, Time, and Utopia: Critical Theory and the Process of Emancipation 113
Paul Buhle and Raymond Tyler's Partisans 116
Noah Isenberg's Edger G. Ulmer: A Filmmaker at the Margins 123

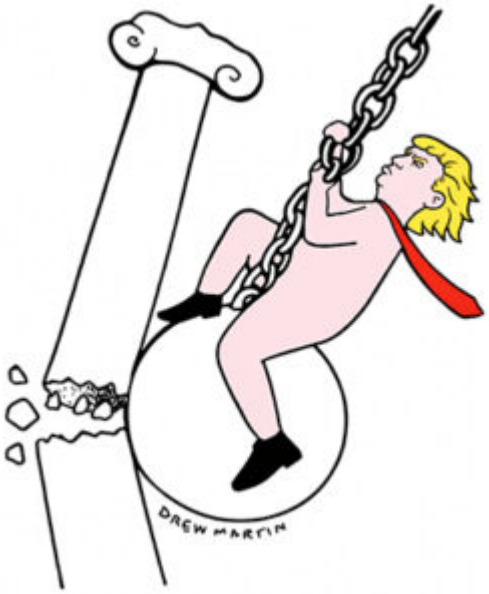
Implementing Project 2025: Day One and After

By | 2026: Vol. 25, No. 1



I won't be a dictator, "except on day one" – Donald Trump

Axios (Basu & Davis, 2024) holds that President Trump promised to make 59 major policy changes the first day of his second term. The president's declaration about limiting dictatorship to "day one" may lack veracity, but he has followed through on many of his other proposals made that day. In Trump's first ten months in office, he implemented numerous policies proposed in the Heritage Foundation's nearly 900-page, *Mandate for Leadership* (2023), which provided a detailed blueprint for governance in a Trump second term. More than 100 hard-right organizations advised Heritage about the *Mandate* and other facets of Project 2025 (i.e., personnel database, training videos, and 180-day transition playbook). They were designed to facilitate a rapid transition to a second Trump term and immediate appointment of *loyal* staff to avert problems that plagued his first term (i.e., inadequate advanced preparation and planning and selections of cabinet members and other advisors who sometimes opposed publicly his policies and persona).



More than half of the 312 writers of the *Mandate's* thirty chapters had served faithfully in the first Trump Administration. Available on the Heritage website nearly nine months before the election, the *Mandate* was excoriated by Democrats in attack ads and was highly unpopular with the public. On the campaign trail, Trump said he "knew nothing about" Project 2025 and that he disagreed with much of what it was rumored to advocate. In his second term, he instituted many of the *Mandate* proposals and made its goal of destroying the administrative state an ongoing project. He refashioned some of its core policy recommendations to extremes far beyond what was originally proposed. I address below some of the *Mandate's* most important policies and assess the Trump Administration's efforts to implement them during the first ten months in his second term.

The Imperial Presidency

The demolition of the East Wing of the White House and plan to build the grandiose "Trump Ballroom" was not proposed in the *Mandate*. However, this renovation manifests the document's call for concentrated executive power. Trump began the project without public review or consideration of historical preservation standards. Nearly twice the size of the rest of White House complex and reminiscent of Gilded Age mansions, it has been described by critics as a monument to Trump's enormous ego and symbol of the drift toward authoritarian governance he has animated. The *Washington Post's* (2025) editorial, "In Defense of the White House Ballroom," by a compliant Editorial Board, echoing views of their billionaire boss Jeff Bezos and major contributor to the boondoggle project, sparked the outrage of the vast majority of more than seven-thousand commenters who decried the desecration of "the people's house." Despite the uproar over the ballroom, Trump proudly unveiled his gaudy renovation of the Lincoln Bathroom (i.e., all Italian marble with golden fixtures). The coup de grace – Trump fired all members of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, the federal agency that oversees public sector construction and major built environment renovations in the nation's capital and replaced them with loyalists the president expects will rubber stamp the destruction of the East-Wing and construction of the massive "Trump Ballroom" after the fact

and approve any other renovations. The project arguably is a consequence of Trump exercising imperial power proposed and planned in the *Mandate*, facilitated by the Supreme Court "immunity decision" (Trump vs U.S. [07/01/2024]), and supported by loyalist advisors, appointees, and followers in the president's second term.

Trump sets general political directions of his Administration, but he expresses little interest in policy particulars, which he leaves to his Cabinet and other appointees and confidants. Major contributor to Project 2025 and author of the *Mandate* chapter on the Executive Office of the President, Russell Vought now serves as Trump's Director of Office of Management and Budget (OMB). A most trusted advisor, conservative Christian Vought bitterly opposes abortion, affirmative care for transexuals, and all "woke gender ideology" and embraces traditional family values and Christian nationalism. His *Mandate* chapter portrays the OMB Director as "keeper of the commander's intent," and stresses concentrating presidential power capable of imposing this reactionary agenda.

Vought has impounded funds allocated for programs that Trump dislikes and consequently usurped the power to spend provided to Congress by the Constitution. He supports Trump's Schedule F (now "Schedule Policy/Career") – the executive order to strip up to 50,000 nonpartisan federal civil service workers of their job protections and replace them with political loyalists or eliminate their positions. The *Mandate* claims that the rules, benefits, protections, and political climate of the civil service were shaped by New Deal era reforms and that officeholders consequently favor socially liberal Democratic Party policies. It claims that the civil service is unaccountable to elected officials and the voting public. After Elon Musk left the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), Vought took over the lead in the effort to dismantle the "deep state" by firing civil service workers and eliminating or cutting the budgets of offices Trump opposes. Vought was encouraged by Trump to use the government shutdown to shutter bureaucracy. However, the expected mass release of federal workers was stymied by court decisions and pressure from office managers to relieve problems of understaffing and threats to vital governmental services.

The Department of Justice (DOJ) is part of the executive branch and advises the president on legal issues, but normatively the office and the Attorney General are expected to be independent and serve the Constitution rather than act as the president's personal lawyer. The *Mandate* stresses restoring independence, honesty, impartiality, integrity, and legitimacy to the DOJ, which was supposedly politicized and thereby degraded by Biden and his Attorney General Merrick Garland. The subtext is that the various investigations of Trump during his first term were entirely politically motivated, and indicative of DOJ corruption. By contrast, Garland has been accused by Democrats for operating too slowly and timidly with too much concern for the appearance of political neutrality in dealing with massive Trump and MAGA wrongdoing. Conversely, the *Mandate* holds that the Biden DOJ abandoned the office's core responsibilities of fighting crime and maintaining rule of law and stressed "woke" agendas of unaccountable bureaucrats and leftwing ideologues.

The *Mandate* charges that fanatic emphasis on "diversity, equity, and inclusion" (DEI) by the

Biden DOJ resulted in widespread "affirmative discrimination." Trump supporters hold DEI injustices to be especially pervasive in higher educational admissions and minority inclusion practices, which they see as discriminating against white people and to some degree against Asians. The president and his DOJ have used accusations about DEI injustices as a lever in his battles against universities, K-12 schools, city administrations, and corporations they considers too liberal or "woke." The *Mandate* advises a thorough assessment and "complete overhaul" of DOJ, especially of its Civil Rights Division, which has focused on minority rights since the Warren Court. Throughout the document, different chapters demand eliminating all offices and positions that formulate or enforce DEI rules supposedly intended to advance minority equal opportunity and citizenship rights or even collect data about alleged violations of these rules. The *Mandate* treats DEI policies as the heart of "wokeness," which it urges Trump to extirpate.

After avid Trump supporter Matt Gaetz's nomination for Attorney General failed, Pam Bondi, also a Trump loyalist and 2020 election denier, was nominated and narrowly approved by the Senate. In the confirmation hearing, Bondi testified in response to intense Democratic questioning that she would act independently from the president, keep politics out of the office, and defend rule of law. Shortly after her appointment, she sent a memo to DOJ career attorneys and officials decrying Biden's weaponizing the office and announcing establishment of a DOJ "Weaponizing Working Group" to investigate Trump enemies and, paradoxically, to restore the tarnished integrity and credibility of the office. She issued another memo that ordered all DOJ appointees to "zealously" protect the president and strive to advance his political agenda or suffer serious penalties and even termination. Since Trump became president, more than half of the ten-thousand DOJ employees have quit, been fired, or took buyouts, and the vast majority of Civil Rights Division lawyers and officials have left their positions. DOJ has a shortage of experienced prosecutors. Applications for positions in DOJ and the numbers of elite candidates from top law schools have declined sharply. Tacit expectations that appointees must be loyal to Trump have contributed to politicization of DOJ and weakened its reputation (Stein, 2025).

After respected Republican U.S. Attorney for Eastern Virginia, Erik Siebert refused to prosecute Trump enemy, former FBI Director James Comey because of insufficient evidence of wrongdoing, the president demanded that DOJ still prosecute the case. When no other experienced U.S. Attorney would take the case, DOJ appointed Lindsey Halligan, an assistant to Trump and insurance lawyer who lacked any experience in prosecution or criminal law. She secured an indictment in a split Grand Jury decision. However, she did not meet the qualifications for the position and made "fundamental misstatements of law" that imperiled the case. Comey filed to have the case dismissed because Halligan did not show the final indictment to the entire grand jury. DOJ acted similarly with Laticia James, New York State Attorney General, who had successfully prosecuted Trump in a $500 million decision for inflating assets and financial fraud. DOJ took the James case forward with insufficient evidence. A federal judge dismissed both cases in late November.

In another problematic move, DOJ assigned Todd Blanche, second in command in the office and former Trump personal attorney, to interview Ghislain Maxwell, Jeffrey Epstein partner in

sordid sexual abuse and trafficking of children. After claiming that long-time Epstein friend Trump had not participated in the wrongdoing, she was moved from a maximum-security to a minimum-security prison, which never houses such serious offenders. Allegedly, she also has been given all sorts of special privileges in "Club Fed," which are not extended to other prisoners. Democrats and other critics charge that Bondi serves as the president's personal lawyer rather than as defender of rule of law and the Constitution. They claim that she loyally fulfills Trump's demands for retribution against his enemies. Trump claims this retribution is justified and that more prosecutions like these will proceed regardless of the chances of conviction. Even when unsuccessful, prosecution is often very costly financially to those charged and can seriously damage their reputation. Moving forward with cases with insufficient evidence of wrongdoing or "finding a crime to fit the person" are serious violations of judicial ethics that undercut rule of law. Bondi has delivered the punishing payback to MAGA enemies desired by Trump.

Pundits have been bemused by Trump's unwillingness to say whether he would or would not commute the sentence of Maxwell. However, this *may* be for the president an instrumental decision about timing and the potential political response rather than of the seriousness of the crimes she committed. On day one, he gave a blanket pardon to about 1600 people imprisoned or awaiting trial or sentencing for their actions in the January 6th insurrection at the Capitol and later pardoned top allies who conspired or were implicated in efforts to steal the 2020 presidential election. For the president, the of practice of justice seems to be motivated by Schmittian friend-enemy politics rather than rule of law.

Culture Wars: Making the U.S. a White Christian Fortress

The anti-pluralist, anti-DEI policies pertaining to race and ethnicity have also been applied to family and sexuality by the *Mandate.* It supports and recommends that state power be employed in support of the patriarchal family and heterosexual relations and to reduce protections for LGBTQ+ people and women. David Graham (2025: 45-46) holds that these muscular masculine beliefs and intolerance of nonconforming gender identities manifest the influence of White Christian Nationalism on Project 2025 and the MAGA movement. He says these beliefs are the "heart of their agenda" because they are "deeply felt" and have major impacts on everyday life. Emphatically opposed to abortion, the *Mandate*recommends using the 1873 Comstock Act to prohibit abortion drugs from being sent by mail, advises funds for Planned Parenthood be slashed, calls for abstinence-only sexual education, and attacks transexual rights and gender affirming care for young people. It advocates recognizing exclusively biological sexuality (i.e., two sexes) and eliminating the conception of gender (i.e. gender ideology") and protections for nonconforming gender identities. The *Mandate* affirms Christian fundamentalism's narrowly scripted, immutable, hierarchical gender roles (i.e., the dominant male and submissive female binary).

Trump issued a sweeping executive order on day one asserting that there are only two sexes, demanding that "gender ideology" be erased, forbidding federal officials from uttering the word gender, rescinding all policies, communications, and rules concerning gender identity,

and eliminating Title IX protections for women and LGBTQ+ people. A later Trump executive order provided federal penalties for schools or colleges that allow transexual females to participate in women's sports. The *Mandate* recommendations and executive orders about these matters have been consequential. For example, Texas A&M fired a lecturer after a viral video showed a student challenging her views about multiple gender identities. A faculty committee later ruled that the firing was unjustified and reinstated her, but the Texas A&M Board of Regents held that all courses on the twelve campuses in their system that advocate "racial or gender ideology" are banned unless they are approved by the campus president. Also, the Supreme Court upheld the Trump Administration order that biological sex must be listed on passports, and some red states required it be used on drivers' licenses, birth certificates, and other official documents. Republican run states also passed laws that restrict bathroom use to sex assigned at birth. An early second term Trump executive order required transexual criminals be incarcerated in federal prisons consistent with their biological sex. Also, the culture war motivated a transexual ban in the military and inspired removal woman in military leadership roles.

Immigration has been a major front in the cultural war aimed to make the U.S. white and Christian again. The *Mandate* recommends mass deportation, aggressive surveillance, intimidation, and apprehension of "illegal aliens," and "full use of expedited removal." It suggests using Blackie's warrants to search work sites for undocumented people, anddemands their incarceration, expansion of detention centers, and usage of tents if more beds are needed. It calls for rescinding limits on enforcing immigration laws and provides Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) wide discretion and power to execute these aims. The *Mandate* not only calls for deporting millions of undocumented immigrants but also advises sharply reducing legal immigration via diverse measures. It closes or makes harder almost every route to attaining legal status to remain in the U.S. For example, the *Mandate* suggests winding down H2-A and H2-B work visas, eliminating T and U visas for survivors of trafficking, crime, and physical abuse (it declares victimization should not be a rationale for immigration benefits). It calls for reducing student visas and terminating them for students from enemy nations. The *Mandate* recommends limiting sharply parole or temporary permission for noncitizens to remain in the U.S. for humanitarian reasons, eliminating temporary protected status, terminating legal status of dreamers, limiting work authorizations, increasing fees across the board for legal immigration applications and related paperwork (e.g., citizenship applications, spousal accommodation, Asylum related fees). The *Mandate* also suggests generating planned backlogs to justify "pausing" or reducing applications for legal immigration.

The president issued a day-one executive order to restrict immigration, which declared a national emergency at the southern border, advocated expedited removal of undocumented immigrants, called for an end of chain migration, and even attempted to end the Constitutional right to birthright citizenship. He also ordered enforcement of immigration laws virtually everywhere, including in "sensitive zones" (e.g., schools, places of worship, health care facilities, food banks), which had been previously restricted to protect vulnerable adults and children. He implemented most of the *Mandate's*draconian immigration recommendations and even exceeded their expected harshness. The brutality of masked ICE agents in the streets,

workplaces, “sensitive zones,” courthouses, and even offices where immigrants go for interviews or complete paperwork to remain legally in the country. The racial profiling, incarcerating of American citizens, blocking oversight and inspection of detention centers, withholding information from families of the whereabouts and condition of their incarcerated relatives, expediting removal of immigrants without due process, deporting immigrants to places other than their countries of origin, and telling transparent lies that ICE apprehends almost exclusively dangerous criminals or “worst-of-the-worst” while federal data demonstrates that fewer than 40 percent have had criminal convictions and of these about 8 percent committed violent crimes while 9 percent had traffic violations (Nehamas et al., 2025).

One of the cruelest Trump Administration moves sent more than two hundred Venezuelans to El Salvadore’s notorious CECOT prison where they were beaten and sexually abused. The intensive operations and brutal methods of ICE, employment of national guard (allegedly to reduce crime) in Democratic run cities, and overall climate of militarization have helped animate widespread charges of fascism even in mainstream media and numerous protests in many cities and towns nationwide (including the massive “No Kings” protests). Symbolizing Trump’s approach to legal immigration, the president signed a proclamation to raise fees for most H1-B visas from a maximum of $5000 to a $100,000 while he issued an executive order to create a golden green card, which foreign nationals could purchase for $5 million to attain a fast lane to legal U.S. residency without the usual long queues, bureaucratic hassles, and red tape.

The Trumpist Economic, Military, and Environmental Gulag

The *Mandate* calls for balancing the budget by decreasing federal spending – reducing tax brackets to two, cutting taxes of the wealthy, lowering corporate taxes, and overall seeking a flat tax favoring the rich and making poor pay more. The *Mandate* proposes cutting antipoverty programs and restricting eligibility and creating stricter requirements for them. It recommends deep cuts in the supplemental nutrition plan (SNAP), an antihunger program for 42 million people living on the margin. It suggested reducing funding and benefits, increasing work requirements, and limiting eligibility. The *Mandate* calls for Medicaid cuts, increased work requirements for beneficiaries, and caps in benefits and privatization of Medicare.

The Republican One Big Beautiful Bill Act passed in July provided roughly $4 trillion in tax cuts, which benefit especially the wealthy and ultrarich billionaire class, and cuts Medicaid and Medicare to pay for it. The bill made the greatest cut ever in SNAP. During the government shutdown, Trump used SNAP cuts as leverage in the battle with Democrats – he refused to tap its emergency fund, which is legally required to be used if regular sources of support for the program are unavailable or insufficient to meet recipient needs. When the courts required the funds to be used, Trump said he would provide only half benefits to recipients. When federal courts affirmed that the legal benefits had to be extended, Trump took the matter to the Supreme Court even though the shutdown was about to end. While holding back support for low wage workers and the poor, he found funds for his ballroom, payment of the military, and a $20 billion loan to Argentina to keep its Trumpist leader, Javier Milei, who was behind in the

polls for an upcoming election, in power. Manifesting Trump's America First ideology and his approach to the poor, the president shut down the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), which could cause an estimated thirteen million children to lose access to education and ninety-five million people to lose health care (Oxfam America, 2025). USAID had provided basic support to some of the world's poorest people, and increased the international influence of the U.S.

Trump's Big Beautiful Tax bill provides a windfall for the ultrawealthy – while the top 0.1 earners will get a $286,940 tax cut, the lower 20 percent will get a $150 and the second quintile $750 (Mattson, 2025). The lower two quintiles will also likely suffer more than higher brackets from the health care and other social protection cuts. Moreover, Treasury and the Internal Revenue Service have been giving tax breaks via nontransparent rule changes to crypto, real estate, insurance industries, and other large companies and multinationals. The Trump Administration is gutting the "corporate alternative minimum tax" instituted by Biden to ensure that big corporations reporting high profits to stockholders and low liabilities to the IRS do not escape taxation (It was supposed to collect over $200 billion in taxes over the next decade). The Trump Administration rolled back Internal Revenue Service scrutiny of aggressive corporate tax shelters and granted big tax breaks to foreign investors in U.S. real estate (Drucker, 2025). The unlegislated tax favors for the ultrawealthy parallel the exceptional corruption of Trump and his family using the presidency to enrich themselves and their friends (Warren, 2025). He exploited the presidency for self-enrichment more than any of his predecessors – having government pay for regular trips to Mar-a-Lago and his golf courses, accepting large gifts from foreign governments, enriching his family businesses, and demanding $230 million compensation from his own DOJ for the many investigations and efforts to impeach him during his first term. Trump has used his presidency to become a cryptocurrency billionaire – he eliminated multiple layers of financial safeguards, pardoned crypto's richest man Changpeng Zhao, and received help from industry insiders for favors (Alexander, 2025).

The *Mandate* recommends reducing U.S. participation in international organizations such as the U.N. and Nato; it advises Europe to take much greater responsibility for its security. It calls for the U.S. to adopt America First Isolationism and protectionism rather than globalist internationalism. The *Mandate* treats Russia and especially China as security threats and enemies. However, Trump openly admires their leaders and other strongman heads of state. He promised to end the Russia-Ukraine War at the start of his second term, but he has yet to press his friend Putin with severe economic sanctions or provide Ukraine with the advanced military technologies they have asked for. He proposed a twenty-eight-point plan, drafted by Putin's special envoy Kirill Dmitriev and Steve Wikoff, which made no major concessions to Ukraine, required big losses of land, and other measures intended to keep the nation weak and subordinate to Russia. Trump demanded that Zelensky accept the deal almost immediately or risk loss of further American support. Trump's intervention in Iran and Venezuela, and threats to use force to take back the Panama Canal, take Greenland, make Canada the fifty-first state, defend Christians in Nigeria, defend white farmers in South Africa, institute regime change in Venezuela, and sink drug boats without due process are not mentioned in the *Mandate* and

contradict his isolationist America First agenda.

The *Mandate* advocated that the U.S. pursue an "energy dominance agenda" based on expanded drilling, domestic usage, and export of fossil fuels and removing all Biden subsidies for renewable energy sources, green technologies, and electronic vehicles (EVs). The *Mandate* proposals on the environment are too extensive and varied to be elaborated here (for concise summing see Graham, 2025: 105-119; Antonio, 2024; 2025). However, in the first ten months of Trump's second term, he made eviscerating environmental regulation a major thrust of his policy regime and addressed many of the themes stressed in the *Mandate.* On day one, he declared a national energy emergency to expedite fossil fuel extraction and production; withdrew the U.S. from the Paris Agreement; eliminated EV subsidies; called for review of auto milage and appliance standards; rescinded 75 Biden era executive orders about environmental justice, sustainability, and climate change; curtailed future offshore wind leasing projects; considered reversal of Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) warnings about greenhouse gases, and proposed holding back unspent climate funds of the Inflation Reduction Act and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

The Trump Administration later planned for resumption of extensive coastal oil drilling off the Florida and California coasts; opened the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and Gas Drilling; cancelled billions of dollars in grants for clean energy projects; and weakened the Endangered Species Act. The Department of Energy banned usage of climate change related words and released a bogus report denying climate change. The Interior Department weakened search and development standards for offshore mineral extraction, rolled back mining standards, expanded mining areas, and proposed removing coal mining standards. The EPA removed standards on Carbon Pollution from power plants for mercury and other air toxins and proposed stripping wetlands of protection. Trump appointed heads of the EPA, Department of Interior, and Energy Department who are avid supporters of fossil fuel extraction and use and deny or underplay anthropogenic climate change. There are many more facets to his massive anti-environmental, energy dominance agenda that go beyond the ones mentioned here.

Calling climate change "the greatest con job ever perpetuated" and "green scam," Trump claimed that the predictions by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and scientific organizations have been all wrong – the product of "stupid people" who have damaged the economy. Although, the U.N. now holds that solar and wind are usually the cheapest and fastest means for increasing electricity generation, Trump asserts that such renewables are "pathetic" or too weak, expensive, and ineffective (Walling & Borenstein, 2025). He made major budget cuts, workforce reductions, and eliminated the climate change research arms of National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Climate disasters in first half of this year have been the costliest ever in the U.S (Millman, 2025). Deaths in poor countries are expected to rise sharply due to Trump's increase in fossil fuel production and usage and abandonment of efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. A *Nature* survey of 233 *IPCC* scientists found that over 60 percent believe that global atmospheric temperatures will rise a disastrous three degrees Celsius or more by the end of

century (Tollefson: 2023). Earth system scientists hold that seven of eight Earth system boundaries have been crossed and increase substantially the risk of ecological catastrophe (Rockström et al., 2023). Over the next decade Trump's climate policies could lead to 1.3 million related fatalities (Lerner, 2025).

The Existential Crisis: Democracy or Autocracy

"post-truth is pre-fascism" – Timothy Snyder

Snyder (2017) adds that, "Fascism says disregard the evidence of your senses, disregard observation, embolden deeds that can't be proven," which cultivate blind obedience to autocrats and affirm their mythologies. He holds that truth-telling underpins rule of law and democracy. Trump's anti-science, postfactual style suppresses, diminishes, or denies findings of systematic scientific inquiry that call for increased regulation or otherwise interfere with his policy trajectories. Transparent disregard for facts and truthfulness suffuse his rambling speeches. His base believes what he says or sees it as authentic expression – i.e., "Trump-being-Trump." Moreover, the president berates reporters who dare question even his most outrageous claims in his speeches. Snyder is right that Trump's postfactual ways corrode the guardrails protecting rule of law and democracy and thus opens possibilities for authoritarian rule.

Pervasive falsity and autocratic tendencies also can inspire a powerful democratic backlash, especially if the strong man has not yet imposed military rule. A regime that depends on loyalty of its top appointees absent competence has a fragility that can result in a sudden tipping point or even a regime collapse. Blind faith in the strong man can wane quickly in response to severe economic problems, excessive sociopolitical overreach, or terrible statecraft. Diverse conditions exerted enormous stress on MAGA rule this fall – e.g., inflation, unaffordability, Medicare and Medicaid cuts, business uncertainty from Tariffs, brutal ICE actions, splits between openly racist, anti-Semitic, neofascist hard right factions (e.g., Nick Fuentes) and the less radical MAGA majority, massive No King's rallies, Trump's plunging poll numbers, and Democratic Party victories in the off-year elections.

Facing defections of MAGA supporters and possible loss in a congressional vote on opening the Epstein files to the public, Trump suddenly ended his dire opposition to the move and and told Republicans to vote to open them. This "emperor has no clothes" moment suddenly demonstrated unanticipated weakness. Shortly after, avid MAGA and Trump supporter, Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene declared she would soon resign her position after the president called her a traitor for supporting opening of the Epstein files, and a surprisingly cordial meeting with democratic socialist Zohran Mandani further confused and divided MAGA supporters. Moreover, six military veteran Democratic lawmakers asserted that armed forces personnel should not follow illegal orders, raising questions about Trump's using the military in U.S. cities and sinking alleged drug running boats without certainty that only so-called narco-terrorists were aboard and absent due process for them. The issue of illegal orders also likely provided a chilling reminder that when Democrats return to power Trump, his appointees, and

diehard MAGA supporters would face serious punishment if they used the military to intimidate urban voters in next year's elections, attempted another authoritarian coup to keep Trump in power, or committed other serious violations of rule of law. A few weeks earlier, pundits debated the possibility of Trump seeking a third term or employing the military to avert relinquishing his position now discussed his possible relegation to lame duck status (Hulse, 2025).

Trump is a mercurial leader who may change course, and mid-term elections are a long way off so that it is premature to judge how the current fracturing of the MAGA movement will culminate. Whatever Trump's political fate, his appropriation of concentrated executive power opened way for the illiberal New Right to attain political voice and legitimacy. Vice President Vance, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, and many other Trump appointees and confidants embrace National Conservatism, which advocates hierarchical authority and inegalitarian rule. Virulently anti-liberal, anti-pluralist Integralist, intellectuals Patrick Deneen, Notre Dame political theorist, and Adrian Vermeule, Harvard law professor advocate instituting top-down hierarchical authority, legislating Christian morality and reversing the trend toward individual moral autonomy. They have enthusiastic support among younger, radical New Right followers, who often have elite academic credentials and confidence that they can overturn liberal democracy and its permissive culture. Vermeule's advocacy of natural law frees legal interpretation from the Constitution and aims to revolutionize the sociocultural totality not merely the political order. The right-wing Catholic majority dominating the Supreme Court, who often employ the shadow docket and no longer consistently justify their many decisions supporting Trump and executive power via originalist explanation, *may* be trending toward already in Vermeule's direction. The reactionary tendencies of these far-right Catholics have affinity for the larger U.S. political tent of Christian nationalism.

There are multiple vibrant New Right intellectuals and organizations seeking power in the U.S. (see Field, 2025 for a mapping). A more politically sophisticated New Right could succeed Trump, whom they always viewed as flawed and have supported mostly for instrumental reasons. As Timothy Synder asserts today and John Dewey warned in the Great Depression era global hard-right populist surge – to survive the autocratic populist threats democracy must be stronger, more egalitarian, and more participatory in civil society as well as in public administration and social protection, and not limited exclusively to electoral politics. That will likely remain the democratic challenge after Trumpism.

References

Alexander, D. (2025, November 25). *Forbes.* Trump's crypto cronies: they sent the president money – and got off easy. Retrieved from https://www.forbes.com/sites/danalexander/2025/11/25/trumps-crypto-cronies-they-sent-the-president-money-and-got-off-easy/

Antonio, R. J. (2025). Project 2025 environmental policy: postfactual ecocatastrophe". *Current Perspectives in Social Theory*: The Future of Agency. Volume 41:

237-256. https://doi.org/10.1108/S0278-120420250000041012

Antonio, R.J. (2024) Project 2025: Trumpism and the new conservatism." *Logos: A Journal of Modern Society and Culture.* Volume 23, Nu. 3.{2024). Retrieved from https://logosjournal.com/

Basu, Z. & Davis, E. (2024. December 26). Trump's first day frenzy. Everything he promised to do on "day one." *Axios.* Retrieved from https://www.axios.com/2024/12/26/trump-first-day-executive-orders

Dans P. & Groves, S. (Eds.). (2023). *Mandate for leadership*. Heritage Foundation. Retrieved from https://static.heritage.org/project2025/2025_MandateForLeadership_FULL.pdf

Drucker, J. (2025. November 8). How the Trump Administration is giving even more tax breaks to the wealthy. *New York Times.* Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/08/business/trump-administration-tax-breaks-wealthy.html

Editorial Board. (2025. October 25). In defense of the White House Ballroom. *Washington Post.* Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2025/10/25/ballroom-east-wing-trump-white-house/

Field, L. K. (2025). *Furious Minds*. Princeton N.J. Princeton University Press.

Graham, D.A. (2025). *The Project.* New York: Random House.

Hulse, C. (2025. November 20). Congressional Republicans begin to lo look beyond Trump. *New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/20/us/politics/congressional-republicans-trump-midterms.html

Lerner, S. (2025, November 19). Trump's anti-green agenda could lead to more than 1.3 million more deaths. The poorest nations will be impacted most. *ProPublica.* Retrieved from https://www.propublica.org/article/trump-climate-rollbacks-heat-deaths

Mattson, J. (2025. July 21). Here's exactly how much you'll save on your 2026 taxes, by income bracket: Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill benefits. *Fast Company*. Retrieved fromhttps://www.fastcompany.com/91371700/2026-taxes-exactly-how-much-youll-save-by-income-bracket-trump-big-beautiful-b

Milman, O. (2025. October 22). Climate disasters in the first half of 2025 costliest ever on record, research shows. *Guardian.* Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/oct/22/climate-disasters-2025-cost

Nehamas, N., Keller, M.H., Berzon, A. Aleaziz, H. & Kanno-Youngs, Z. (2025. November 16). Homeland Security missions falter amid focus on deportations. *New York Times*. Retrieved

from the https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/16/us/politics/dhs-agents-reassigned.html#:~:text=In%20fact%2C%20federal%20data%20shows,traffic%20conviction%2C%20the%20analysis%20found

Oxfam America. (2025, November 6). What USAID did, and the effects of Trump's cuts on lifesaving aid. Retrieved from https://www.oxfamamerica.org/explore/issues/making-foreign-aid-work/what-do-trumps-proposed-foreign-aid-cuts-mean/

Rockström, J. et al. (2023, May 31). Safe and just Earth system boundaries. *Nature.* Retrieved from https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-023-06083-8

Synder, T. (2017. March 9). "Post-truth is pre-fascism." A Holocaust historian on the Trump era. *Vox*. Retrieved at https://www.vox.com/conversations/2017/3/9/14838088/donald-trump-fascism-europe-history-totalitarianism-post-truth

Stein, P. (2025. November 10). Justice Department struggles as thousands exit – and few are replaced. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2025/11/10/justice-department-hiring-stalled/

Tollefson, J. (2021. November 1). Top climate scientists are sceptical that nations will rein in global warming. *Nature. Retrieved from https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-02990-w*

Warren, E. (2025. April 30). ICYMI: Waren reads 100 acts of Trump corruption into congressional record to mark 100 days of Trump Administration. Newsroom Press Release. Retrieved from U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren | ICYMI: Warren Reads 100 A...

Walling, M. & Borenstein, S. (2025. September 25). Trump called climate change a 'con job' at the United Nations. Here are the facts and context. *PBS.* Retrieved from https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/trump-called-climate-change-a-con-job-at-the-united-nations-here-are-the-facts-and-context

Domination and Chaos: India’s Radical Conservatism

By | 2026: Vol. 25, No. 1

Ideology is the most devilish variation of the lie – Hannah Arendt

To speak of reaction is to counterpose it with progress. This terminology is not helpful. Stable issues of political life, such as legitimate authority, justice, transparent government, clarity on the means vs ends problem; along with issues of character such as fair-mindedness; respect for difference; and empathy for the suffering – are denuded of their perennial nature and placed on a temporal plane. *Progress* implies that History with a capital H is going somewhere, and things improve with time. *Reaction* is the force which resists History.

But is this an accurate depiction of human experience? How should we understand the recurrent attempts to overcome history, either by ceremonial re-enactments of the final victory of good over evil; or by ideological performances in real time wherein the living are punished for the crimes of the dead?

Let us approach this issue with a definition: conservatism is the belief that things could get worse; progressivism the belief that things can get better. A conundrum arises: those

conservatives who decry the destructive aspects of modern society and seek to reverse these via cultural and political activity are progressives; and those progressives who wish to return to a real or imaginary moment of the not-too-distant past (in India's case, say, the Nehruvian era) – are conservatives. *Radicalism* also acquires an ambiguous tint when applied to such practices.

There is nothing conservative about contemporary right-wing politics in India. What is unfolding is an assault on tradition in the name of preserving it; combined with de-regulated capitalism, and the use of state power to benefit corporate interests. This is not extraordinary: the past century witnessed numerous instances of the embrace of democracy by social forces which had been hostile to the very idea of governance based on popular consent. In his book *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* (1923), Carl Schmitt (not yet a Nazi) claimed that acclamation was superior to voting procedures, and that Italian fascism and Bolshevism 'were certainly anti-liberal but not necessarily antidemocratic.'

Within a few years after the Great War a new phenomenon had appeared, a pseudo-democratic politics which tapped into authoritarian populist impulses including antisemitism, militarism and the yearning for charismatic leaders who could offer a way out of uncertainty. Thus began the era of right-wing populism.

The Wider Landscape

Confining our discussion to nation-states as they appear now would be a mistake. This is not only because these states are successors to an empire within which questions of social reform, religious conflict and nationalism first arose; but also because political relations between these states – and events within them – are the matrix within which we may discuss conservatism, reaction, ideology, and justice.

The simplest way to observe this is the movement of displaced populations, and the crises

caused by political upheavals such as the partition of India and the civil wars which have taken place in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar and Sri Lanka over the past decades. Prolonged insurgencies have taken place in India's border regions as well as in the interior: the latter are Maoist-led tribal movements. All such events have an impact not only on the internal politics of the respective countries; but also on neighbouring states. Matters of security become dominant in political discourse, and given the prime role of identity, more often than not these are framed in communal language.

The state uses such situations to increase its powers, and neutralise the judiciary and criminal justice system. The dominant position of the military in national affairs can be seen evolving in Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Pakistan even as I write these lines. All countries of the region have witnessed murders of political figures, not to mention instances of mass violence – political assassinations of humble people. The carnage of Sikh citizens in Delhi (in the aftermath of Mrs Gandhi's assassination) in early November 1984; and the Gujarat massacre in 2002 are just two grisly examples. What is noteworthy is that the criminal justice system has proven incapable of protecting innocent citizens. This begs the question: why?

It is only in light of these phenomena that we can begin to understand the nature of so-called reactionary politics in India and South Asia. Claims to legitimacy are often connected to divine authority, but tangentially. These politics are not conservative, and if they are reactionary, that is so only in a qualified manner. What is unfolding is militarist nationalism verging on state-worship, a totalitarian politics. Education, justice, policing and administration – financial or otherwise – are being subjugated by ideological loyalty, and even the pretence of an impartial state is being eroded in full light of day.

It is the tyranny, less of persons than of ideologies.

Purification: the precursor to cultural homogeneity

Indian culture is marked by festivals, pilgrimages, days consecrated to revered personages etc. These cut across religious boundaries and can attract members of many communities. They also involve music, feasting and ceremonials, the paraphernalia of which are provided again, by different communities. Such ceremonials could be interpreted as the erasure of historical time in favour of something perennial. Historically, the attempt to 'purify' belief has been led by reformers among the intelligentsia. On this canvas, those who sought, or seek to preserve the inclusive features of tradition are conservatives; and those who wish to replace syncretic practices with sharp lines of separation see themselves as progressives working toward an ethos of homogeneity.

The matter provokes several questions, What part of tradition is sought to be altered or preserved; who launches such programmes and why; and by what standards may we judge the norms for which people fight? Is the rectification of the past the preserve of so-called right-wing reactionary politics; and the longing for total revolution the defining element solely of left-wing politics? I think not.

Leaving aside the fact that *revolution* means the completion of a circle; a return to a pristine starting point; the problem with this rule of thumb is that these ideological characteristics are often exchanged across political boundaries. As George Orwell put it, *who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past*. Leftists also rectify history; and rightists also yearn for a utopian future. The totalitarian regimes of the past century represented themselves as socialist, but they also functioned as tyrannies.

The inner tensions of Indian nationalism

Radicalised conservatism in India can be called reactionary only with caveats. An academic sympathetic to the ruling party has dubbed the assassination of Gandhi a 'gatecrashing into modernity'. A book explicating the German version of this phenomenon is titled *Reactionary Modernism*. This is an alternative modernity; and it is democracy that it is reacting to. The section on reactionary socialism in the Communist Manifesto provides a clue. This can first appear as an opposition to capitalism; but it is capable of embracing capitalism on its own terms.

It is an unwarranted assumption that modernity possesses unalloyed democratic features: to the contrary, it is a blend of domination and chaos. Its global nature always sat uneasily with democracy and nationalism. This is visible in the fusion of archaic elements with technological progress. This is why Bukharin compared Stalinist modernisation to the methods of the pharaohs; and why in 1938, Freud opined: *We live in very remarkable times. We find with astonishment that progress has concluded an alliance with barbarism*.

These features are as true of the post-colonial world as they are of the West. In India *communalism* became the name for ideological movements that sought to mobilise entire communities as nations. Such a definition – as opposed to territorial nationalism, wherein people embark on defining a new form of social friendship over and beyond religion and caste – is fraught with divisiveness. Here, I shall keep the focus on communalism, the Hindu variant of which goes by the name of *Hindutva,* a term invented by its political patron Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, a prime accused in the Gandhi assassination case. (Hindu nationalism includes moderate currents, and is not historically equivalent to *Hindutva*). Muslim nationalism was the politics which led to the foundation of Pakistan. Characteristic features of communal ideologies include monarchical nostalgia; dreams of rectifying history; returning to a mythic golden age, and the glorification of a warrior ethos manifested in the militarisation of civil society, leading to its decline as an autonomous social phenomenon.

When communal movements claiming to speak for the Nation capture power, such a state proceeds to dismantle the nation. (The relationship of religion to communal ideology is akin to that between Judaism and Zionism). This process began during the decline of the British empire, and continued in its successor states after World War 2. It is a record of prolonged civil war; and a continuous evocation of the danger of internal enemies: a self-fulfilling prophesy.

Every time there is an Indian election, at the provincial or central level, the ruling political

party conducts its propaganda – among more immediate matters – in terms of a battle with the Mughal dynasty (dead for three centuries); and Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, who died in 1964. Sub-historical propaganda is also focused on local heroes: this is why elections which could be over in days are extended over several weeks, to enable the rulers to micro-manage their messaging, much of which is done via smartphones. All this requires a pliant Election Commission, which omits (selectively) to enforce the code of conduct for elections. This leads to an embittered political atmosphere.

The determination of the ruling dispensation to transform itself into a permanent authoritarian bloc is accompanied by measures which are tantamount to creating an atmospherics of permanent civil war. This cannot remain a mere performance, we have seen several outbreaks of mob or vigilante violence. The thrust toward homogeneity and so-called national integration leads inexorably to its opposite. The longer this carries on, the closer the polity inches towards disintegration.

Rule of law or rule of ideology?

The most ominous feature of Indian politics is the subjugation of justice. Here is an instructive observation about the early successes of Nazism:

> (The counter revolution) tried many forms and devices, but soon learned that it could come to power only with the help of the state machine and never against it… the Kapp Putsch of 1920 and the Hitler Putsch of 1923 had proved this… **In the centre of the counter revolution stood the judiciary…** Law is perhaps the most pernicious of all weapons in political struggles precisely because of the halo that surrounds the concepts of right and justice' (emphasis added).

The judiciary has become increasingly pliable, with disturbing judgments and unconscionable delays. As a background to this, we should consider the highly controversial death of Judge Brijgopal Harkishan (1966-2014) who was presiding over a case concerning the extra-judicial deaths of alleged terrorists in Gujarat. A high-level politician was implicated in the affair. The judge was intimidated via several phone calls and the withdrawal of his security detail. He was a healthy man, but was found dead in a rail compartment in 2014. He had physical wounds, but was pronounced dead of a heart attack in a highly dubious manner. Two of three close friends to whom he had confided about the threats also died, one barely escaped an 'accident'. A new judge disposed of it in three days. An extensive investigation was conducted by an intrepid journalist, whose findings were published in a magazine. His book disappeared from circulation.

There are many similar cases, including lynching; custodial deaths, disappearance of crucial evidence in criminal cases involving political allies of the ruling party; the deployment of financial investigative agencies as levers of political pressure, etc. Related to financial matters are the massive loans owed by India's leading corporations to public sector banks; many of which now deemed unrecoverable. (See the article on Indian Big Business, reference to which

is given below. Further information on human rights in contemporary India may be found on the website of the Peoples Union for Democratic Rights).

Ingrained tradition, autocratic practices, indiscriminate accusations of seditious intent directed at critics of the ruling party, ideological influence upon the bureaucracy – all these manifest the erosion of secular democracy by absolutism. A glaring instance of this is the assault on education: every year, hundreds of thousands of Indian students migrate to foreign countries for higher education. The number currently studying abroad is estimated to be 1.8 million, up half a million from last year. This is because an over-burdened educational system is now under the grip of an ideological tyranny that uses political power to fill teaching posts with political allies, and censor academic debate. The most recent example of this is the cancellation of a seminar on land rights at the Delhi School of Economics; obliging its convenor to resign in protest.

Our liberties are now at the mercy of a self-appointed imperium.

What has gathered speed over the past four decades is the criminalisation of the state. This is true for all the successor states of the former empire (and Nepal): Pakistan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, combined with recurrent bouts of mass violence in Bangladesh and India. The tendency on the part of certain contenders for power to encourage polemical religiosity has resulted in the migration of radical sentiment into polarised pseudo-religious camps. Equally dangerous is the habit of severe repression of civic protest. India's current dispensation has taken to embroiling activists under a preventive detention statute. Dissent is being criminalised: the latest is police action against citizens of Delhi protesting the high levels of pollution in the city.

Violence as virtue

Violence in our polity is a serious issue. Not only because much of it is sanctioned by ideology, and ideology masquerading as religious belief; but because it functions as a lever of power. Communal and caste-related outbursts of violence are losing their spontaneity. Controlled mobs and politically affiliated vigilante groups are taking their place.

The RSS (whose name translates as National Volunteers), parent body of the governing party, exercises increasing control over course content in central educational institutions and those in BJP ruled states. Ideological historiography communalises the identities of victims and aggressors; and seeks to portray one side as wholly evil and the other as wholly innocent. Propaganda is now spread by high functionaries, with the Prime Minister's recent exhortation to 'remember the horrors of Partition' – advice rendered into an instruction for officially-run educational institutions. There was indeed a tidal wave of mass violence in the years 1947-1948, with about 14 million persons displaced from their domiciles and forced to migrate; and about 800,000 victims of violent death. These numbers included Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims – there is no evidence that 'one side' dominated the other. But it is remarkable that the Prime Minister should ask us to remember – as if we had forgotten.

Militarism and martyrdom are pronounced elements of state propaganda, and often highlighted

in election campaigns. The hostility to Mahatma Gandhi on the part of the Maoist Left and the radical Right (the dominant faction of the latter, let it be clear, is ruling the country), is aimed at his principled opposition to violence as a political weapon; and his concept of *satyagraha*; which means 'holding fast to truth.' Truth and non-violence are not exactly the highest ideals of those obsessed with the ideological subjugation of the polity.

The ultra-nationalist ambience of politics has accentuated pre-existing fault-lines in society. These ideas have become crucial to the project of cementing control of the state. Human beings are now seen as biomass for the mindless momentum of the state machine. We inhabit a living example of Orwell's dystopia from *1984*: by becoming permanent, war has been abolished. As Mobarak Haider, in his article A Society at War with Itself writes: *War is a tragedy but a society at war with itself and everything around, with no objective and no remorse is more than a tragedy; it is a total disaster. Our society… is at war with itself and the world, with other religions and its own religious diversity. It is in a state of schizophrenia passing into paranoia. The roots of this mindset lie in our narcissism, in our self image of righteousness*. (Dawn, January 29, 2013). This was a comment about Pakistan, but is applicable to other countries in South Asia. We define ourselves by enmity.

Criteria of political judgment

We need to revisit the defining elements of a politics of the labouring poor and oppressed populations. Such a politics would include a separation of powers as opposed to a singular pole of state authority; an independent judiciary coupled with autonomy of prosecution; the presumption of innocence until proof of guilt; proscription of preventive detention without trial; an autonomous election commission; freedom of the press, conscience and worship; of public protest and mobilisation; autonomous trades unions; and all those liberties which used to be undisputed features of democratic politics in its struggle against absolutism.

The reality which we have confronted for decades is a gradual degradation of the above features. Our cultural nationalists – always ready to berate Macaulay's proposal of 1834 to anglicise Indian education – do not recall that preventive detention in India began with Regulation III of 1818, around the same time as imprisonment without trial was introduced in Britain; *and has continued on the statute books under altered names, until this day.* It is now called the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA).

This degradation has deep social and traditional roots. Given the severe turmoil of the 1920's, the stresses of the national movement produced often intractable political divisions – this was abetted by a retreating empire embroiled in global war. Communal conflict in the 1920's was described by some observers as incipient civil war; thereafter northern India from east to west was engulfed in waves of mass violence from the Calcutta Killing of 1946 onwards, which did not abate until after Gandhi's assassination in January 1948.

Despite these difficult circumstances, India's ethical resources remained rooted in syncretic culture, nostalgia for heritage sites and ordinary human decency. But a destructive dynamism

has taken domestic politics in its grip; a politics which grasps the potential of violence in word and deed as being the simplest route to power. In brief, Indian political culture could draw on a varied provenance; but became increasingly inclined toward the more vicious one. Mass violence, combined with erosion of criminal justice on the one hand, and the curtailment of humane impulses on the other have undermined the integrity of civil society. In such a situation, there is no single camp of reaction; and even categories of Right and Left need to be rethought and recreated; before they lose all relevance.

Resistance

The years since 2013 have seen nation-wide mass protests such as the one against the Citizenship Amendment Act (2019) that lasted for five months before being brutally suppressed, and the united peasants movement against the Farm Laws, that lasted an entire year, from the winter of 2020 till late 2021. The government painted both as anti-national conspiracies, and attempted – as it usually does – to bring in a communal tinge. This was especially marked in the case of the CAA bill, that sought to exclude Muslim asylum-seekers; and seemed to undermine the secular provisions of the Indian Constitution. Many persons are still under trial for their involvement in this movement.

The Farm Laws were ultimately withdrawn, in a great victory for India's peasants (now renamed 'farmers' by the media and officialdom). Over 700 members of peasant families perished for various reasons during the year-long sit-in; the longest *satyagraha* in Independent India. There have also been successful agitations against Special Economic Zones, which were designed to bypass labour laws. However, the vindictive repression adopted by the government makes it clear that only large-scale mass resistance can keep despotism at bay.

Conclusion

Political stability in South Asia is a chimera. Structure and ideology have fused together in a nihilist dynamic whose only purpose is self-aggrandisement on the part of various power-hungry sociopaths. The result is systemic implosion. It would be futile to predict where this will lead, but the tendency is clear enough: it is a process which tends towards the disappearance of civil society and its absorption by the state. Such a culmination is not inevitable. However, the only conceivable counter to it remains what it has been throughout the twentieth century: social-democratic resistance to militarism and absolutism, transcending national and religious boundaries.

Further reading

Anubha Bhonsle; Mother, *Where's My Country? Looking for Light in the Darkness of Manipur*; 2016

Dilip Simeon; A Brief History of Indian Fascism; in Jairus Banaji, (ed); *Fascism: essays on*

Europe and India; 2013

Dilip Simeon; The Broken Middle (2014)

The Lady Vanishes – a comment on justice and ideology in the 20th century

H. S. Phoolka & Manoj Mitta; *When a Tree Shook Delhi: The 1984 Carnage and Its Aftermath;* 2007

Jairus Banaji; Indian Big Business: The evolution of India's corporate sector from 2000 to 2020. *Phenomenal World*, December 20, 2022

Kishalay Bhattacharjee; *Blood on My Hands: Confessions of Staged Encounters;* 2015

Manoj Mitta; *Modi and Godhra – The Fiction of Fact Finding;* 2014

Niranjan Takle; *Who Killed Justice Loya;* 2022

Peoples Union for Democratic Rights, Delhi

Pritam Singh; *Economy, Culture and Human Rights: Turbulence in Punjab, India and Beyond*; 2010

Prem Shankar Jha; *The Dismantling of India's Democracy*; 2025

Rahul Pandita, Neelesh Mishra; *The Absent State: Insurgency as an Excuse for Misgovernance*; 2010

Srinath Raghavan; *1971: A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh;* 2013

Lula, Brazil, and a World in Flux

By | 2026: Vol. 25, No. 1

The contentious United Nations COP30 climate summit, held in November 2025 in Belém, Brazil, provides a useful reference point for making sense of the host country's global agenda, as well as president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's third term in office and broader political project. Analyzing the linkages between the domestic and international aspects of this assertion of leadership in global climate governance reveals not only a series of tensions in Lula's governing model and Brazil's current trajectory, but also a broader set of issues related to the global unraveling of democracy, stalled "Global South" development and the paradoxes of existing "South-South" relations, and global capitalism's discontents—along with potential avenues for addressing them.

In welcoming the world—with the notable exception of the U.S. federal government, which declined to participate—to a city known as "the metropolis of the Brazilian Amazon," the Lula administration's aim at COP30 was not only to foreground, through geographic proximity, the unparalleled beauty of, and dire threats facing, the natural world and particularly its most sensitive ecosystems (in the latter regard, a fire that broke out in the convention center and disrupted the final hours of negotiations served as a useful, if unintended, metaphor). Also on offer was the narrative that Brazil is a committed environmental steward and caretaker, a firm believer in multilateralism, and a responsible protagonist and mediator—in a world lacking in both—in climate-related matters, as well as global-governance mechanisms more broadly.

COP30 president and veteran Brazilian diplomat André Corrêa do Lago promised a different ethos from standard, top-down summit diplomacy by invoking the local, Indigenous-inspired concept of the *mutirão*, which refers, in his words, to "a community coming together to work on a shared task, whether harvesting, building, or supporting one another." He continued: "By sharing this invaluable ancestral wisdom and social technology, the [then-] incoming Cop30 presidency invites the international community to join Brazil in a global *mutirão* against climate change, a global effort of cooperation among peoples for the progress of humanity." In turn, the formation of "circles" of relevant parties that consisted not only of the usual suspects of high-level political leaders and diplomats, but also community leaders and Indigenous representatives, made for a stark contrast with an "axis of obstruction" spurred on by Washington's absence but led on the ground by leading petrostates Russia and (especially) Saudi Arabia. Also welcome was the return of boisterous protests after the previous three summits, whose host governments—Egypt (2022), the United Arab Emirates (2023), and Azerbaijan (2024)—evinced notably less tolerance for expressions of dissent.

The specter of collapsed negotiations and a deal-less COP30 summit was only narrowly averted through energetic last-minute Brazilian diplomacy, but with ambiguous results—summarized by the title of an article in *The Guardian* that referred to "compromises, voluntary measures and no mention of fossil fuels."

Most emblematically, the resulting final agreement featured an announced tripling of adaptation funds by rich countries for their poorer counterparts, though this still falls far short of need; in turn, the timeline for future increases was further delayed. A "just transition mechanism" that evokes an equitable, inclusive path to a global green economy made it into the agreement, but without earmarked funds. Remarkably, a climate conference held in the Amazon failed to produce a plan to stop deforestation, though some international funding was committed for Brazil's announced "tropical forest fund." Faced with a (successful) petrostate-led effort to keep the phrase "fossil fuels" out of the final agreement, the best that could be obtained was an oblique reference therein to the "UAE Consensus"—referring to the landmark

2023 COP28 agreement reached in Dubai, the first such document to specify a transition away from fossil fuels. Brazil, for its part, pledged to carry forward with this agenda to wind down the use of fossil fuels via a (voluntary) "coalition of the willing," but outside of the formal COP process (for example, via the G20).

Lastly, the Lula administration used the occasion of the summit to announce the creation of ten new, federally recognized Indigenous territories. Yet only weeks previously, it had announced that the federal government would permit—for the first time ever—oil drilling by the mouth of the Amazon River. As the *New York Times* put it, summarizing the palpable tensions that characterize Brazilian global climate diplomacy: "Save the Amazon or Drill for Oil? Brazil Says It Can Do Both."

That Brazil, in reality, of course *cannot* simultaneously pursue both stated objectives speaks to a series of ambivalences, tensions, and contradictions that undergird Lula's third presidency (2023-2027), the contemporary Brazilian political and economic scenarios, and the country's global standing and protagonism. Such fault lines are not precisely new or exclusive to the third incarnation of the associated political project known as *lulismo*, per the below analysis of his past two administrations. However, they have only become more apparent as the national and global contexts in which Lula and his Workers' Party-led (PT; *Partido dos Trabalhadores*) administration must operate have grown all the more convoluted, and, in many ways, hostile. Having recently announced his intention to run for reelection later this year, what, then, does a potential—and unprecedented—fourth Lula term augur for Brazil and a world in crisis and in flux?

Lula and *lulismo*, Past and Present

After three unsuccessful attempts at the presidency, Lula's 2002 electoral triumph heralded a new reality in national, regional, and even—to an extent—global politics.

For a country accustomed to elite rule, the assumption of power by an internal migrant from Brazil's relatively impoverished, oft-stigmatized northeast—who was born into a poor family, dropped out of school as a teenager to sell peanuts and shine shoes, rose through the ranks as a metalworker and union leader, and to this day maintains a distinctively working-class accent—was itself remarkable, and figured heavily in early media coverage. More significantly, for the first time since the 1985 return to civilian rule, which brought to an end 21 years of military dictatorship (against which Lula organized, for which he was imprisoned), the political left would lead Latin America's largest country.

These were, in the aggregate, heady times. Buoyed by booming commodity exports to China in particular, but also the Middle East and other parts of the world, Brazil experienced significant economic growth. It also avoided—at least for a time—the repercussions of the late-2000s U.S.-born, global financial crisis, and produced enough of a surplus to line the pockets of elites and the traditional middle class while also bringing millions of Brazilians out of poverty and into a new, if precarious, middle (or lower-middle) class. The latter process was facilitated by the

globally famous conditional cash transfer program *Bolsa Família*, directed toward lower-income families, which earned plaudits even from august institutions of global economic governance such as the World Bank, along with inspiring imitative (if smaller-scale) efforts around the world.

Internationally, Brazil was pursuing an "assertive" foreign policy, per the English translation of a book by Celso Amorim (2017),[1] who served as Minister of Foreign Affairs (2003-2010) and subsequently Minister of Defense (2011-2014), and is currently Lula's chief foreign policy advisor. Regarding the former role, a 2009 article in *Foreign Policy* labeled him "the world's best foreign minister."

The list of international, Brazilian-led or -guided initiatives from Lula's first two terms is lengthy, and includes: regional integration and/or cooperation initiatives such as the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR/L) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) (the former defunct, and the latter still in existence); increasing Brazilian protagonism vis-à-vis world geopolitical issues traditionally under the purview of Global North would-be diplomacy, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the impasse over Iran's nuclear program[2]; the 2009 formation of the "BRIC" apparatus, the acronym for which refers to the founding members of Brazil, Russia, India, and China, often portrayed as a "Global South" challenge to traditional, Northern-led global-governance institutions and mechanisms[3]; military leadership, and the deployment of large numbers of troops in support, of the controversial UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH; 2004-2017); and the tremendous expansion of Brazilian commercial relationships with and diplomatic overtures towards "Global South" partners in Africa and the Middle East.

Regarding the former, an *Al Jazeera* article from the time referred to Lula as the "secretary general of Africa," noting his nine trips to the continent in the span of 8 years and observing that "Lula has invested himself and Brazil's overall foreign policy heavily in Africa, maybe more so than any other non-African leader in modern history." In relation to the latter, Lula extended diplomatic recognition to the state of Palestine in 2010, and "became the first Brazilian head of state to make official visits to the Arab world," with the country's sizable Arab-descendant population—consisting of several million people, and mostly Syrian and/or Lebanese in origin—emerging as key protagonists behind the development of rapidly expanding economic ties (Funk 2022, 96; see also, Karam 2007). As Amorim (2011, 48-50) put it: "Without any hesitation, I can testify that the Middle East was brought, perhaps for the first time, to the center of our diplomatic radar." More broadly, as Amorim also noted, such a profound restructuring of global politics and economics was afoot that it was increasingly the case that, "to get from Brazil to Cairo, you won't need to pass through Washington and Paris" (quoted in Karam 2007, 174). In both the African and Middle Eastern cases, interregional summits were held, trade and investment greatly expanded, direct flights were established, and new Brazilian diplomatic missions were opened. As will be analyzed below, China also emerged during this time as Brazil's largest trading partner, overtaking the U.S.

Capturing the zeitgeist, a 2009 *Economist* cover displayed a rocket-propelled Christ the

Redeemer statue ascending above Rio de Janeiro's hilly, cloud-filled horizon, and featured the title, "Brazil takes off."

As is well known, that Brazil would soon thereafter descend into a series of political and economic crises comprised a natural endpoint to the buoyant years of Lula's first two administrations. The 2010s, in turn, would bring economic stagnation and then decline, massive corruption scandals, public anger at the juxtaposition between austerity in welfare spending and gigantic state expenditures in the service of mega-events (with the 2014 FIFA men's World Cup held in cities across the country, and Rio serving as the host of the 2016 Summer Olympics), large protests that were increasingly co-opted by the far-right, and the growing frustration of both "new" middle classes (whose precarity became apparent as Brazil's economy stalled, and many of whom would populate the ranks of swelling, right-leaning Evangelical congregations) and their "old," traditional counterparts (many of whose members resented, *inter alia*, the new rights being afforded to domestic workers, affirmative-action programs to diversify public universities, and the perceived encroachment of non-elites in previously rarified spaces such as airports). A follow-up 2013 *Economist* cover, featuring the same scene but with the Christ the Redeemer statue careening toward the ground, posed the question of whether Brazil had "blown it."

(In)famously, Brazil's descent continued. Lula's chosen successor Dilma Rousseff was removed from office in 2016 through a parliamentary coup, with her former vice-president—the wildly unpopular, right-leaning Michel Temer—serving out the rest of her second term. With Lula unable to run again for the presidency in 2018 due to (dubious, and subsequently overturned) corruption and money-laundering convictions, for which he spent nearly 600 days in prison, the path was cleared for far-right provocateur and unreconstructed Cold Warrior Jair Bolsonaro to win the presidency (2019-2023), ushering in a chaotic period characterized by democratic erosion, rampant misinformation and COVID denialism, numerous corruption scandals, and the cultivation of alliances with a global cast of right-wing self-styled "populists." In late-2025, with Lula well into his third term, Bolsonaro began a serving 27-year prison sentence over a coup plot that included assassinating Lula and others, though right-wing efforts to reduce his sentence continue, and a pardon could be forthcoming should the right return to the presidency in 2027.

With Lula having by now spent over a decade as head of state, albeit nonconsecutively, what remains at this point of *lulismo*—a center-left project characterized by advancing mild redistributive efforts within a generally capital- and elite-friendly political-economic framework, along with pursuing commodity-driven and export-led growth, elaborating an "active" foreign policy (with a predilection for "Global South" relations), and trying to have it "both" ways by simultaneously seeking expanded oil production, including in extremely ecologically sensitive areas, as well as leadership in global climate governance?

Lulista Internationalism and the "Reprimarization" of the Brazilian Economy

Lula 3.0 contains certain elements of carryover from his previous two administrations,

particularly an ambitious international travel schedule (in 2023 alone, he visited two-dozen countries) and global agenda (including the aforementioned staging of COP30, as well as frequent commentary on matters of worldwide import, such as the Israel-Gaza War).

Yet in the intervening years, the national and global scenarios have shifted in numerous, unfriendly ways for Lula and *lulismo*.

If accommodation with the national bourgeoisie and conservative forces was always part of the *lulista* project, whether out of conviction or convenience, it is now perceived to be a political necessity. Having been elected to the presidency alongside a distinctively right-leaning congress, there is little hope of progressive domestic legislative change in today's Brazil. Indeed, as observed halfway through his third term, "Lula has remained unable to pass any legislation without making further compromises with the conservative majority in the House" (Singer 2024). The result is that "[i]f Lula's first and second terms created the illusion of painless progress"—in which mild, but significant, pro-poor policies could be pursued through strong GDP growth without raising taxes on the rich—"his third has all but removed social justice from the picture." This lack of room for domestic maneuver also reinforces Lula's tendency to dedicate significant—in the eyes of some observers, disproportionate—energy to international issues.

Lula's 2022 reelection meant that some kind of democracy had been salvaged (at least temporarily) after four years of Bolsonaro-led machinations. Further, and in large part due to the aforementioned social programs, he retains a popular base among the marginalized that has escaped from the hands of many center-left counterparts around the world. Yet the dilemma, of course, is that while a more egalitarian "structural transformation" is necessary to put Brazilian democracy on firmer footing, including by constructing a more inclusive social order, such reforms appear nearly impossible given the prevailing balance of forces in Brazil's current political context.

Less commented upon have been the discontents of Brazil's economic evolution, *lulismo*'s role in their deepening and perpetuation, and the links between the country's "development" paradoxes and its international posture.

Though Brazil's status as a world agro-export power is easily taken for granted, it is a relatively recent phenomena. It also bears an imprint of *lulismo*. Further, Brazil's rise as the "world's stockyard" reflects and reinforces a series of political, economic, and environmental maladies with global implications, and from which the country cannot easily free itself.

Less than half a century ago, Brazil was a net importer of agricultural goods; it is now one of the world's largest exporters (Hopewell 2016). As the economist Fernando Rugitsky observes:

> When President [Lula] started his first term in office in 2003, Brazilian exports of frozen beef ranked third in the world by volume, representing around 11 percent of the total. By the end of his second term in 2010, Brazil ranked first, accounting for 23 percent of all frozen beef exported worldwide. In quantity, these exports increased from 317 to 781

> thousand tonnes. Over the following decade, Brazilian beef supremacy deepened: in 2022 Brazil was the origin of 32 percent of all frozen beef traded internationally, exporting almost twice as much as India, the second largest exporter.

From the same starting point, Brazilian soybean exports have risen from a quarter of the global total to approximately half today. These changes have not occurred through the magic of the vaunted "free market," but rather through state policies and interventionism—particularly under military rule in the 1970s (Hopewell 2016), and during Lula's administrations. Regarding the latter, a significant part of Lula's international agenda has revolved around constructing alternative axes of political relations—outside of the European/North American core—that would simultaneously open new markets for Brazilian economic interests (Berringer 2023). The resulting "class compromise"—in which profit-seeking opportunities abounded for outward-oriented Brazilian capitalists, and there was sufficient surplus to fund state policies to drive down the poverty rate—worked reasonably well during the first Lula administrations, but no longer appears viable in a lower-growth global economic order.

Much is at stake, both nationally and globally, vis-à-vis this agro-driven transformation of the Brazilian economy.

First, agriculture's rise has been industry's loss in Brazil, thus generating the "reprimarization" of an economy that featured (and still, to an extent, possesses) a significant manufacturing base, built largely via mid-century import-substitution industrialization (ISI) policies. The old demons that stoked the ire of earlier generations of developmentalists and dependency theorists—declining terms of trade, unstable commodity prices, failure to move up the global value chain, and the super-exploitation of rural labor (Marini 2022)—had never been completely overcome during that period of industrial growth. Yet they are back in full force in contemporary Brazil. In turn, largely gone from the contemporary picture is any coherent national story of "development" and/or "modernization" of a kind that compares to the ISI period, with the current end game instead appearing to revolve around *endless* extraction (or, at least for as long as fragile ecosystems will allow) in the service of endless wealth accumulation (for some). More broadly, this Brazilian crossroads evokes a broader global reckoning with the apparent contemporary lack of accessible development pathways for the vast majority of the world's states.

Second, the environmental consequences of Brazilian extractivism are entirely predictable, truly astounding, and ultimately affect everyone. A reported "one-fifth of all commodity-driven deforestation across the tropics" is linked to Brazil's world-leading beef exports (Zu Ermgassen et al. 2020), while it is estimated that "up to 90 percent of the Amazon's deforestation is related to the cattle industry" (Funk 2024b, 34). Many of the current Lula administration's climate contradictions that were on evidence at COP30—including the marriage of progressive discourses concerning sustainability with a strong reluctance to take actions inimical to Brazil's extractivist industries—reflect both a seeming lack of other economic options, as well as *lulismo*'s deep entanglements with these various sectors and actors, including agribusiness, but also mining and Petrobras, the majority state-owned oil company (Funk 2024a).

Further, in addition to serving as a key constituency that helped to propel Bolsonaro to the presidency, agribusiness' rise has helped to shift Brazilian politics to the right in numerous other ways. Indeed, as I have observed elsewhere:

> Agribusiness also plays an outsized (and controversial) role in Brazilian politics, with magnates and large companies in this sector serving as key protagonists in promoting a far-right agenda. Of particular interest to these actors, unsurprisingly, is a relaxation of environmental regulations, the undermining of state capacity to enforce them, and reducing Indigenous land rights. Regarding the latter, it was Brazilian agribusiness that spearheaded a recent legislative effort to prohibit the recognition of these lands if the Indigenous groups in question were not occupying them in 1988, when the country's post-authoritarian constitution came into effect with a legal guarantee of such rights. Further, after the Supreme Court's 9-2 ruling against this proposal in late-September 2023, it has again been agribusiness and its associated farm lobby that has sought to challenge this decision by securing the passage of legislation to impose the aforementioned time limit, as well as by seeking a constitutional amendment. While Lula vetoed several of the bill's parts after its subsequent approval by the Senate, this was overridden by the mostly agribusiness-friendly Brazilian congress in December 2023, and has since come into effect. (Funk 2024b, 35)

Especially notable is that all of the above dynamics related to Brazil's "reprimarization" have a great deal to do with the aforementioned Lula-driven push to develop Brazil's political-economic relations with (then-) newer partners, primarily China, but also Middle Eastern and other "Global South" markets. The discourse surrounding "South-South" relations, emanating from Lula and other sources, conventionally evokes a normatively desirable increase in Global South autonomy, as well as rising multipolarity and an erosion of Western domination of global politics and economics (Funk 2024b). Yet the fact that Brazil's "Global South" economic ties revolve almost entirely around commodity exports, with the aforementioned accompanying effects related to "reprimarization," calls into question the "normatively positive sheen that often accompanies the South-South label" (Funk 2024b, 34; see also Funk 2013), as well as the very foundations of Lula-led, Brazilian internationalism.

Lula 4.0?

What remains of the progressive elements of *lulismo* and what promise does a potential fourth administration hold?

With the regional (and North-Atlantic) political pendula swinging firmly to the right, another Lula triumph in the October 2026 election is far from guaranteed. Nor can its importance be taken for granted in a global context in which obscurantist, anti-democratic forces hold increasing sway. As was the case for the previous election in 2022, a repeat Lula victory would provide a sense of hope and possibility in dark times, even if the fact that it again appears to be incumbent upon an old-guard politician, now an octogenarian, to "save" Brazil's democracy is hardly a cause for comfort. Especially compared to the Bolsonaro years, Lula's continuation in

power would also bode relatively well for addressing the global climate crisis, with more vigorous enforcement bringing down deforestation rates by a significant margin in Brazil, and the country on track to achieve the largest emissions reduction of any G20 member.

Regarding national politics, it is unlikely that a Lula reelection would be accompanied by the swearing in of a more amenable congress. Internationally, the trend is toward an increasingly convoluted scenario, with Latin American politics in the midst of a definitive rightward turn, the return of U.S. military intervention in South America, and rising superpower tensions threatening to "trample" the Global South.

Navigating such treacherous waters will not only require Lula's renowned political acumen, charm, and "cunning" (French 2020). More profoundly, what is needed is an effort to chart an inclusive, ecologically friendly development path for Brazil (Antunes de Oliveira 2024), and to pursue an internationalist agenda that provides a progressive alternative to a global status quo defined by hierarchy, commodification, and environmental degradation (Funk 2025)—all of which must occur within a highly constraining global-economic order in which the logics of profit, consumerism, and competition predominate.

The bar for elaborating such an alternative vision is extremely high indeed, both for Brazil and the world, as are the stakes.

REFERENCES

Amorim, Celso. 2011. "Brazil and the Middle East: Reflections on Lula's South-South Cooperation." *Cairo Review of Global Affairs* 1, no. 2: 48-63.

Amorim, Celso. 2015. *Teerã, Ramalá e Doha: Memórias da Política Externa Ativa e Altiva*. São Paulo: Benvirá.

Amorim, Celso. 2017. *Acting Globally: Memoirs of Brazil's Assertive Foreign Policy*. Lanham, MD: Hamilton Books.

Antunes de Oliveira, Felipe. 2024. *Dependency and Crisis in Brazil and Argentina: A Critique of Market and State Utopias*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Berringer, Tatiana. 2023. *Brazilian Bourgeoisie and Foreign Policy*. Leiden: Brill.

French, John D. 2020. *Lula and His Politics of Cunning: From Metalworker to President of Brazil*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Funk, Kevin. 2013. "The Political Economy of South America's Global South Relations: States, Transnational Capital, and Social Movements." *The Latin Americanist* 57(1): 3-20. https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/tla.2013.a705975.

Funk, Kevin. 2022. *Rooted Globalism: Arab-Latin American Business Elites and the Politics of*

Global Imaginaries. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Funk, Kevin. 2024a. “Constructing a Sustainable ‘Tomorrow’: Iconic Architecture and Progressive Neoliberal Place-Making in Rio de Janeiro’s ‘Little Africa.’” *Journal of International Relations and Development* 27(2): 170-197. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-024-00327-4.

Funk, Kevin 2024b. “A (Neoliberal) ‘New World Economic Geography’: Latin American-Middle Eastern Relations in an Emerging Age of Multipolarity.” In: Demir, Firat and Van Jackson (eds.). *The Global South in an Era of Great Power Competition*. Security in Context Report. Pp. 28-36. https://www.securityincontext.org/posts/neoliberal-new-world-economic-geography-latin-american-middle-eastern-relations-in-emerging-age-of-multipolarity.

Funk, Kevin. 2025. “Toward a Cultural Political Economy of Arab-Latin American Relations” (afterword). In: Guirguis, Laure and Maru Pabón, eds. *Art and Politics between the Arab World and Latin America*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill. Pp. 209-223.

Hopewell, Kristen. 2016. “The Accidental Agro-Power: Constructing Comparative Advantage in Brazil.” *New Political Economy* 21 (6): 536-554. https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2016.1161014.

Karam, John Tofik. 2007. *Another Arabesque: Syrian-Lebanese Ethnicity in Neoliberal Brazil*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Marini, Ruy Mauro. 2022. *The Dialectics of Dependency*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Singer, André. 2024. “Lulismo 3.0: A Mid-Term Diagnosis.” *New Left Review*. November/December.

Zu Ermgassen, E. K. H. J. et al. 2020. “The Origin, Supply Chain, and Deforestation Risk of Brazil’s Beef Exports.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 117(50): 31770-31779. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2003270117.

Notes

[1] The subtitle of the original Portuguese version refers instead to an “active” and “proud” foreign policy (Amorim 2015).

[2] Of significance here is that the aforementioned Portuguese-language text by Amorim is titled, *Teerã, Ramalá e Doha* (*Tehran, Ramallah, and Doha*). The latter invokes Brazilian protagonism within the Doha Round of international trade negotiations that commenced among World Trade Organization (WTO) members in 2001.

[3] The name would shift to the more-familiar “BRICS” to reflect the subsequent inclusion of South Africa, with “BRICS+” often used as of 2024 to account for further expansion.

The Protestant Ethic after 120 Years

By | 2026: Vol. 25, No. 1

Commemorating a scholarly text now known only by title demands a certain circumspection that would not be required to honor a distinguished song, movie, or novel, each of which would boast a contingent of afficionados for whom allocating respect to the cultural product in question would be "natural." Music in particular summons up enthusiastic endorsement long after its composition for reasons that nobody, even musicologists, can rightly explain. A few famous films bring a knowing grin to people's faces, and minds, because cinema creates imagined worlds otherwise unavailable, and as such, remains poignantly memorable. In earlier times of widespread and devoted literacy—Dickens's novels sold in the millions in his lifetime—even fiction deserved memorialization of a type.

Another aura surrounds *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (hereafter PE), a work which never warmed anyone's heart, and from the moment of its publication has infuriated readers whose religious or ideological allegiances rejected Weber's argument *tout court*. If ever there was a scholar whose writing did not inspire even modest adoration, but who dealt with subjects of world-historical amplitude, Max Weber fills that bill. The same could be said for Kant and Hegel, yet philosophers are given free rein to proselytize in obscure prose, while sociologists are regularly accused of being alarmingly pedestrian, and often too readily understandable.

Much of Weber's most important scholarship lay in manuscript form at his premature death at 56 in 1920, and only through the extraordinary efforts of his wife, Marianne and a few of his students, was his masterpiece, *Economy & Society*, brought to fruition (1922/25), along with several volumes of previously uncollected essays. And as she noted in her indispensably unique biography of Max, "He was entirely unconcerned with the form in which he presented his wealth of ideas"—which becomes obvious to anyone not professionally yoked to the task of understanding his achievement. Yet the centenary of PE was celebrated with book-length treatments (e.g., *The Protestant Ethic Turns 100,* edited by William Swatos and Lutz Kaelber) as well as numerous essays and international conferences. Why? The book is querulous, overgrown in long, argumentative endnotes, is throughout technically demanding, and mostly concerns religious thinking and practices which occurred between 1520 and 1720. What exactly gives the book its lasting appeal, at least to scholars pursuing the history of capitalism and/or the evolution of Protestantism in Europe and America?

At the age of 32 in 1898, following 10 years of maniacal output as an economist, legal theorist, historian, financial analyst, philosopher of social science, and survey researcher, Max Weber became clinically depressed and therefore unable to work. His phenomenal publishing achievements in the nascent social sciences abruptly halted because lecturing, writing, or reading scholarly materials became intolerable for him, according to his wife's biography. This tragic turn of events was mostly due to the sudden death in August, 1897 of his temporarily and recently estranged father, Max Weber, Sr. Prior to that disturbing occurrence he had attained a law degree, a first doctorate specializing in medieval economic history, a second doctorate regarding Roman land use practices, oversaw a huge survey of agrarian workers in Prussia, demystified the stock and commodity markets, taught Marx's *Das Kapital* as a novice professor, and thus had become the rising star of the *Geisteswissenschaften* as publicly proclaimed by Theodore Mommsen, doyen of German humanists of the time (whom even Mark Twain found intimidating).

Eventually Weber overcame some of the emotional crises he had been enduring for a half-

dozen years. Putting aside his crippling depression, he accepted an invitation to address an international congress in St. Louis. He and his wife left Germany on August 20, 1904, toured the U.S. as seemingly veteran ethnographers, and returned home on November 27. This trip influenced his thinking and writing far more than would an ordinary scholar's junket, particularly because he spoke with many people, including William James, W. E. B. Du Bois, Jane Addams, Booker T. Washington's wife and staff, Samuel Gompers, Edwin Seligman, attended the Penn-Harvard football game, and visited Biltmore in Asheville, NC, the Vanderbilt home (see Lawrence Scaff, *Max Weber in America* , 2011). He had written Part One of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* in summer, 1904 (published in the fall), took the U.S. tour, finished the longer Part Two in March, 1905, and published it three months later, again in the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik.* The book form appeared in 1920, just prior to his unanticipated death, featuring a new "Author's Introduction" in which he counter-attacked all those who had questioned the accuracy of his original argument on religious, historical, economic, or philosophical grounds.

The wide range of criticism that *The Protestant Ethic* inspired in the 15 years between its initial publication, as two journal articles, and publication in final book form, not to mention the hundreds of pertinent books and articles that have appeared since then in every scholarly language, raises the inescapable question: *Which PE is under examination?* Weber's own words are less often consulted rigorously than one would hope. Instead, one sees summaries of the type most readily transmitted to undergraduates: "Weber thought that Protestants created modern capitalism because John Calvin persuaded them they were predestined to heaven or hell, and the only way to hint to an inscrutable God that they deserved salvation was by making lots of money and spending very little of it, thus demonstrating ascetic virtue." A good and simple story that bears insubstantial relation to what interested Weber, prompting him to create a document often called "the most continuingly influential work by any sociologist during the classical period" (1870-1920). Had this easy tale revealed all that was at stake, he would hardly have bothered to write the original articles, plus delivering heated and extended responses to notable specialists of the time who claimed he had concocted an explanation for capitalist development that violated, in one way or another, their own interpretations of socio-economic history. (The most penetrating analysis of the book's context is Peter Ghosh's *Max Weber and 'The Protestant Ethic': Twin Histories* [2014].)

The first difficulty facing those who wish to understand Weber's point of view accurately is the German in which it was written, or, barring that, the three extant English translations that render his tortuous scholarly language as well as can be expected, discrepant though they be. Two early translators of Weber memorably wrote in 1946 that "At their best, they [German writers using a non-English style] erect a grammatical artifice in which mental balconies and watch towers, as well as bridges and recesses, decorate the main structure. Their sentences are gothic castles . . . .Weber pushes German academic tradition to its extremes. His major theme often seems to be lost in a wealth of footnoted digressions, exemptions, and comparative illustrations" (Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber*, p. vi-vii). If this style proved an obstacle to 20th century readers, in our current literary climate that sidesteps complex texts, much of Weber's writing, even via skilled translation, becomes a "non-starter." More than

other obstacles to comprehension of theoretical works from Weber's period, today's routinized hyper-simplification of discourse blocks the way to lucid, reliable use of writing such as his. Throwing up one's hands when facing Kant's or Hegel's major works has become "normalized," and Weber's densest writings seem to have become similarly forbidding for all except the most committed readers. And even though Weber's roots do indeed lie within the neo-Kantian tradition, he was not a metaphysician, and intended his socio-economic and political writings to be comprehensible, at least to the "German mandarin" class which he so well represented, and those sectors of the educated bourgeoisie who took such works seriously.

Between 1930 and 2002, Talcott Parsons' translation of PE was the only version available in English. Despite inevitable complaints by native speakers and a few experts from other countries, Parsons' youthful labors—begun with Marianne Weber's blessing when he was 25, completed two years later—produced a "semantic translation" that satisfied most of its intended audience (Scaff, *Max Weber in America* [2011], 217-28). It remains the most often quoted version even with those by Peter Baehr and Gordon Wells (Penguin, 2002) and Stephen Kalberg (Fitzroy Dearborn, 2002/Oxford, 2009) at hand. When its original publisher, Unwin in England, reissued the book (1976), it reprinted Parsons' version unchanged, as did Dover Publications (2003), and Norton's "Critical Editions" (2009).

Given this history of translations, examining a smidgen of the source material as interpreted by each translator will show that "*which PE?*" is a valuable question when assessing the ultimate utility or disutility of Weber's classic. The opening sentence of the first chapter, "Religious Affiliation and Social Stratification," illustrates some of the various conundra that can arise:

Parsons: "A glance at the occupational statistics of any country of mixed religious composition brings to light with remarkable frequency a situation which has several times provoked discussion in the Catholic press and literature, and in the Catholic congresses in Germany, namely the fact that business leaders and owners of capital, as well as the higher grades of skilled labours, and even more the higher technically and commercially trained personnel of modern enterprises, are overwhelmingly Protestant" (p. 35).

Baehr and Wells: "With relatively few variations and exceptions, the occupational statistics of a denominationally mixed region reveal a phenomenon which in recent years has frequently been the subject of lively debate in the Catholic press, in Catholic literature, and at Catholic conventions: business leaders and owners of capital, as well as the skilled higher strata of the labor force, and especially the higher technical or commercially trained staff of modern enterprises tend to be predominantly *Protestant*" (p. 1).

Kalberg: "A glance at the occupational statistics for any country in which several religions co-exist is revealing. They indicate that people who own capital, employers, more highly educated skilled workers, and more highly trained technical or business personnel in modern companies tend to be, with striking frequency, overwhelmingly *Protestant*. The variation in this regard between Catholics and Protestants has often been discussed, in a lively fashion, in Catholic newspapers and journals in Germany, as well as at congresses of the Catholic Church" (p. 61;

fourth edition).

Weber: "Ein Blick in die Berufsstatistik eines konfessionell gemischten Landes pflegt mit auffallender Häufigkeit eine Erscheinung zu zeigen, welche mehrfach in der katholischen Presse und Literatur und auf den Katholikentagen Deutschlands lebhaft erörtert worden ist: den ganz vorwiegend protestantischen Charakter des Kapitalbesitzes und Unternehmertums sowohl, wie der oberen gelernten Schichten der Arbeiterschaft, namentlich aber des höheren technisch oder kaufmännisch vorgebildeten Personals der modernen Unternehmungen."

The translations do not blatantly contradict one another, but neither do they produce a version of Weber's writing that offers the reader complete confidence in the tone or direction of his intentions. This is the norm for Weber's works in English such that, for instance, for 70 years experts in German language have complained about the alleged imprecision harbored within the three large books he wrote treating religion in India, China, and among the ancient Jews. They were all translated by Hans Gerth, a native German, student of Weber's brother, Alfred, at Heidelberg, and noted Weber expert. Yet nobody has stepped forward to retranslate them given the difficulty of the task.

Worse perhaps even than translation ambiguities are Weber's infamous footnotes (in the original) or endnotes (as in the English versions). In Parsons' edition the main text (pp. 13-183) consumes 49,500 words, and the endnotes (pp. 185-284 in reduced font) uses 52,900 words. Thus, ignoring the notes means leaving over half the book out of play, and for Weber himself, probably the more important half given his vigorous counter-critiques answering specialists of high scholarly standing. He also conformed to standard practices of academic writing in his day by freely using Latin and Greek phrases, thereby his repeated invocations of *finitum non est capax infiniti* (the finite is not capable of the infinite), *certitudo salutis* (certainty of safety/salvation), *horrendum decretum/ decretum horribilis* (horrible decree, pertaining to predestination)*, fides efficax* (effective faith), *unio mystica* (mystical union, of the mystic with God), among many, throws up another barrier between his story and today's reader.

A characteristic passage from Parsons' translation, with accompanying notes [indicated in brackets] attached to nearly every line, is this:

> Thus, however useless good works might be as a means of attaining salvation, for even the elect remain beings of the flesh, and everything they do falls infinitely short of divine standards, nevertheless, they are indispensable as a sign of election [60]. They are the technical means, not of purchasing salvation, but of getting rid of the fear of damnation. In this sense they are occasionally referred to as directly necessary for salvation [61] or the *possessio salutis* is made conditional on them [62]. In practice this means that God helps those who help themselves [63]. Thus the Calvinist, as it is sometimes put, himself creates [64] his own salvation, or, as would be more correct, the conviction of it. But this creation cannot, as in Catholicism, consist in a gradual accumulation of individual good works to one's credit, but rather in a systematic self-control which at every moment

stands before the inexorable alternatives, chosen or damned. *This brings us to a very important point in our investigation*. It is common knowledge that Lutherans have again and again accused this line of thought, which was worked out in the Reformed Churches and sects with increasing clarity [65], of reversion to the doctrine of salvation by works [66]. (pp. 115-16; emphases added)

Endnote 66 seeks to defend some of his observations at this key juncture in Weber's argument where he obviously felt the need for irrefutable proof. In form and content, it resembles dozens of similar notes, and reads in part as follows:

> The Calvinistic faith is one of the many examples in the history of religions of the relation between the logical and the psychological consequences for the practical religious attitude to be derived from certain religious ideas. Fatalism is, of course, the only logical consequence of predestination. But on account of the idea of proof the psychological result was precisely the opposite. For essentially similar reasons the followers of Nietzsche claim a positive ethical significance for the idea of eternal recurrence. This case, however, is concerned with responsibility for a future life which is connected with the active individual by no conscious thread of continuity, while for the Puritan it was *tua res agitur* [your own affairs are in question]. Even Hoornbeek (*Theologia practica*, I, p. 159) analyses the relation between predestination and action well into the language of the times. The *electi* [the chosen] are, on account of their election, proof against fatalism because in their rejection of it they prove themselves "*quos ipsa electio sollicitos reddit et diligentes officiorum*" [those whose election makes them anxious and careful about their tasks]. The practical interests cut off the fatalistic consequences of logic (which, however, in spite of everything occasionally did break through).
>
> But, on the other hand, the content of ideas of a religion is, as Calvinism, shows, far more important than William James (*Varieties of Religious Experience*, 1902, pp. 444f) is inclined to admit. The significance of the rational elements in religious metaphysics is shown in classical form by the tremendous influence which especially the logical structure of the Calvinistic concept of God exercised on life. If the God of the Puritans has influenced history as hardly another before or since, it is principally due to the attributes which the power of thought had given him. James's pragmatic valuation of the significance of religious ideas according to their influence on life is incidentally a true child of the world of ideas of the Puritan home of that eminent scholar. The religious experience as such is of course *irrational,* like every experience. In its highest, mystical form, it is even the experience [par excellence], and, as James has well shown, is distinguished by its absolute incommunicability. It has a specific character and appears as knowledge but cannot be adequately reproduced by means of our lingual and conceptual apparatus. It is further true that every religious experience loses some of its content in the attempt of rational formulation, the further the conceptual formulation goes, the more so. That is the reason for many of the tragic conflicts of all rational theology, as the Baptist sects of the seventeenth century already knew. But that *irrational* element, which is by no means peculiar to religious experience, but applies (in

> different sense and to different degrees) to every experience, does not prevent its being of the greatest practical importance, of what particular type the system of ideas is, that captures and molds the immediate experience of religion in its own way. . . . (pp. 232-233)

This note embraces many angles of analysis, but several parts stand out. For instance, Weber's understanding of religious experience as fundamentally irrational, "like every experience," becomes the crux of his overall argument. And it could hardly be otherwise given his detailed knowledge of the key religious texts and the ways they had guided private and commercial behavior for centuries. Consider one small part of Calvin's own prescription for the proper behavior of a Protestant ascetic:

> Hope of the enjoyment of God's presence makes this life bearable. Now whatever is abstracted from the corrupt love of this life should be added to the desire of a better. I grant, indeed, the correctness of their opinion who considered it as the greatest blessing not to be born, and as the next to die immediately. For being heathens, destitute of the knowledge of God and of true religion, what could they see in it but unhappiness and misery? Nor was there anything *irrational* in the conduct of those who mourned and wept at the births of their relations and solemnly rejoiced at their funerals. (John Calvin, *The Institutes*, Section 9.4; emphasis added)

A modern person speaking this way would be institutionalized, or worse. And yet Calvinism spread across Europe and into the United States, even if with diminished dogmatic claims on practical behavior. Weber saw more clearly than did Werner Sombart, Ferdinand Tönnies, and others in his small circle of capitalism's analysts that the unbalanced, pre-Enlightened dictates of religious zealotry prevalent in the 16th century, by the time they had been watered down and recorded in Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*, fit perfectly with the presumed virtues of capitalists' accumulation.

A few pages later in PE Weber dialectically refines the core of his argument under the heading *Die Berufsethik des asketischen Protestantismus* (Parsons: "The Religious Foundations of Ascetic Protestantism"), where *Berufsethik* bears the theoretical weight, meaning "professional ethics" or "worldly ethics," and not "religious foundations." In Weber's words:

> The life of the saint was directed solely toward a transcendental end, salvation. But precisely for that reason it was thoroughly *rationalized* in this world and dominated entirely by the aim to add to the glory of God on earth. Never has the precept *omnia in majorem dei gloriam* [for the greater glory of God] been taken with more bitter seriousness. . . . It was this *rationalization* that gave the Reformed faith its *peculiar* ascetic tendency. (p. 118; emphases added).

The conversion of working hard in Calvin's time to glorify God's presence on earth—even if He did not pay attention—into "waste not, want not," and "a penny saved is a penny earned" 200 years later, is the socio-economic phenomenon that fascinated Weber, and for which he willingly carried out vigorous scholarly battle when faced with fierce repudiations, as he was

for years.

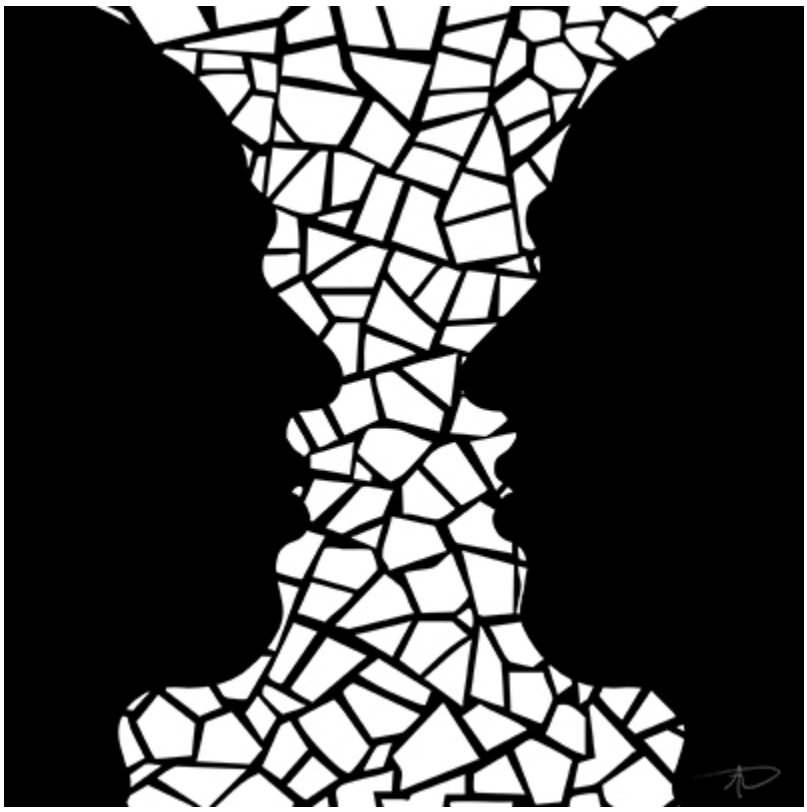
The word “peculiar” and its cognates crop up many times in PE as applied to capitalism’s development and its relationship with religious ethics. In the original the German words are usually *besondere, eigenartig*, or *spezifisch*. Weber’s application of these words appears on pp. 16, 22, 24 (4 times), 25 (twice), 26 (twice), 39, 40, 45, 46, 51 (twice), 55 (twice), etc., for at least 20 more instances. With a devout Pietist mother and an irreligious politico father, Weber studied this phenomenon in “real time,” and “peculiarities” became an indispensable analytic term for him in his quest for lucidity, both as a scholar and a son. His consternation about these overlapping issues becomes clear in a summarizing passage:

> In the rules of St. Benedict, still more with the monks of Cluny, again with the Cistercians, and most strongly the Jesuits, it [Christian asceticism] has become emancipated from planless otherworldliness and *irrational* self-torture. It had developed a systematic method of *rational* conduct with the purpose of overcoming the *status naturae*, to free man from the power of *irrational* impulses and his dependence on the world and on nature. It attempted to subject man to the supremacy of a purposeful will [77]. . . The Puritan, like every *rational* type of asceticism, tried to enable a man to maintain and act upon his constant motives, especially those which it taught him itself, against the emotions. . . Contrary to many popular ideas, the end of this asceticism was to be able to lead an alert, intelligent life: the most urgent task the destruction of spontaneous, impulsive enjoyment. (pp. 118-19; emphases added)

So there we have it: crush one’s autarkic *joie de vivre* under the iron heel of capitalist discipline, pile up the wealth, forget about God’s presence or absence, and—*voila*!—capitalism thrives even as its subject peoples are smothered in hyper-rationalization on all fronts.

Frantz Fanon and the Crisis of Our Current Transitional Period

By | 2026: Vol. 25, No. 1



July 20th 2025 was the 100th birthday of Frantz Fanon that remarkable thinker, writer psychoanalyst and revolutionary from the Caribbean Island of Martinique. There were many celebrations of this very special milestone in many venues across the world, including the big one organized by the Caribbean Philosophical Association (CPA) in Martinique. For me, it was a distinct pleasure to have been able to join that group of celebrants in honoring this great Caribbean thinker with our thoughts, papers, poems and other offerings. And it is another distinct pleasure to be joining yet another celebrating of Fanon's 100th birthday with my contribution to this special issue of the journal, *Logos.* This global celebrating of Fanon's 100th birthday reminds me very much of the 2001 celebrating of the 100th birthday of CLR James in Trinidad that was organized by the CLR James Society before it became an integral part of the CPA.

One of the last significant achievements of the CLR James Society before it merged into the CPA was a special issue of the *CLR James Journal* celebrating Fanon's 80th birthday. It was volume 11, No.1, and it came out in 2005. It was one of the best-selling issues of the journal, which required a second printing. In short, Fanon was hot then and still is now. In my editor's note introducing that special issue, I wrote: "more than anything else, it is Fanon's visionary

capabilities that we are very much in need of today. He saw so clearly and wrote so precisely about the neocolonial crisis that would overwhelm our postcolonial present. The grip of this crisis continues to tighten, yet we are without any clear sense of how to get out of it".

Fanon and the Caribbean Tradition of Creative Realism

When we reflect on the distinctive thinking of the major Caribbean scholars such as CLR James, Nicolas Guillen, Sylvia Wynter, Aime Cesaire, Wilson Harris, Frantz Fanon, and most recently, Lewis Gordon, the underlying structure of their thought is an original dialectical synthesis that brings together a number of constituting factors that are usually kept apart. Thus, in the case of CLR James, his thought was founded on a dialectical synthesis that brought together a Marxist historicism, Pan Africanism, literature and the game of cricket. Most striking and memorable has been the particular synthesis that James established between cricket and theatrical drama in his classic text, *Beyond A Boundary*. It was this unique dialectical synthesis which brought these distinct analytical factors into mutual engagements that was the source of James's originality and brilliance.

In the case of Sylvia Wynter, her thought is centered on a dialectical synthesis that brings together creative writing, literary criticism, a Marxist historicism that is in constant dialogue with the epistemic historicism of French poststructuralism, Pan Africanism and the biology of Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela. As in the case of James, this was an unusual synthesis. It was also very difficult for others to reproduce, and it has remained the source of Wynter's originality and brilliance. Although very different from James's synthesis, the latter had a very profound influence on Wynter's dialectical synthesis and thus on her thinking.

It is a major thesis of this paper that an important key to Fanon's thought and longevity is that his thought was also founded on another of these original and difficult to reproduce dialectical syntheses. This synthesis that grounded and informed Fanon's thought brought together literature, a Marxist historicism, Pan Africanism, psychoanalysis and French existentialism. It

was a combination that produced a dialectical synthesis like no other, and thus was able to give Fanon that originality, which we have been celebrating over the course of the year of 2025. If in the case of James, the particularly notable area of synthesis was that between theater and cricket, in the case of Fanon, it was that between a Black or Pan African Marxist historicism, psychoanalysis, and existentialism. Even more specifically, it was the connections between the theories of anxiety and its outward projection into the arena of a racialized global political economy that remains one of the notable moves in Fanon's dialectical synthesis. It was the delicate and non-dogmatic balance that Fanon was able to maintain between these major currents in his thought that made it so special and original.

We may wonder about the source and factors behind these striking dialectical syntheses that have clearly marked the Caribbean intellectual tradition and brought it worldwide attention. A very well-known aesthetic that had been developed by two of Fanon's teachers, Rene Menil and Aime Cesaire, to capture this dialectical aspect of Caribbean thought has been magical realism. Giving this answer a more philosophical twist, I have attempted to link the production of these distinctive dialectical syntheses to an underlying ontology and the epistemic or knowledge-producing priorities it has metaphysically justified. This underlying onto-metaphysical infrastructure I have called creative realism. Its distinctive nature was probably first made explicit by the great novelist from Guyana, Wilson Harris even though he did not give it that name.

For Harris, the creative/intellectual environment in which the Caribbean writer/thinker finds him or herself was one that he described as imploded and burnt out. By these descriptors, Harris was pointing to the fact that the traditions of thought inherited by the Caribbean thinker or writer have all been shattered ones, broken into now widely scattered pieces by the experiences of colonization, slavery, indenture, and industrial modernization. This is true whether we are speaking of Native Caribbean, Euro-Caribbean, Indo-Caribbean or Afro-Caribbean traditions of thought. None of these survived the above experiences sufficiently intact to give the thinker or writer the lived experience of creating within a wholistic integrated body of ideas and practices that were alive and thus giving vital stimuli to his or her creative projects. Rather, the experience has been one of getting dead or negative fragments out of the way or going in search of clearly missing fragments. Thus in Harris's experience, what the writer who inherits the shattered traditions of the Caribbean experiences first or primarily is not the creative inputs or established truths of a well-functioning cultural/intellectual tradition, but the inherent creativity of human self that established the creations and truths of these traditions before they were shattered and scattered by the turbulent movements of old empires falling and new ones rising.

In other words, the starting point, the founding center of ontological writing for the Caribbean thinker is the inherent spontaneous creativity of this Caribbean self that was largely stripped of its more intact cultural clothing, forced to find many of these lost fragments, and to create new pieces of cultural clothing with which to redress itself. This, in Harris's view, is the creativity that drives the Caribbean writer and thinker and is the source of their now well-recognized dialectical syntheses, and their originality. The ongoing encounter with this movement of the

inherent creativity of the human self is experienced and theorized as being more real than any of its own new creations or any creation or piece of knowledge inherited from the imploded traditions. As such, this directly experienced inherent creativity becomes the center, the head cornerstone of this ontology of creative realism, which in my view extends and reinforces the ground under the aesthetic of magical realism.

In his acceptance speech for the 1992 Nobel prize for literature, the Caribbean poet and playwright, Derek Walcott echoed Harris's image of the broken traditions of the Caribbean region. He used the image of a broken vase to represent the tradition with Caribbean literature as the love that has been carefully gathering the scattered pieces and putting them back together again along with the new pieces that have been created to replace those that have been permanently lost so that we can continue to meet the new and evolving challenges of our postcolonial situation. This is why the Caribbean intellectual tradition lacks the more comprehensive syntheses of the pre-modern period, while at the same time being well known for its highly creolized nature.

One of the already noted features of these less than comprehensive but dialectical Caribbean syntheses, is that their creators have remained quite skeptical about arriving at final or absolute truths. These epistemic undertakings have been labeled by Harris as "rehearsals". Fanon's creative realist skepticism towards final or absolute truths was very evident in the boldness with which he "stretched" Marxism, existentialism, psychoanalysis, literature and Pan Africanism, which made it possible for him to bring these analytically distinct discourses into productive mutual engagements. Thus, for the most part the findings and truth claims emerging from these syntheses have been given a provisional status – quasi-real or partially true – and thus are likely to be revised in the future. What is most real and closest to the truth in postcolonial Caribbean tradition of inherited cultural fragments is the lived experience of the inherent creativity of the human self. In the European tradition, the philosopher whose works compares best with these dialectical syntheses at the heart of the Caribbean intellectual tradition is Theodore Adorno, whose thinking rested on the dialectical synthesis of literature, a Marxist historicism, psychoanalysis and music.

Fanon and Our Present Moment

As we needed Fanon's visionary capabilities at the start of the postcolonial period, we are again in need of them as the world system of global political economy into which we are all integrated is going through another of its major transitional periods. This current period of change and transition is as profound and comprehensive as the one that gave birth to the postcolonial era, with its the decline of the European empires, and the liberation of the colonies of those empires in spaces of greater political independence. This was the period of global transition that Fanon saw more clearly than most and garnered him global recognition. It is that period in which many colonies were becoming new nations that is now being pushed from the center of the historical stage. Another, barely visible at the present moment, is taking its place. We can provisionally call it the informatic phase of a postmodern world system that is leaving behind the modern industrial one theorized by Oliver Cox, Immanuel Wallerstein, Raul

Prebisch, Lloyd Best, Norman Girvan and others. Its birth is showing major signs of difficulty and turmoil.

As we move deeper into this emerging era, it is the Fanonian type of vision that we, in the rapidly changing peripheral areas of our world system, will be greatly in need of as major changes in the global order continue to unfold. We have seen new centers of power, like market socialist China, emerge. Former centers like Britain, Russia and France are experiencing major declines, falling somewhere between the centers and the semi-peripheries of this changing global system. Meanwhile, semi-peripheral areas such as the oil rich Middle Eastern states are clear pushing to occupy locations closer to the centers of the system. Further, the information and artificial intelligence technologies that will dominate this emerging informatic phase are rapidly separating it from the receding modern world system that was dominated by the industrial monopoly phase of Western capitalism. Such changes have already significantly altered patterns of trade between the countries of this system producing great wealth for some and increasing poverty for others. Within specific countries new classes are emerging while others are declining. Relations between races, gender and sexualities are also being profoundly disrupted along with the ongoing introduction of major new technologies such as artificial intelligence – making this a major period of change and transition.

In the past, the disruptive nature of major global changes such as these have turned periods of transition into eras of high anxiety as people and communities worry and panic more over their future. The period in Europe between the two world wars was one such era that ours is beginning to resemble in terms of the high levels of free-floating anxiety that people are experiencing and having to project onto others in very disturbing and destructive ways. Thus, one of the most concerning trends of our present moment has been the eruption of fascist trends in countries across the globe. We can think of Narendra Modi in India, Viktor Orban in Hungary, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Recep Erdogan in Turkey or the rise in popularity of Far-Right parties in Western Europe. These eruptions of fascism, which have engulfed many of the major Western liberal democratic states, have now included the United States. These fascist turns in the major Western states and in many of the new nations of the postcolonial period have added new layers difficulty to the neocolonial crisis that continues to invade and capture our postcolonial present. It is the significant increase in difficulties of this nature why we are in such need of visionary powers like those of Fanon.

On account of his deep psycho-existential understanding of the role of racialized identities in the production of both colonial and fascist forms of domination, the current emergence of strong fascist and racist currents in the present neocolonial orders invading the Caribbean and other postcolonial societies were always very real possibilities for both Fanon and his teacher, Aime Cesaire. What in Fanon that is particularly important for us today was his ability to shine a very bright light on these psycho-existentially projected or scapegoating ways of dealing with the high levels of free-floating anxiety of major transitional periods. These inner dynamics are often linked by both leaders and masses to those of party politics and to the crisis tendencies of national economies in very deceptive and destructive ways, thus producing some of the

persistent features of fascist politics. These destructive ways of addressing and dealing with the politico-economic problems of a difficult period of transition have often taken the form of finding some convenient group to blame and thus to scapegoat. We saw it in Fascist Germany with the Jews, and we are seeing it now in the U.S. with Hispanic immigrants. Given this dangerous turn in our period of major transition, we are going to have draw inspiration from Fanon's courageous ability to speak freedom in these times of rising authoritarianism. In short, we are also going to have to mobilize within ourselves Fanonian abilities to look at and name the darkest impulses, passions and practices that can emerge from the hidden depths of the fascist soul.

The Divided Psyche of the Fascist

One of the first things that we have learned from Fanon about fascism is the deeply divided nature of the psyche of the fascist. From the earliest of humanity's philosophical writings, there emerged a dualistic view of the creative processes by which our psyches established our subjective identities and their correlated worldviews. However, this dualistic mode of self- and world-production has had the effect of trapping our development in dualisms such as self/other, we/they, good/evil, Spirit/matter, human/non-human, male/female, individual/collective, colonizer/colonized, state/market. For many of our ancient philosophers, inner wholeness and ethical growth required the transcending or overcoming of many of these dualities. Today, we refer to these dualities as binary oppositions and think of them as operating on us through the languages that we speak. These dualisms are also highly visible in the primary encounters of James, Harris, Wynter and other Caribbean thinkers with the inherent and spontaneous creativity of the human self. Whether we refer to them as dualities or binary oppositions, in well-known periods of fascism, there has consistently been an extreme polarizing of the differences between the concrete realities represented by these discursive dualities or linguistic binary oppositions.

Key to this widening of the distances between of these dualistic categories along with the concrete realities they represent is a significantly increased polarizing of the self/other and we/they binaries. This increased polarization occurs when an individual, a community or a nation claims some privilege, advantage, or inheritance that is made into the basis for a claim of being superior to those who lack this special privilege or inheritance. The internal semiotics of these systems of binary oppositions is such that an increased polarization the above two will bring about corresponding adjustments in many of the other dualities within this semiotic system. As a result, the differences between the realities they represent will no longer be subject to adjustments that will make room for wider and more inclusive possibilities or unities. Instead, rigid either/or relations are imposed on the concrete realities represented by these dualistic categories. Further, in periods of fascism the violence with which these dualistic boundaries are policed increases sharply.

In Fanon's analyses of the colonial period, the particular binaries or dualities that experienced extreme polarization were the race/ethnic binaries – particularly the we/they, self/other, black/white, European/non-European ones – which were buttressed by the extreme polarization

between the concrete realities represented by the human/non-human duality. Today, in the rising fascism and neocolonialism of our transitional period, we can see the increasing levels of polarization between the human and social realities represented by the we/they, citizen/immigrant, white/brown, white/black, rich/poor, male/ female, capital/labor, center/periphery binaries, their reinforcement by the environmental human/non-human duality and the increasing levels of violence required for the policing of these orders of inequality. With the observable sharp increases in the polarization of these binaries in both Europe and the U.S., there can be no doubt, from a Fanonian standpoint, that the West has entered another fascist period in its history. One of the most significant differences between this fascist period and that of the inter-war years is that the current one has engulfed the U.S. Indeed, with the unfolding of the second Trump administration and its placing of national guard troops in cities governed by the democratic party, the U.S. is emerging as the leader of this fascist turn in Western history.

How with the aid of Fanon's dialectical synthesis can we account for the above eruptions of fascism across the globe? Further, how can we account for sharp anti-liberal, anti-social democratic and authoritarian turns in West, the deeper polarizing of underlying dualities and the more violent policing that has accompanied their rise? Given the dialectical nature of Fanon's founding synthesis, the global rise of these fascist movements, political parties, regimes and underlying semiotic orders of binaries, must be the result of many contradictions and opposing forces maturing and coming together in this transitional period. Here, I cannot focus on all of them, but I will focus on some of the politico-economic ones and their connections to the projecting onto others of difficult- to-localize free-floating anxieties that are among the distinctive features of a Fanonian synthesis.

The Politico-Economic Factors

The politico-economic factors triggering these eruptions of fascism across the globe and contributing to the sharp increases in the polarization of underlying binaries are clearly rooted in the crises of global and national re-distribution that have overwhelmed the neoliberal policy measures that were put in place in the 1980s to contain the crises of stagflation in the Western economies of the 1970s. These neoliberal policies marked a second major attempt by the West to experiment the principle of the self-regulating nature of markets. The first was the British-led experiment of the 1840s that collapsed in 1914 and brought with it the collapse of the gold standard for trade between nations, sharp rises in levels of economic protectionism and the start of the first World War. Echoing the collapse of the British experiment with self-regulating markets, the early 1970s was the period during which the U.S. transitioned from being a surplus producing, creditor economy to a borrowing debtor economy that was forced to abandon in 1971 the backing of its currency by gold. This was the start of the postwar collapse of the second Western experiment with markets as self-regulating mechanisms, and also its experiment with the gold standard. These were two areas of significant collapse that lead to the rise of gold-dollar standard and to the globalization of markets that have been at the core of neoliberal reforms of the system. Further, the 1970s was a period of increased competition in industrial production as the Japanese, South Korean, and Taiwanese economies were

experiencing robust growth, which at the same time was dependent on access to the American markets. This intensifying industrial production was also affecting several European countries like the UK and France. If these major Western economies were to keep growing a major shift in basic policies was required.

This period of the late 1960s and early 1970s was also one in which slowing growth rates and the increasing industrial competition was requiring basic policy changes in the peripheral economies of the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Ever since Rosa Luxemburg's classic work on the process of capital accumulation, intense theoretical debates have raged regarding the role and importance of colonies and peripheral areas in the accumulation of capital in the Western economies. In the Caribbean, scholars such as Eric Williams, Claudia Jones, Sylvia Wynter, and Caribbean dependency theorists such as Lloyd Best, Norman Girvan, Clive Thomas have been making arguments that center/periphery relations are as important as capital/labor relations within a country for understanding processes of capital accumulation. Fanon's thinking on these issues was very much in line with the ideas of the above theorists. However, the distinctness of his contribution was the manner in which the anxiously projected dehumanization of black and other non-white workers was incorporated into the extraction of surplus value from their labor and consequently their contributions to capital accumulation in the Western economies.

The big policy shift that resulted from these debates was adoption of the major recommends of Latin American and Caribbean dependency theory by several of these countries. At the core of these recommendations was the call for a New International Economic Order (NIEO). In general terms, this new order called for the wider application of Keynesian principles state/private sector cooperation in the management of the global economy. Spearheading this policy shift were the Argentinian economist, Raul Prebisch and the then Jamaican Prime Minister, Michael Manley. They took it before a special meeting of the UN in 1974, where it was vetoed by the major Western powers. Countering this proposal for an NIEO was that for the Neoliberal Global Economic Order, or what we can call the NGEO. This clash between the two opposing proposals for needed economic policy shifts summed up very clearly the changing state of relations between the Western centers of the global political economy and former colonies now economic peripheries in spite of being politically independent. Hence, these tensions and shifts in center/periphery are important for a complete understanding of the rise of neoliberal order. Under the Trump administration, center/periphery relations have been further polarized with shooting of so called "drug dealers" supposedly transporting drugs from the Caribbean to the U.S., and the stationing of a U.S. aircraft carrier off the coast of Venezuela.

Today, it is crisis of this NGEO, which was instituted as an alternative to the NIEO that we are living through as an integral part of this difficult transitional phase that our global order is now going through. It is only a major crisis of the key set of policies governing the global politico-economic order that can account for the economic dislocations visible across the globe and the anxious fires of fascism that they have been triggering. It is the NGEO's maturing contradictions which are making clear that its strategies of offshoring and turning to finance to

fill the holes left by this offshoring of major sectors of industry, has in fact long outlived its usefulness. In his major work*, Capital in the Twenty-first Century*, Thomas Piketty analyzed another of the contradictions of the NGEO to mature and burst. He has documented with such thorough care the massive transfers of wealth from the middle and working classes of the West to a now very visible billionaire class. This so-called second gilded age points to a repeating cycle in the central capitalist economies, which has oscillated between periods of upper-class wealth production and periods of expansion in welfare institutions, as the state gets captured by elite class fragments or by mass mobilizations from below of workers and other oppressed groups. It is the movement of this central capitalist cycle too far in the direction of capital that has emerged very clearly as one of the major contradictions of the NGEO.

Also affecting the fate and sense of security of the major classes in the West is the number of "good jobs" that have been exported abroad or offshored as integral parts of the market driven neoliberal order. The maturing of this contradiction came with the exporting of way too many of these jobs, which hollowed out many middle-class communities and made the experience of "living paycheck to paycheck" one of the soundtracks of this transitional period. In particular, this contradiction indicated another major instance of the failure of markets to self-regulate within time horizons that will avoid major human suffering. As a result, the Biden Administration found it necessary to override the functioning of the markets and to institute state-led policies of reshoring, onshoring, near-shoring and friend-shoring in order to jump start the re-industrialization of the U.S. and to address the growing concerns of labor.

Under the second Trump administration this abandoning of the now crisis-ridden NGEO increased sharply. Abandoning market principles and the authority of liberal, free market institutions like the WTO and the World Bank, Trump has imposed a high degree of authoritarian control over the American economy through the tariffication of its trade. Tariffs have been imposed on countries that were supposedly taking advantage of the U.S. because they had a trade surplus with America. But the case of Brazil made it clear that there were other power motives involved as it did not have a trade surplus with the U.S. Unfortunately for the administration, this authoritarian tariffication of American trade policy has not been working. It has contributed to rising prices at home and thus adding to the woes and anxious concerns of many middle and working-class Americans. Further, because of the high levels of borrowing to finance AI and other investment projects, careful Wall Street watchers like Andrew Ross Sorkin are very concerned about a huge bubble in the economy that could pop with disruptive consequences that call to mind the Great Recession of 2008 and the Great Depression of the 1930s. Still further, the American labor market has been tightening, inflation has been quite stubborn at around 3%, rather than the 2% desired by the Federal Reserve Bank. Hence, we have Trump's fight with Bank Chair, Jerome Powell, along with his authoritarian push to compromise the independence of this central bank. Abroad, Trump's authoritarian policies have only further polarized center/periphery relations, as in the case with Venezuela, and disturbed relations with long-standing allies like Canada and the UK.

In the midst of failing policies and politico-economic changes of this nature and magnitude there can be little doubt regarding the increased levels of anxiety and concern for the future

that they are generating. The evidence of increased levels of fearful anxiety being displaced onto others just cannot be denied. Trump's arbitrary imposing of tariffs is a classic example of how the socio-economic distance between we/they binary can be increased while generating other increased polarizations down the chain of connected binaries. As result of moves like these, practices of scapegoating are definitely up, along with the violent attempts to put down the scapegoated groups who are perceived to be taking away the jobs and engaging in practices of white replacement. It is in times like these that we get statements such as President Trump's reports of Haitian immigrants eating the cats and dogs of good Americans. The attack on black voting rights achieved through the courageous and progressive struggles of the African American Civil Rights Movement is very much a part of this comprehensive countermovement to shore up and preserve the already collapsing neoliberal order and the power of those billionaires who have benefited so well from it. The shocking and very disturbing display of state violence against Hispanic communities even though their members are not illegal immigrants is truly one of the defining features of this period of American fascism.

What is to Be Done?

Our Fanonian analysis of the dangerous currents in our present period of major transition pointed our attention to three crucial areas. First was the possibility of a global crisis of capital accumulation with sources in multiple nations such as the crisis of the NGEO. Second, our Fanonian analysis directed our attention to the disruptions and dislocations in the lives of individuals and communities produced by this neoliberal restructuring of global capital, such as the excessive offshoring of the good jobs needed for good lives. Third and finally, it directed our attention to the increased levels of anxiety produced by these dislocations that have been projected onto others in the forms of dehumanizing practices of racist, sexist, and fascist forms of scapegoating. Having clearly identified these realities hypothesized by our Fanonian analysis, our next move must be to take up the famous Leninist question: "What is to Be Done?"

Because our new post-neoliberal global order is still emerging and thus barely visible, one of the first things that we can do is to compare its birth pangs with those of other periods of major transition that emerged from global economic crises and wildly burning fascist fires. When we have found such comparative periods, we need to look carefully at how their economic crises and their fascist fires got started and how they were eventually put out. Such lessons and guides from the past may give us important clues about our economic crisis, its fires, how to put them out, and so emerge into the sunlight of the new and hopefully better politico-economic order; one with more equitable capital/labor, center/periphery relations, lower levels of free-floating anxieties and more equality between the races and genders.

With these concerns in mind, I have been hinting that our current period of major transition compares best to the transitional period between the two world wars, which gave us the monopoly phase of Western capitalism with its distinct sets of capital/labor, center/periphery, capitalist/socialist, and race-ethnic relations. Unfortunately, the passage from the older and more liberal-competitive phase to the monopoly one included a major war, which involved

several nations and took the lives of millions of people. Let us hope that this won't be the case with our present transition even though the fires of smaller wars are burning all around us.

Regarding the lessons from the transition to the monopoly phase of Western capitalism, one of the first is that we must stand up and resist these turns to fascism as bravely as Fanon did. He joined the French military in their fight against German fascism. However, in that military outfit, in addition to learning about German fascism Fanon also encountered directly the projecting onto him of French anti-black racism. Solidarity with the protest and resistance movements to both the NGEO and its fascist offsprings that have erupted and are still erupting is thus extremely vital. So, as we recall with hope the seven million people who took to the streets in the "No Kings" demonstrations of November 2025 in the U.S., let us also bring to mind the 2009 44-day uprising against the neoliberal order in Fanon's home country of Martinique and its sister- Caribbean Island of Guadeloupe. For the Caribbean, this was a very important political upsurge from below as it brought to the surface the persisting ideals of democratic socialism, pan African racial equality, popular democracy, popular control of the media and other cultural establishments – ideals that had been smothered and sidelined by the rise of neoliberalism. This uprising was not a classic Fanonian revolutionary upsurge like the ones that Fanon described and analyzed so brilliantly in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Rather, it was very much an insurrection of the type which James has described as the masses writing their own books in the streets using the performative language of collective action. The importance of insurrectionary upsurges like this one is that they let us know that, appearances to the contrary, many of our postcolonial ideals of freedom, racial and class equality, the NIEO, the mixed economy and others are still very much alive and have not been neo-colonized to death by the NGEO and its structural adjustment packages. Also worthy of note here is the fact that this French Caribbean insurrection provided major stimulus to the 2018-2020 Yellow Vests protests of workers in France. In short, solidarity among existing anti-fascist groups must be a vital political strategy during our complex and difficult transition period.

Second, we must now look even more closely and honestly at what went wrong with our economic alternatives to the neoliberal order, particularly our NIEO proposals for restructuring the global order and our mixed economy proposals for addressing the persistent development challenges confronting our postcolonial economies. Consistent with our principles of creative realism, the truth claims that we have attached to these proposals have made them at best Harrisian rehearsals. They are not final truths or final performances. Self-criticism and self-testing in these key economic areas must also be a top priority for us now. We need to know as accurately as possible what areas of our political economy discourses are good and should be kept and what areas are in need of improving, revising, or throwing out. This is and must be a time of serious politico-economic thinking as the global parameters of national economies are changing and changing rapidly. Is there a post-Lewisian phase for Caribbean economies that will take us beyond the practices of dependent investment and development by foreign capital? Is there an emerging phase in which we will achieve greater ownership and control of the major tourist, offshore banking and mineral sectors of our regional economy? These are vital concerns that will determine how we in the Caribbean will experience this transition and what our life will be like in the emerging new and possibly informatic order. In short, we also have

serious intellectual work to do.

Third and finally, our Fanonian analysis will require of us that we observe very carefully how we on the progressive Left are experiencing the heightened levels of anxiety that are inherent in our transitional period. We don't have complete control over how our psyches deal with anxieties that are difficult to localize and own. The dehumanizing projection of such anxieties are not primarily conscious operations. To realize this, all we have to do is to reflect on how the polarizing of self/other and we/they binaries contributed to the decline of major political upsurges such as the Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter movements. In short, as good Fanonians we will have to make every effort to be highly aware of how these two binary oppositions are operating within us as we join with others like us and those who may not be like us on this journey into the next phase of our global system of political economy.

Works Cited

Fanon, Frantz, 1967. *Black Skin, White Masks*, New York: Grove Press

Fanon, Frantz, 1968. *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York: Grove Press

Harris, Wilson, 1973. *Tradition, the Writer and Society*, London: New Beacon Press

Piketty, Thomas, 2017. *Capital in the Twenty-first Century*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press

Ross Sorkin, Andrew, 2025. *1929*, New York: Penguin Random House

Walcott, Derek, 1993. *The Antilles*, New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux

Wynter, Sylvia, 1984. "The Ceremony Must be Found", *Boundary 2*, No.12

Fanon and Anti-Fascism

By | 2026: Vol. 25, No. 1

I: Our Neo-Fascist reality

Trump's "big beautiful bill" is another massive neoliberal redistribution of US capitalist wealth that has gutted welfare reforms won by African-American struggles of the 1950s and 1960s. As much as the last piece of the puzzle, the military, is still being tailored to his authoritarian control, the massive budget for ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) gives him the largest funded militarized force in US history, already operating as neo-fascist storm troopers. Importantly, his attempt to overturn birthright citizenship takes us back to the revolutionary moment when, as Karl Marx contemporaneously observed, Black slaves freed themselves and brought about the Reconstruction Amendments to the US Constitution following the Civil War. Let's not forget that it was the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement of 2020 that emerged out of the George Floyd moment during the COVID lockdown, a moment which immediately spread across the US and the world after a young woman, Darnella Frazier, stood and videoed the murder of Floyd as he called out, "I can't breathe."[i] Trump wanted to bring in the military at that time. That is the threat now. But as in Apartheid South Africa in the 1960s and 1970s, Black communities in Apartheid America have always understood that Black protest walks in the shadow of massacre. Nonetheless, as the BLM movement demonstrated in 2016, the Black dimension will continue to play a vanguard role in the anti-fascist future. As Fanon puts it in his 1956 speech to the First Congress of Negro Writers and Artists in Paris (1956), "Racism and

Culture," "Racism … haunts and vitiates American culture. And this *dialectical gangrene* is exacerbated by the coming to awareness and the determination of millions of Blacks and Jews to fight this racism" (Fanon, 1967: 36, my emphasis).

The white supremacist US foreign policy also has a connection to South Africa's case against Israel for violations of the Genocide Convention in Gaza.[ii] For South Africans, the case is particularly illuminating because it is directly related to the long struggle against Apartheid, a struggle that included a large number of South African Jews. In other words, although South Africa is increasingly neoliberal, corrupt, and reactionary, its willingness to accuse Israel of genocide is underscored by a constitution informed by the struggle against Apartheid. The memory of colonial genocide has not faded across the continent as Namibia's first lady, Monica Geingos, made clear as she immediately spoke out against Germany's defence of Israel in opposition to South Africa's charge of genocide. What she said was instructive: "The absurdity of Germany, on January 12, 2024, rejecting genocide charges against Israel and warning about the 'political instrumentalization of the charge' is not lost on us."[iii] What was not lost was the memory of the 1904 Herero-Nama genocide by the German military, which killed 100,000 Herero and 10,000 Nama in then-German South West Africa. It is this connection between genocide and colonialism that continues to be very real.

This was familiar territory for Frantz Fanon, who had left Martinique to join the struggle against Nazism and Fascism and realized a year later, at 19 years old, that he had been duped by "this false ideology." Just a few years later, in 1948, he became acutely aware of the hypocrisy of the French signing the UN's "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" almost at the same time as it was suppressing anticolonial uprisings in Madagascar and Vietnam and brutally torturing combatants and those assumed to be combatants.

Fanon was especially aware of Aimé Césaire's argument that Nazism was the product of a "boomerang effect" (2000: 36) of European colonialism, where European savagery, violence, and brutality—racism—toward non-European peoples rebounds with the largest holocaust in

history, the systematic extermination of six million Jews. In Martinique, Fanon worked on Césaire electoral campaign in 1945 and remembered Césaire's speech in *Black Skin, White Masks*, when Césaire said, "When I switch on my radio and hear that black men are being lynched in America, I say that we have been lied to: Hitler is not dead; when I learn that Jews have been insulted, mistreated, persecuted, I say that we have been lied to: Hitler is not dead; when, finally, I turn on my radio and hear that in Africa forced labor has been inaugurated and legalized, I say that we they have certainly been lied to: Hitler is not dead" (2008: 70).

In this very Fanonian spirit, we discover postwar fascist continuities in the observation of South Africa's Black Consciousness theorist and organizer, Steve Biko, who added, Hitler is likely to be found in Pretoria." Fanon was writing on South Africa in *Black Skin, White Masks*, which was just a few years after the military defeat of Nazism in Germany and Fascism in Italy, when the Apartheid National Party, which had only recently closed down its pro-Nazi and proto-Nazi groupings (to which most of the new Apartheid government leaders had been connected[iv]), was elected to office.

II: Putting Fanon in context

Fanon was 14 when the Second World War began and 17 when he first decided to join the French resistance against Fascism in Europe. Against his older brother, Joby's advice, who was channeling his philosophy teacher, saying that it was a white conflict, Fanon was adamant: "Wherever liberty is in question, I feel concerned. We're all concerned, whatever our color" (Joby Fanon, 23).

The wartime trauma and experiences in the racist French military as well what he saw (for example in *The Wretched of the Earth*, he remembers colonial Algeria creating the logic of a farmyard in Algeria where children fight over bits of bread (1968: 307)) reflected the disconnect between the ideals of the French Republic, he had internalized in Martinique and the realities he witnessed. These experiences changed him. He wrote to his parents in April 1945 that he was wrong: "We must no longer look to this false ideology, behind which secularists and idiotic politicians hide, as our beacon. I was wrong! Nothing here justifies that sudden decision I took to make myself the defender of the farmer's interests, when the farmer himself couldn't care less." (quoted in Joby Fanon: 34) Fanon's feeling was shared across the Black world. As the Black soldiers, the "heroes of the battlefield of Europe … machined gunned … this is Sétif in 1945, this is Fort-de-France … this is Dakar, this is Lagos" (Fanon, 1968: 232). It was the same for Black soldiers returning to American cities who now faced fascism at home with a new militancy.

Fanon's changing attitude to the French struggle against fascism from inside the war reveals a lifelong commitment to be at the core of the fight against tyranny and for a just freedom. As he put it in *Black Skin White Masks*, after writing of the reality of South Africa's racist structure, he articulates a vision of human solidarity: "Colonial racism is no different from other racisms. Anti-Semitism cuts me to the quick… I cannot dissociate myself from the fate reserved for my brother"[v] (2008: 69).

The liberation of France did not bring an end to French colonialism and French racism, far from it. But that did not mean a change in Fanon's principle of struggling for human solidarity.

Let us not forget that postwar France was Social Democratic with powerful Communist and Socialist Parties supporting colonialism or at best mildly critical of the massacres and torture, whether that be in Madagascar or Vietnam, or quiet about French colonialism's Sétif massacre in Algeria in 1945. The European civilizing mission had not been undermined by the military defeat of fascism but remained dominant among liberal intellectuals such as Octave Mannoni. French liberal worries about the effects of the torturing of the Vietnamese or the Algerians on French youth in the military had a point because it is through colonial wars (whether that is the French and Americans in Vietnam, the British in Kenya, the French in Algeria or the Portuguese in Angola), Fanon argues, that the recruits "learn fascism" (see "Algeria Face to Face with the French Torturers," Fanon, 1967: 70). Does anyone doubt that this dialectic is not at work amongst the citizen soldiers of the IDF in Gaza today?

Fanon's wartime experiences can certainly be considered part of his decision to become a psychiatrist.[vi] He worked with the founder of Institutional socio-psychotherapy, François Tosquelles, at Saint Alban psychiatric hospital in the mountains of Lozère, France. Tosquelles had been one of the founding members of the anti-Stalinist POUM, the Workers' Party of Marxist Unification, that, along with advocating revolutionary opposition to Fascist dictator Francisco Franco, supported worker and farmworker collectives and communes in Catalonia as an anti-fascist expression of the society that they were fighting for. It was in that context that Tosquelles began practicing "sociotherapy" in the trenches of the war zone. Fleeing Franco's Spain, Tosquelles was found by the director of Saint Alban in a French internment camp. And it was through Tosquelles' radical therapeutic practice, Saint Alban became a hospital where, in contrast to others that had become places of starvation and extermination as the Vichy regime followed the Nazi policy of systematic sterilization and murder of the mentally ill, the large majority of patients not only survived but were actively involved in their own survival alongside resistance fighters who found a refuge there.

Fanon's decision to study psychiatry at the University of Lyon was connected with Saint Alban, which he heard about from its former director, Paul Balvet. Balvet was practising socio-psychotherapy at Vinatier Hospital in Lyon when Fanon decided to study psychiatry. The idea of what became known as Institutional or social psychotherapy was building a new society inside the hospital as an attempt to de-institutionalize the hospital, its hierarchies and structures, and change the relationships of power. While Saint Alban Hospital became a refuge for anti-fascist fighters and refugees, after the war, it became known as a site for radical and innovative mental health practices. Fanon became Tosquelles' intern there in 1952 before taking a position at Blida-Joinville Psychiatric Hospital in Algeria.

Blida-Joinville Psychiatric Hospital was a settler colonial hospital where the racist theories and practices of the so-called Algiers School of ethnopsychiatry, which Fanon had earlier written about in the essay "The North African Syndrome," were dominant. Arriving before the outbreak of the national liberation war, Fanon spent the next four years working from inside the hospital

as a reformer, educator, and practitioner of socio-psychotherapy within a system he described as systematized dehumanization (see 1967: 53). After November 1954, when the FLN opened the national liberation struggle, Fanon was also dedicated to it. For him, both struggles, inside and outside the hospital, were connected. In this sense, his work was to make concrete what he had argued in *Black Skin, White Masks*, namely, to bring the social world into the consulting room and thereby enlighten the analysand on the need to change the world.[vii]

III: Fascist Complicities

For Fanon, the undercurrent of fascism in postwar France, which would re-emerge more fully with De Gaulle's coup, was set in motion by France's Socialist government.

In one of the appendices for Fanon's 1959 *A Dying Colonialism* (in French, *L'an V de la révolution algérienne*, noting the revolutionary calendar of the French Revolution) on "Algeria's Minorities," Fanon's intern at Blida-Joinville, Charles Géronimi, writes of his wish, reflecting the view of many progressives at the time, to take a "third position" on Algeria, that is, against the French and the FLN. This "third position" was based on the French left's triumph in June 1954, led by Pierre Mendès-France. But Mendès-France's immediate response to the call for Algerian independence in November was to insist that "Algeria is France." With that, the idea of a third position disintegrated as an attempt to "humanize repression," Géronomi argued, "in the face of the fascist-Lacoste,"[viii] with the French Left, Géronomi concludes, "playing the game of Algerian fascism" (1965: 174).

Fanon's *A Dying Colonialism* details the complicity of the medical profession, psychiatrists, and psychoanalysts in state torture regimes. These continue to play out today. After 9/11, the revelations of the duplicity and scheming between top officials in the American Psychological Association (APA) and the United States government's torture program became clear. Promoted by the Pentagon and CIA, loosening the constraints around "experiments with human subjects," that were put in place after the Vietnam War, the APA promoted and justified psychologists' work in the torture industry and collusion in the management of torture programs. After the release of photos from Abu Ghraib American prison, liberal intellectuals became immediately concerned about the effects of US torture on American military personnel, mirroring the same moral turpitude of "French intellectuals" during the Algerian war, who deplored how "the French recruits are learning fascism."

"The gravity of the tortures," explains Fanon, "the horror of the rape of little Algerian girls, are perceived because their existence threatens a certain idea of French honor … Such shutting out of the Algerian, such ignoring of the tortured … or the massacred family, constitutes a wholly original phenomenon. It belongs to that form of egocentric, sociocentric thinking which has become the characteristic of the French" ("Algeria Face to Face with the French Torturers"(1967: 71)). That phenomenon is now common and grounded in pathologization.

IV: A Threat to Antifascism: The Absence of Ideology and the Needed Vision of an Antifascist Future

At the end of 1960, in his role as the Algerian Provisional Government's representative in Africa, Fanon took an organizational trip through the Sahel. One vividly senses his presence in his notebooks. He writes of the excitement of meeting revolutionaries and "discussing strategy, terrain, passage." Reading books and reliving them "with the intensity that circumstances and the place confer upon them." But while acknowledging that Africa would soon be liberated, he cautions that things are not that simple: "the deeper I enter into the cultures and the political circles, the surer I am that the great danger that threatens Africa is the absence of ideology" (1967: 186).

This absence of ideology—in short, what you are against and also what you are for (or what we might call an idea of the future society and its human character)—cannot be deferred. Instead, the nature of liberation and what it aspires to become must be concretely clarified, made more inclusive, and rendered holistic. For Fanon, the end of colonial occupation cannot simply mean taking over state offices, flying a new flag over the border posts, and assuming management of state administration. While the struggle itself does explode old colonial truths, it also exposes the reality that what is framed as national can often be divergent and conflicting. These are problems Fanon addresses in his last book, *The Wretched of the Earth.*

Fanon's vision of re-humanization challenges movements to envision new possibilities for social life through the practice of including all those formerly colonized and excluded as *active participants*, creating the nation as spaces where people can develop new ways of being and relating to one another.Liberation, as praxis, thus involves the creation of new social relations, grounded in solidarity, equality, and participation, requiring a quite different commitment to what might be considered "development projects". This is why the practical work of including everyone in the building of the new nation is essential to what Fanon considered the "limitless humanity" of revolutionary processes—an openness to rethinking and reimagining the future and the need to "humanize this world," he argues, beginning with conditions of work (1968: 99). Fanon articulates this philosophically in terms of the human not capitalist notions of time: "the important thing," he argues, "is not that three hundred people form a plan and decide upon carrying it out, but that the whole people plan and decide even if it takes them twice or three times as long." Because, "the time taken up by explaining, the time 'lost' in treating the worker as a human being, will be caught up in the execution of the plan. People must know where they are going, and why."

Knowing that building the new nation and awakening the whole people will take time, he adds, "We African politicians must have very clear ideas on the situation of our people. But this clarity of ideas must be profoundly dialectical" and global, because "the yardstick of time must no longer be that of the moment or up till the next harvest, but *must become* that of the rest of the world" (1968: 193-194).

V: Sanction All Revolts

Bodily experience is central to Fanon's political and psychiatric thought and essential to his notion of human freedom, with gait, expression, and breath reflecting lived experiences. By

connecting the body's free movement to liberation, Fanon highlights the interplay between physical and mental emancipation, redefining space and resistance. This interplay is central to Fanon's analysis of the physical geography of settler colonialism in *The Wretched of the Earth* and to Fanon's directive that we "sanction all revolts, all desperate actions, all those abortive attempts" (1968: 207). Does this sanction mean that he has no criticism of such attempts? Of course not. However, meaningful critical engagement can only begin with the recognition that "every time we don't understand," we are, as Fanon puts it, "at the heart of the drama" (1965: 125).

Acknowledging the radical intellectuals' lack of comprehension behind their often reactive opinion serves as a valid starting point to listen to revolt with openness. For Fanon, the challenge to hear the rationality of revolt and to hear its new language is not easy because it involves a commitment to a new kind of listening that must cut through prejudice and assumption.[ix]

Intellectuals, he argues, need to break with their presuppositions by using all they have learnt in elite schools in the struggle against such education and become disciplined by the movement (1968: 150), "put at the people's disposal the intellectual and technical capital that it has snatched when going through the colonial universities" (my emphasis).

What Fanon calls "the rationality of revolt" is therefore neither given beforehand nor immediately comprehensible. Instead, it is living. Fanon introduces the idea within the anticolonial struggle, arguing that retrogression is the inevitable result of the incapacity to "rationalize popular praxis." The revolutionary movement does not erase differences but enlivens them (Lenin), and thus, for Fanon, the intellectual challenge is the work of political and educational clarification, which *begins* by*rationalizing popular praxis and attributing to it reason*, but does not end there. To do this requires a cognitive break. Because without that, national consciousness would become "nothing but a crude, empty, fragile shell," where "the nation is passed over for the race" with chauvinism and xenophobia erupting in violence. Fanon's conception of the new anticolonial, anti-fascist nation—a new society—is inherently fluid because it must be actively created and consciously willed by those who have been silenced and dehumanized. Political education, then, also allows those who had been denied subjecthood, space, encouragement, and independence to speak their thoughts. Fanon's anti-fascism is a revolutionary philosophy and radical humanism are grounded in the recognition of the profound psychological scars inflicted by colonialism and racism. These scars can persist long after formal liberation, shaping the identities and experiences of those who have endured and also continue to endure dehumanization. Fanon's work as a psychiatrist informed his understanding of these dynamics, particularly in his analysis of the impact of all the forms of colonial violence on mental health. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, he explores how the trauma and the brutality of settler colonialism leave lasting wounds on individuals and communities. He argues that liberation is not merely a political process but must be social and psychological, requiring a re-humanization of the oppressed.

As much as he has written about "radical mutations in consciousness" brought by the national

liberation struggle, he insists, in his last words of the last chapter of his final work, that we can't wait until humanity is "imperceptibly transformed by revolutionary processes in perpetual renewal" (1968: 305). Rather, because of the systematic dehumanization of capitalist-colonialism, *consciousness needs help now*. Almost returning us to the analytical self-criticism of the consulting room, he argues, "the important theoretical problem is that it is necessary at all times and in all places to make explicit, to *de-mystify*, and to harry the insult to humankind that *exists in oneself*" (1968: 305, my emphasis). As much of individual liberation cannot be achieved without social praxis and changing the world, for Fanon, claims of "an authentic national liberation" can only exist "on the precise degree to which *the individual*has irreversibly begun their liberation."[x] (1967: 103, my emphasis). The two are intertwined, but the first task of the newly independent nation is "to give back dignity to all citizens, fill their minds and feast their eyes with human things, and create a prospect that is human because conscious and sovereign inhabitants dwell therein" (1968: 205, my emphasis, translation altered).

This sums up an anti-fascist philosophical grounding, humanism. The struggle for freedom, he said in the statement he made at the Second Congress of Black Artists and Writers, Rome, in 1959, was that "after the conflict there is not only the disappearance of colonialism but also the disappearance of the colonized. This new humanity cannot do otherwise than define a new humanism both for itself and for others" (1968: 245-246).

*A version of this paper was presented at the international symposium, "Fanon Today: Contemporary Struggles and Theoretical Perspectives," Berlin, July 22-23, 2025.

Bibliography

Fanon, Frantz (1965) *A Dying Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review)

_____ (1967) *Toward the African Revolution* (New York: Grove Press)

_____ (1968) *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press)

_____ (2008) *The Black, White Masks*, translated by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press)

Fanon, Joby (2014) *Frantz Fanon, My Brother: Doctor, Playwright, Revolutionary* Lanham: Lexington Books

Notes

[i] On Fanon's ideas of combat breath, see my Frantz Fanon, *Combat Breathing* (Polity, 2024). While the concept of "Combat Breathing" re-emerging at the end of Trump's first term with the George Floyd's murder inspiring a new Black Lives Matter movements, and the idea of prison and police abolition moved from the margins, liberals and American corporations and banks quickly adopted the language of DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) and promised action,

much of which was unrealized.

[ii] Phillippe Sands points out that American prosecutors at the Nuremburg trial never use the word genocide fear that it could also be used against America and Americans (see *New York Times*, August 13, 2025,https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/13/opinion/ezra-klein-podcast-philippe-sands.html In South Africa "the land question" remains, with white farm owners owning the majority of land (on the struggle for land and the creation of decommodified communal land see Abahlali baseMjondolo, Twenty Years of Organising in the Shanty Towns of South Africa: Twenty years of Struggle and Courage, Daraja 2025). In contrast to the ICE racist attacks on Black and Brown workers in the US, Trump's continued support of Apartheid is seen in his encouragement of white (Afrikaner) farmers to migrate to the US.

[iii] See *Report on the Natives of South-West Africa and Their Treatment by Germany*. Prepared in the Administrator's Office, Windhuk, South-West Africa, January 1918, Union of South Africa. Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of His Majesty, August 1918 (London: Published by His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1918).

[iv] https://samilhistory.com/2023/09/09/the-nazification-of-the-afrikaner-right/

[v] It is significant that when Fanon writes this, "we had in mind Jaspers's metaphysical guilt," remaining silent versus the risk of one's life to prevent the murder of other human beings. The reference is to Karl Jaspers' *The Question of German Guilt*, published in 1947.

[vi] One could argue that Fanon was impelled to try to understand these traumatic experiences through diagnosis and analysis that would see into the fascist core of the forms of racism.

[vii] We should remember that while Fanon maintains in *Black Skin, White Masks* that only a psychoanalytic interpretation can "reveal the affective disorders responsible" for Black alienation, the "inferiority complex" is, he says, a double process: first, primarily economic and second, the "internalization or rather epidermalization of this inferiority" (2008: xv).

[viii] In February 1956, the socialist Robert Lacoste became the resident minister and then the governor general of Algeria until May 1958. In the essay, Fanon added that "for a long time history is made without [the French Left]. They were unable to prevent the sending of contingents to Algeria … They were passive under Lacoste, powerless before the military coup of the 13th of May. *Nevertheless, their existence has forced the neofascists of Algeria and France to be on the defensive*. The Left has done nothing for a long time in France. Yet by its action, its denunciations, and its analyses, it has prevented a certain number of things" (1965: 149),

[ix] In his practice as a psychiatrist, Fanon spent much of his time listening, and much of Fanon's writing can be considered a compilation of voices and responses to what he had been hearing.

[x] In a 1957 article in *El Moudjahid*, Fanon describes the Algerian revolution as one that "expresses both a process of liberation from foreign yoke and the destruction of feudal relics," where the individual, he adds, "can blossom, advance and exercise [their] personal judgment and initiative freely" (2018, 57-71).

Masculine Rage at the End of the World

By | 2026: Vol. 25, No. 1

51 year old divorce raped man who is physically, financially, emotionally, and spiritually broken. Gave everything I had doing a dirty, dangerous, discomfortable industrial construction job only to be thrown out like garbage once she saw better. I thought love was forever but now I see that it was all a lie and I was nothing more than a steppingstone. I can't help but to feel the best is all behind me and future has nothing as store but heartache and loneliness. Mgtow Brothers I tried to find comfort in this community but I think it's too late for me. It's weird I used to be somebody that people looked up to, but now I walk down the street and I can almost sense how people want to distance themselves from me as if I'm contagious of some sort of disease. I used to have friends but now nobody calls me. And it's as if women can smell my patheticness.

Appearing in the MGTOW subreddit on Reddit, this is the post of a self-described broken man.

MGTOW or Men Going Their Own Way is a community of men, who claim that relationships with women are so toxic they must go 'their own way'. Men should abstain from sex with women, or have casual sex with women, or with sex workers. Some even advocate that men should disconnect from society entirely – move into the wilderness, go off grid, and live a solo life.

MGTOW are not extreme. Instead, they represent growing mainstream views. According to a recent study of 2,000 men in the UK, 62 percent believed that “women have too many expectations of how men should be in relationships these days”, while 41 per cent believed that having a relationship was “too big a financial commitment”[1]. It’s not just relationships – men are also increasingly opting out of society all together – such as the phenomenon of Hikikomori, a growing problem in Japan where primarily young men withdrawn from social life, often seeking extreme degrees of isolation and confinement.

These shifts in behaviours are due, in part, to a growing nihilist sentiment, that is pushing more people to disconnect from society entirely.

The Nihilistic Century

Nihilism is a crisis in faith. The concept emerged in the late 19th and early 20th Century, popularised by the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche explored nihilism as a social mood responding to the decline of religion. This created a crisis of faith, which grew from “a moment of the deepest self-reflection of humanity”[2]. In this early nihilistic era, this crisis of faith was expressed as a failure to accept the world as it is, “resenting the fact that the world is devoid of a goal, unity or meaning”[3]. Bulent Diken[4] says this nihilism involved “escapist attempts to be able to endure the meaninglessness, the chaos of the world, by trying to endow it with meaning…”

While early nihilistic sentiment was a reaction to the loss of God, however, this did not mean that meaning was lost all together in Western Society. Instead, religious explanations of society were replaced by humanist explanations, which firmly gave meaning to capitalist subjects. Specifically, through privatising domestic work, capitalism enforces a firm distinction between the ‘public’ (masculine) and private (feminine) spheres. This created a clear sense of what it meant to be either a man or a woman – women worked in the home, while men acted in society – whether through politics, war, business etc. In doing so “both” sexes were given a sense of

contributing to capitalism, even if such “contributions” were often highly problematic for those involved.

This sense of social meaning was particularly relevant for men. The feminist author Susan Faludi[5] argues that post-war society provided men with a range of promises, which she calls “a mission to manhood”. There were four missions that men were given; (1) the promise of a frontier to be claimed, (2) the promise of a clear and evil enemy to be crushed; (3) the promise of an institution of brotherhood in which anonymous members could share a greater institutional glory, (4) and the promise of a family to provide for and protect. These missions gave men both a sense of how they should act, what their goals were, and what it meant to be a real ‘man’.

With the rise of neoliberalism, however, these missions have been eroded, replaced by what Faludi calls an ‘ornamental culture’ – one “that encourages people to play almost no functional public roles, only decorative or consumer ones.”[6] In ornamental culture people are directed away from participating in social systems such as politics, church, unions, social groups etc, to instead focus almost on our individual selves and family.

This has fundamentally changed how people relate to the world. While extremely problematic, the mission to manhood at least gave men a sense of social purpose – some reason to live and exist. In an ornamental culture, however, such purpose is gone, with “manhood is defined by appearance, by youth and attractiveness, by money and aggression, by posture and swagger and “props”, by the curled lip and petulant sulk and flexed biceps, by the glamour of the cover boy, and by the market-bartered “individuality” that sets one astronaut or athlete or gangster above another.”[7] Of course this hasn’t just impacted in, with people of all genders losing access to the social communities and structures they used to participate in.

This is having real world impacts. People have exited systems of democracy on mass – people are voting less, joining political parties and organisations such as unions less, and, when they are participating are more likely to vote or engage with the extreme fringes rather than mainstream political parties[8]. In addition, people are socialising less, with young boys having fewer friends than any generation at the same age[9]. People are also having less sex[10], and, as I noted earlier a growing cohort of men have decided that relationships with women are too hard. As Faludi argues:

> Ornamental culture has proved the ultimate expression of the American Century, sweeping away institutions in which men felt some sense of belonging and replacing them with visual spectacles that they can only watch and that benefit global commercial forces they cannot fathom.”[11]

This disconnect from society, is not just due to cultural changes, but is also backed by material reality. Social activity has dropped, for example, because people are working more and because social activities cost a lot more. While drops in political engagement are in part due to people losing their sense of purpose, it also represents a growing disapproval of political

systems, driven by the hyper-capitalism of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism has promised everyone that if they work hard enough, they can achieve greatness – everyone is just one step away from being a billionaire. Yet, as George Monbiot points out, this is a false promise:

> neoliberalism tells us that if we work hard enough, we can all be Number One: a mathematically impossible promise. But it also creates the conditions which ensure that, no matter how hard you work, you are likely to remain subordinate and exploited… neoliberalism simultaneously promises the world and snatches it away.**[12]**

This gap between promise and fulfillment has fundamentally impacted our collective psyche, creating a breeding ground for frustration, humiliation, a desire for vengeance, and a massive disapproval of political systems and structures[13][14].

Hyper-capitalism has also facilitated real material changes to society. Naomi Klein and Astra Taylor[15] for example point to three shifts that are leading to a growing sense of apocalyptic doom – the climate crisis, Covid-19and the rapid advancement and adoption of AI technologies. Each have created a sense of a world facing the end, whether through environmental collapse, pandemic (which in many places was denied, dismissed, or downplayed), or destruction via technology.

In this context – one of a loss of social purpose and a hyper-capitalistic system – nihilism now represents a loss in faith in the systems that replaced God – whether it be the failure of the American Dream, liberal systems, or, in the case of groups such as the MGTOW, the norms of relationships or love.

Masculine Longing and Masculine Rage

Everybody responds to these societal changes in different ways.

Some, as I explained at the top of this piece, are disconnecting from society. You see this sort of nihilism throughout online men's rights communities. While MGTOW men remain committed to the idea of relationships with women, wishing and hoping they could occur, they have also given up on them, believing that women are so toxic and dangerous that there is no way to truly exist happily in that world. As Nietzsche[16] argues, the basis of nihilism is a fundamental belief: *it is not worth it.* The response by men in these groups is underpinned by this sentiment more than any other.

Others are longing for the past, believing in some mystical period before 'wokeness' where none of these problems existed for society. This longing is clear in the slogan Make America Great Again, but is also being expressed through an abandoning, or unmooring, of dominant values of Liberalism. Mark Zuckerberg, has, for example, pined for a culture that celebrates aggression, wanting to return to a masculinised era prior to feminist and talk of equality. The recently murdered Charlie Kirk, like many conservatives, railed against the idea of 'empathy', claiming it made Western Society week and in turn needed to be abandoned as a concept.

Kirk here played a fascinating game, talking up the principles of liberalism such as free speech, which also constantly trashing such ideas through his actions. This is another form of nihilism, where liberal values are unmoored from their true meaning. As Nietzsche claims, nihilism does not equal the end of values, but instead a world in which "the highest values devaluate themselves"[17]. In her book *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism****[18]***,Wendy Brown argues, "these values, which include the Christian virtues along with democracy, equality, truth, reason, and accountability, do not vanish as they lose their foundations, but become fungible and trivial, superficial and easily instrumentalized." This is exemplified by when Kirk declared himself a saviour of free speech, while also running a website that targeted American academics for expressing this exact speech. The values of the past are trashed primarily through using them cynically, and in turn making them trivial.

While these examples are extreme enough, at the most worrying end of spectrum, nihilistic sentiment is also exacerbating male rage.

Masculinity is closely linked to extremist violence. Extremist groups target men by promoting ideas of 'what it is to be a man', aiming to give men a sense of response, recognition and meaning in their lives. Increasingly, however, this masculine rage is being infused with a dangerous nihilistic sentiment.

In May 2014 a self-described involuntary celibate (incel) Elliot Rodger killed six people and injured fourteen others in a misogynist rampage in Isla Vista California. Incels believe that because of their physical traits that they are unable to obtain relationships with women, and in turn often become resentful, angry, and at times, extremely violent.

Before committing his killing spree Rodger left a manifesto online. The manifesto runs through a range of standard complaints of incels – that he was ignored by women, that other 'less deserving' men were more successful in relationships, and that he was a social pariah. These feelings resulted in spite, rage, and anger. But Rodger also ends up questioning the entire point of life, throwing away any sense of future. He says:

> I had nothing to live for but revenge. Women must be punished for their crimes of rejecting such a magnificent gentlemen as myself. All of those popular boys must be punished for enjoying heavenly lives and having sex with all the girls while I had to suffer in lonely virginity.

This not of revenge very common amongst nihilists. Wendy Brown[19] for example notes that revenge is central to Trump's Presidency, who sought "revenge without end because there is nothing else". Fed by resentment, nihilists seek out revenge against the current 'winners' of society. For many followers of Trump, for example, it did not matter what policies he pursued, "only that he opposes those they hold responsible for their suffering"[20].

This desire for revenge is extremely strong in Rodger's manifesto. While he wishes for a better world, he believes strongly it is impossible, and that therefore violence is the only way. This is how Rodger finally describes his rampage. He says:

> It is such a shameful pity that my ideal world cannot be created. I realized long ago there is no way I could possibly rise to such a level of power in my lifetime, with the way the world is now. Such a thing will never become a reality for me, but it did give me something to fantasize about as I burned with hatred towards all women for rejecting me throughout the years. This whole viewpoint and ideology of abolishing sex stems from being deprived of it all my life. If I cannot have it, I will everything I can to DESTROY IT.

The rage here is palpable, emphasised by the declaration that he will DESTORY IT. Rodger repeats the idea of destroying things over and over, claiming the rejection he has faced has left him only one option – hatred, rage, and destruction. This ending is an example of what Brown[21] describes as "raw ressentiment", one that is "stuck in its trapped rancour, unable to "become creative". It has only revenge, no way out, no futurity."

This is how modern masculine rage works. It is rage steeped in resentment, but also without purpose. It is rage and violence that has no hope for the future, and in turn sees violence as the only option.

Hope in the End Times

How do we overcome this sentiment? If we want to end the era of masculine rage, and rebuild connections in our society, we cannot do it solely through policing or surveillance, and we certainly cannot achieve it through retreating to our own bunkers, only speaking to those who do not live in this apocalyptic world.

Naomi Klein and Astra Taylor offer some assistance[22].

We must start by confronting the reality of our situation and tackle the systems causing this harm in the first place. As they argue, "to move forward with focus, we must first understand this simple fact: we are up against an ideology that has given up not only on the premise and promise of liberal democracy but on the liveability of our shared world – on its beauty, on its people, on our children, on other species." We must recognise these systems are hurting all people (except the billionaires) and that in turn there are real opportunities to create solidarity amongst everyone, as long we work hard to do so. We must not give up on those who have entered the realms of nihilism but instead seek ways to bring them back from the grip.

We can achieve this, through telling far better stories than those who promote this nihilistic fever dream, one that sells how we can "survive the hard times ahead without leaving anyone behind"[23]. If our modern world is dominated by a sentiment of nihilistic nothingness, we must counteract that with hope. If all people can see is nothingness and death, then we must counteract it with life.

Many people are already doing this, whether it is small movements regenerating their local patch of greenery down the street, or community groups coming together to create connection in a very disconnected world. And then there are the bigger moments, such as the recent election of Zohran Mamdani in the United States, showing that a message of hope, life and of

the future, can achieve something real.

Shifting this narrative away from nihilistic death will not be easy. This fear and apocalyptic doom is a powerful force, one underpinned by influential individual and material realities. But if we want a future of any sort, it is a story we must sell. Because what is more powerful than life itself as a thing to fight for?

Notes

[1] Petter, O. (2025) "Voices: 'It's not me, it's you': the reason men are giving up on dating is women". *AOL.com* URL: https://www.aol.com/articles/voices-not-reason-men-giving-115926619.html

[2] Nietzsche, F. (1914) *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche,* vol. 11, edited by Levy O, trans. Common, T. London: Macmillan Company: 113

[3] Diken, B. (2009) *Nihilism.* London: Routledge: 15

[4] Ibid

[5] Faludi, S. (1999) *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the Modern Man.* London: Chatto & Windus: 26

[6] Ibid: 35

[7] Ibid: 26

[8] Mair, P. (2013) *Ruling The Void: The Hollowing of Western Democracy.* London: Verso

[9]Armstrong, M (2022) 'Friendships: less is now more', World Economic Forum, URL https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/11/friendships-less-is-now-more/

[10] Copland, S. (2017) "The many reasons that people are having less sex", *BBC* URL: https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20170508-the-many-reasons-that-people-are-having-less-sex

[11] Faludi, S. (1999) *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the Modern Man.* London: Chatto & Windus: 35

[12] https://x.com/GeorgeMonbiot/status/1824691091347587451

[13] Mair, P. (2013) *Ruling The Void: The Hollowing of Western Democracy.* London: Verso

[14] Mishra, P. (2018) *Age of Anger: A History of the Present.* Penguin Press

[15] Klein, N and Taylor, A. (2025) "The Ride of end times fascism", *The Guardian: https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2025/apr/13/end-times-fascism-far-right-trump-musk*

[16] Nietzsche, F. (1968) *The Will to Power,* translated by Kaufman, W. & Hollingdale, R. New York: Vintage Books: 29

[17] Ibid: 9

[18] Brown, W. (2019) *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West*. New York: Columbia University Press

[19] Brown, W. (2019) *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West*. New York: Columbia University Press: 178

[20] Ibid: 179

[21] Brown, W. (2019) *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West*. New York: Columbia University Press: 177

[22] Klein, N and Taylor, A. (2025) "The Ride of end times fascism", *The Guardian: https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2025/apr/13/end-times-fascism-far-right-trump-musk*

[23] Klein, N and Taylor, A. (2025) "The Ride of end times fascism", *The Guardian: https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2025/apr/13/end-times-fascism-far-right-trump-musk*

Making Racism and Misogyny Great Again: The Emptiness and Misplaced Meaning of Angry Young White Men

By | 2026: Vol. 25, No. 1

History shows us that every demagogical dictator requires an equal and opposite enemy, the Evil Other whose mere existence threatens the demagogue's people. The leader then calls for the good people to annihilate the Evil Other, and all traces of their alleged influence. In short, we are witnessing the rise of American fascism. What is fascism? In my view, it refers to a system of government premised on a mythical superiority of race or culture, and at the same time, the oppression and elimination of a mythical inferior enemy. It promises gratification (and maybe prosperity) through hate and violence. Empirical evidence overwhelmingly contradicts the popular belief and media accounts that Trumpism, the MAGA movement, and broader American white supremacy consist of "left-behind" working class people. That belief is factually false, (Manning and Stefanovic 2025, 2024; Reyna et al 2022). Neither are they pursuing a rational response to adverse social change, a belief Arlie Hochschild popularized in academia in two (2024, 2016) highly misleading books. There is no evidence that economic decline or rational assessment drive fascist white men. In economically depressed areas of the Midwest, for example, lower income and impoverished people are most likely not to vote at all, such that middle and higher income people voted for Trump and other Republicans, not the working class (DiMaggio 2022: 201-204). Neither are they rural. Racism, not location, predicts support for Trump and punitive measures against immigrants (Dawkins et al 2024).

They are in fact something very different, a collection of angry and overwhelmingly white men who long for violence against members of the alleged inferior enemy, or really, any perceived outgroup who dares to improve any part of their socio-economic status, or even merely to exist. Why are they angry? Their feelings of aggrieved entitlement define their sense of self (Reiter 2025; Schrock et al 2022). Social change activates longstanding racism and misogyny that overrides economic and other rational interests, such as upward mobility and other livelihood issues. Approximately 66% of US whites somewhat or strongly support the "Great Replacement" fear, that non-whites are fundamentally transforming American culture into something inferior. DiMaggio et al (2024) conclude that racial invasion fears have become mainstream. Giroux and DiMaggio (2024) further argue against the economic left-behind argument that both left and right politicians embrace, to show that MAGA and fascist support in general draws from a politics of hate—what I summarize as white masculine heteronormative ethnonationalism, or American fascism for short.

Aggrieved whites seem to be perpetually aggrieved across time. One especially popular narrative today is that the Democrats have lost the working class, because they have become overly concerned with minority rights, and no longer speak to the economic interests of wage earners. In fact, the working class never consistently supported the Democrats. Since the 1940s, the working class has voted for the most culturally conservative candidates, regardless of party (Stonecash 2025). Angry white men today are not insane, but rather, willfully ignorant. They are not logically considering their economic interests within a perceived unfavorable sociocultural climate, as Hochschild imagines. Their desire for angry personal emotional gratification does not require rational thought or enlightenment, only racial and/or gender hatred.

In terms of perceived status privilege, young and older white men hardly differ, and this is important, because the sense of white male privilege is foundational in US culture and transgenerational. Angry white men of today have inherited a sense of decline that goes back to the end of the Civil War. Across various issues that involve perceptions of race and gender,

roughly half of white voters consistently believe that Black people get special treatment, don't try hard enough, and that white people, not people of color, face the most discrimination (ANES Guide 2025). The entire Trump political campaign in 2024 and his current ongoing administration openly expresses anti-Black racism and misogyny (Rhym and Garbes 2025), and repeated expression bumps his approval upwards among his devoted followers (Gallagher 2025; Silver and McKown-Dawson 2025). This strategy holds support from true believers, about 42% of the US electorate, but also caps his ceiling. To win in 2024, Trump needed a new constituency, and he found it in angry young men—the current generation of aggrieved white males.

Fascism, GenZ Style

Political leaders like Donald Trump, online influencers like Laura Loomer, and savvy agitators like Charlie Kirk voice aggrieved emotions and promise to restore former racial and gender privileges. Importantly, Charlie Kirk conducted his mass rallies on college campuses, his audience overwhelmingly white college men, not working class. What are upward bound white college males angry about? The fact that success typically requires work, and young white males shouldn't need to work hard to stay ahead of perceived cultural subordinates, women, people of color, and gender nonconformists (Parker and Lavine 2025). As one of the most successful fascist agitators, Charlie Kirk (murdered in 2025 at age 31) embodied this hatred and lust for vengeance, but packaged it as compassion, using a quiet conversational style to openly advocate racism, misogyny, and LGBTQ-phobia. He routinely denigrated successful Black people as unqualified, claimed that Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson, as both Black and a woman, lacked the brain power to serve, ridiculed Martin Luther King as a huge mistake, lied about crime statistics, and attacked anyone who disagreed with him as un-American and un-Christian (Frank and Walker 2025). Through his Turning Point USA organization and rallies on college campuses, Kirk organized aggrieved young and overwhelmingly white men and turned them into a political movement.

Although their anger goes back generations before Donald Trump first ran for president, he most successfully gave voice to their fear and hatred and opened the door for Kirk and others to a national audience. Trump's support stands on a cult of personality, anti-science and anti-intellectualism, and conspiracy fantasies (DiMaggio 2022: 211-214). Sarah MacMillen and I (2023) also make this argument, that fascism places "fellowship before facts" (p. 165) and offers belonging in an ersatz religious community that stands outside of and in opposition to the mainstream. It appeals especially to young men, who feel alone as young adults yet who still depend on parents or face economic precarity who also expect white male supremacy. Conspiracies in fascism function as a source of so-called alternate facts independent of science, and derived instead from allegedly immutable and eternal truths about race, gender, and whatever other hierarchy makes people feel elite and powerful. Fascists embrace their own unique worldview, and their own invented facts to legitimate it. This creates a powerful sense of community, based on a transcendent sense of righteousness. This sense of transcendence is crucial, because it inspires much greater commitment to the cult of personality (the leader), and overrides rational policy or factual discovery. For example, Charlie Kirk called young

women to give up on their careers and become mothers and homemakers, but never offered any policy ideas to make unpaid domestic labor viable. In short, fascism asks people: who are you going to believe? Geeky know-it-all intellectuals, or god's chosen leader? Which one makes you feel important and powerful? Which one offers you enemies, real or imagined, to stomp on in righteous self-gratifying fury?

Evil Others

The more outrageous the Evil Other appears, the more credible it seems. American fascists believe that illegal immigrants of color and trans-people threaten the US from within, an enemy in our midst that his infiltrated the real America and will kill white people and men who dare to uphold aggressive masculinity—the real men. Supposedly, immigrants are raping and killing freely, and trans-groomers are sexually assaulting innocent youth and turning them into transgender miscreants who will in turn rape and forcibly transition more youth to the trans-agenda. What is the alleged trans-agenda? To emasculate men, and mutilate everyone's genitalia so there are no more men or women, only mutilated monsters that want to eat human flesh to live forever. After all, their leader, Hillary Clinton is a 600 year old witch, a longevity she supposedly achieved by terrorizing babies, extracting adrenochrome from their brainstem, and then eating their raw flesh. Despite a complete lack of evidence about an alleged trans-agenda and cannibalism, white supremacists and other supporters believe these things and many more conspiracy fantasies (Lundskow and MacMillen 2023). In their view, only Donald Trump, certain online influencers such as Laura Loomer, and anti-science cranks like RFK Jr speak the truth. Everything else is a deep state lie.

Why does the alleged deep state and so-called woke left create such vast conspiracies? Because they are evil—the eternal enemy of whiteness and real masculinity. In this view, good people cannot explain evil, only call it out and destroy it. Among the most ardent white supremacists, only a civil war can return America to its former purity and greatness (Wintemute 2024), just as Pape and Ruby (2021) found among the January 6 insurrectionists who tried to overthrow the US government. They wanted violence, because they believed it was the only way to restore a true America. Although the details of the deep state and wokeness conspiracies differ from one white supremacist supporter to another, the call for violence remains consistent.

As the model agitator, Trump speaks such a wide range of nonsense and lies that each individual can hear what they want, and ignore the rest. However, the anti-trans and anti-immigrant sentiments remain consistent, because the core supporters—white males—feel like these people directly challenge their white and masculine privilege. The anti-trans beliefs attract entitled young males in general, and the anti-immigrant beliefs attract white males in particular. The most strongly fascist young white men thus see themselves as double victims, and incels occupy the pinnacle of racism and misogyny (Pettersson et al 2025). The claim that trans-people want to sexually mutilate everyone is so overtly ridiculous that it doesn't deserve a factual correction. Young men may feel disempowered, but trans-people have nothing to do with it. On the surface, the anti-immigrant belief seems at least possible. Are legal and illegal immigrants of color in fact bringing crime and violence?

The answer is no. Texas is the only state that requires law enforcement to determine the citizenship of every person arrested. Data analysis from Texas shows that immigrants commit all types of crimes at a rate 45% lower than native-born American citizens (Light, He, and Roby 2020; Nowrasteh 2024). Ye the belief persists. Immigrants of color, especially Mexican and other Hispanic people, have supposedly caused a massive spike in violent crime, such that US cities have become war ravaged wastelands. In fact, urban violent crime has been falling steadily since the peaks of the late 1980s and early 1990s. They spiked somewhat during the Covid period in 2020 and early 2021, but have since fallen to the lowest level in all majors cities since about 1964. American cities are more prosperous and safer than ever before in their history. Yet, people who don't live in urban areas still believe that cites are warzones with roving rape and murder gangs, a post-apocalyptic nightmare conjured from something like the *Matrix* movies and the *Fallout* video games. The source of dissatisfaction cannot be from actual immigrant crime (or a sinister trans agenda) that doesn't exist.

Conspiracy fantasists don't care whether post-apocalypse cities are real or not. What matters is that the great leader in the form of President Trump (or other favorite influencer) has declared them as such. Visions of the apocalypse excite their imaginations, and gratify their craving for violence as a replacement for happiness in life. In other words, followers see Trump and fascism as incarnation of the divine, a unique American divinity and Christian redeemer, who will stomp out a fictitious Evil Other. The strongest followers believe in evil entities as supernatural facts (Nie 2024), which in their minds Trump and others correctly identify in real-life—multiculturalism, feminism, LGBTQIA, and immigrants. The enemy is not so much the people, but what they embody—inclusion, compassion, and mutual respect—all of which fascists experience as weakness, and therefore, as an attack. Their hatred of self-transcendent emotions, especially compassion and gratitude, allows them to direct their hatred at anyone they don't like. Trans people have no direct relationship to immigrants of color, but both embody marginalized people attempting to improve their position in life—both materially and in terms of status and political influence. Who will it be tomorrow? Jews are the longstanding Other, but Muslims also play their role today. Donald Trump personally fears strong women, and strong men readily intimidate him. He attacks men who rely on competence and experience, and bows to dictators and kings. The effect for fascist believers is that everyone is becoming an enemy, except for white heteronormative males who submit to Trump as the ultimate leader and his endless stream of delusions and lies.

In the fascist view then, real Americans must rise to the moment and stomp out those who can never be white, male, or normative. At the same time, top public figures in politics and business increasingly compete to demonstrate the most obsequious submission as they praise Trump for his alleged eternal brilliance and glory. Trumpism even rejects education and science, the basic parameters of logic and reason, which makes rational thought and objective consideration of qualifications and accomplishment impossible. In this kind of sociopolitical environment, the more that marginalized people improve their lives—and society—through work and education, as they organize in the cultural sphere and in the socially salient institutions of the economy and government, the more fascists hate them. For aggrieved whites and males, people of the Other are not joining the system or building a more egalitarian

America; they are invading and destroying God's order.

American Fascism

In reality, fascists today do not follow heartfelt religious principles, or likely any principles at all. Their interests center only on themselves, their own gratification, and they have minimal genuine thoughts or feelings for anyone else. When *The Authoritarian Personality* appeared in 1950, Theodor Adorno and colleagues found strong statistical and qualitative relationships between authoritarianism and conservative politics. Authoritarians (a desire to dominate anyone perceives as inferior, and submit to anyone perceived as superior) gravitated to the established conservative politics because it represented conventional attitudes and lifestyles—the normality of familiar and mainstream (white male) American life. Conservative (generally Republican) politics represented white patriarchal heteronormative males and racist attitudes as normal and natural. Hegemonic at the time, authoritarians identified with it precisely because white heteronormative ethnonationalism was hegemonic. Enforced through institutions, including education and government, it dominated the public sphere that subordinated women and ethnic minorities as trespassers to tolerate to the extent they served white male interests as support staff and laborers. In mid-Twentieth Century America and into the 21st, authoritarians were typically conventional, submissive, and aggressive.

By the 1990s, Bob Altemeyer had advanced research on authoritarianism, and identified "Wild Card Authoritarianism." People with these traits have no consistent political views or loyalties. They do not respect the law or legal authorities. Altemeyer (1998) found that wild cards are highly prejudiced and quite hostile in general. Because they have no commitments beyond their own satisfaction, they appear on both the left and right extremes in the data (p. 71-72). These are the American fascists today. Importantly, they seek a strong leader who promises violence against so-called transgressors who the fascist regards as inferior and unworthy of life. They long for a leader who will give them free reign to join the violent persecution, and they don't much care who they stomp, so long as they get to freely stomp someone. With only superficial commitment to rightist or leftist ideology, they latch on to any belief system that justifies violence without personal accountability, or to no beliefs at all.

Formerly centered on anti-Blackness and other racism, they have added transgender people to the list more recently. Fascists hate DEI because it promotes equality. Expanding on previous research, David Smith (2024) notes that "…Wild Card attitudes have become increasingly central in circles that once called themselves conservative (p. 820). As Smith then elaborates, Trump leads a movement of self-perceived great-little people, those who want to flaunt their ignorance, bigotry, and selfishness just like Trump himself. Their average social position makes them "little" in this sense, while their gender and race (masculine and white) render them "great." Instead of being a disqualification, they perceive Trump's self-aggrandizement as authenticity, because for a wild card authoritarian, there is no such thing as integrity and virtue. They once congregated around conservative politics, but only because they spoke to aggression against Chicanos in the 1950s, civil rights leaders, anti-war activists, and hippies in the 1960s, feminist activists in the 1970s, and all of them together from the 1980s to the

present. Therefore, I suggest that wild card authoritarianism, as a type of social character, underlies Trumpism specifically, and the Republican party's shift to fascism in general.

For a wild card authoritarian, there is only self-interest and a lust for violence. Anyone who professes anything else is dishonest. For a fascist, the world is nothing but a brutal struggle for dominance, and anyone who suggests otherwise is a fool or a liar. Compassion is bait for suckers, and it will only hurt you. Therefore, the wild card only trusts those who openly and shamelessly pursue their own selfishness, especially those who acquire a lot of money and fame in the process, by any means that succeed. Cheating on taxes, stiffing contractors, lying to investigators, as well as sexual aggression, crude insults, mass immigrant arrests, whatever it takes to aggrandize oneself and hurt the inferior Others.

Consequently, authoritarianism today has evolved into a peer reference identity separated from political parties or other organized groups. The most recent research today shows that only one attribute from previous studies remains, aggressiveness, and this appeals most strongly to men who feel declining masculine or racial privilege (Justice 2025; Smith 2024; Reiter 2025). The promise of violence directed against racial and gender outgroups most strongly explains Trump's appeal (Dusso and Demirel-Pegg 2025). Fascist men especially fear change that might challenge their relatively rigid, hierarchical, essentialist identities which have traditionally granted them a certain degree of power, privilege, and advantage over racial, ethnic, gender, or other marginalized groups. Gender privilege explains why some Hispanic men voted for Trump (Geiger and Reny 2024), but only those with a strong religious identity as well as patriarchal attitudes (Martinez and Marti 2024). Likewise, non-college white women (but not college-educated or women of color) see their racial privilege declining and they similarly supported Trump's promise to punish non-whites (Versteegen 2025). Therefore, Trump's support primarily exists based on character, because his support stands on personal allegiance, not primarily for any particular policy position (Goldsmith and Moen 2025). The wild ride of rhetoric and emotions provides the thrill of belonging, not the substantive content. Emotional gratification, not reality, motivates their commitment.

Anti-Reality

Why do they hate science in particular? Both the natural and social sciences are a reality they can't control, so they try to suppress it. Science is not a matter of belief, but of logic and evidence. Consequently, Trump appoints anti-science quacks to run important government agencies that rely on science. Health and Human Service Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr is the prime example. He reject the basic tenants of modern medical science, such as the germ theory of disease, and actively seeks to replace it with nonsense drawn form conspiracies and even medieval beliefs about bodily humors and miasma (bad air and smells) as the cause of poor health and disease (Mole 2025). Like all of Trump's cabinet, RFK Jr has no valid reputation or career to protect, and thus obsequiously submits to Trump personally. Otherwise, RFK Jr would have no justification to remain in power, and Trump keeps him in power to destroy America's medical scientific credibility and the underlying research that once kept the United States at the front of medical advances and technology. The Trump administration slashed spending for

scientific research across the board, because sciences address truths that exist independently of belief, independently of rhetoric and nonsense.

Fascist hatred of empirical reality permeates economic policy as well. Trump replaced existing trade agreements with irrational tariffs that are significantly shifting trade away from the US and towards the European Union and China. As of October 2025, Trump has reached an actual trade agreement with only two countries—Vietnam ($155 billion) and Cambodia ($13.5 billion)—which together constitute .03% of total (5.5 trillion) US trade. Having broken treaties with all other major and minor trading partners, all of Trump's other so-called trade "deals" are only framework agreements (Palmer and Hawkins 2025), which simply means that each party agrees to continue negotiations within the framework parameters. Fascists disregard complex politics, economics, medicine, and other facts of reality because for the fascist, there is only one simple truth. They embrace a remarkably dogmatic, consistent and simplistic view, as first measured in the Berkeley Studies (Adorno et al. 1950) to today (Radkiewicz 2021; Torres-Vega et al 2021), and including empirical type differentiation (Lilly et al 2025), and methodological updates for particular new theoretical refinement, such as neoliberal authoritarianism (Nicieza-Cueto et al 2025). Fascism succeeds to the extent it makes a complex world seem very simple, with one simple solution to everything—violence. The only real motivation people ever have, as fascist agitators, online influencers, and political leaders claim, is ruthless self-interest. Trump in essence tells his followers to do as he does: take what you want, and never ask for permission or forgiveness.

If not Reality, then What?

In my view, American fascism today is nothing new, but appears new to people who simply don't care about American historical reality. Descended from myths about the antebellum South and the Golden 1950s, it appeals mostly to white supremacists, but dominant masculinity tentatively appeals to some young men of color. White racism for white men, and dominant masculinity for non-white men. In the few months leading up to his murder, Charlie Kirk claimed that many more young women were also gravitating to his sphere of influence, although no evidence supports this. His constituency remained overwhelmingly young white males.

What did he call people to support? Based on pronouncements at public appearances (Riccardi and Swenson 2025; Smith 2024) and his several books (Kirk 2022; Kirk and Hamachek 2021) and most forcefully in *The Pagan Threat*(2025), Kirk and his various allies advocate for a pure dominionism. As a form of theocracy, RJ (Rousas John) Rushdoony and Gary North began the American Reconstruction in the 1960s as an anti-science movement, because cold-war communism relied on science over faith in God, so America must necessarily reject science as evil. By the 1970s, they also rejected racial and gender equality as Satanism—attempts to overthrow God's divine white male hierarchy. The Dominionist narrative, also called Christian Nationalism, resonates with many American popular beliefs (Nalani and Yoshikawa 2023), especially that the Confederacy, as the idealistic Land of Dixie, was an Eden in which everyone supposedly lived in happiness and harmony (Bonekemper 2022). In this myth, slavery didn't

really exist, but rather, grateful Black servitude, and men were masculine and women gratefully subservient and feminine. Kirk's Turning Point USA organization and American fascism rehash that view. While Trump clearly has no particular convictions about faith or anything beyond his own personal self-aggrandizement, Kirk fully embraced dominionism, although not by name.

Rushdoony and North argued that God ordained the United States as a Christian bastion against the world. They saw the United States as an aggressive conqueror that must subdue the world. As subjugation continues, American Christianity must eradicate all other versions of Christianity, and all other religions. This uniquely American Christianity must consist only of three institutions—family, state, and the church, which encompasses the first two. A council of patriarchs would rule the state, and a man holds dominion over his family. In *Christianity and the State* (1986), Rushdoony absolutely opposes democracy. The religious state exists only to serve biblical dominion. In *A Biblical Psychology of Man*, he condemns individual freedom as a petulant "revolt against maturity." In this view, God created man as an object, and so real life men (women are irrelevant) have no autonomy separately from God's will. This essential fact for Rushdoony means that

at no point in his life or imagination can man step outside of God's ordained order into a realm of humanistic or man-made freedom…dominion is written into the nature of man, who was created to exercise dominion over the earth, and this fact of dominion conditions man's life, his obedience as well as his disobedience (Rushdoony [1977] 1987: 18, 20).

Disobedience against God's dominion violates man's essential nature to dominate the earth and in turn submit to God, and so this disobedience constitutes the basis of mental illness and all social problems. Disobedience against God's dominion is both sacrilege and mental illness. Just as God's dominion subsumes the government and the family, so it subsumes social science as well, and negates natural science entirely. According to Rushdoony ([1967] 2001), the reason why disciplines such as genetics, chemistry, and physics seem so complex is because they are in fact nothing more than an ancient pagan mystery cult embellished with modern techno-mythology and self-important gibberish.

In North's (2022) final telling before his death, everything before Christianity was all prophetic prologue, and meaningful history only begins when Christianity appears, and this marks the beginning of divine earthly dominion (p. 263). Imbued with Christian moral clarity and divine power, Christian civilization advanced to the New World to establish God's fully-formed dominion in preparation for the end times. However, the Union states abandoned Christian civilization when they became more secular and abolished slavery, allegedly a benign and nurturing institution that civilized an inferior and non-Christian race. Slavery constituted a cornerstone of God's natural and social order, as scripture clearly legitimates slavery in Deuteronomy. In collusion with Satanic forces, the Union destroyed the final bastion of Christian government on earth, the Southern Confederacy (North 2022: 296-298). Thus, God's dominion collapsed, and the United States fell from grace. The challenge moving forward would be to reconstruct divine dominion, restore America as a theocracy, and restore slavery.

Although North coats his narrative with the language and style of empirical scientific precision and scholarly-style references, he decisively rejects science, as did Rushdoony. North's only professed concern is restoring God's kingdom. As the patriarchal council dictates, so every man must obey, and women must obey their men. Women have no right to live separately from male dominion.

Charlie Kirk, Laura Loomer, Lucas Miles, and others on the fascist right have not added anything new to Dominionism, except possibly Charlie Kirk's conversational style. At campus rallies, he typically invited young people to discuss their disagreements with him, and then receive Kirk's laid-back wisdom about proper values and lifestyles. No less racist or misogynist than more conventional fascists like Stephen Miller or Pete Hegseth, Kirk equates compassion with domination. The world is tough and life is hard, yes, and the way to peace and happiness is to destroy all who oppose the real Americans. Women must go back to domestic labor, and men must defeat science, equality, and gentle emotions in favor of masculine toughness and control.

As Larsen and Jensen (2025) found, right-wing youth cultural spheres promote a sense of nostalgia for this world that has been lost, but to which white men are entitled, connected to emotions of anger and resentment. What nostalgic legacy have enemies allegedly destroyed? Although Kirk and others do not call for a return to slavery today, they do call for racial and gender hierarchies, and white male heterosexual dominance. Notions of racial superiority and ethnonationalism equally predict right-wing views alongside masculinist domination (Huft et al 2025). Although far-right attitudes among European youth closely resemble American youth, one factor distinguishes them—American commitment to Christian rather than secular nationalism (Pickel and Pickel 2024). Overall, contemporary research shows that worldwide, masculinist gender domination and corresponding misogyny pervades nearly all fascist movements throughout the United Sates, Europe, and the Middle East (Roose and Cook 2025).

Likely Outcomes

Consistently then, American fascism centers on white, Christian, and patriarchal nationalism. At the same time, believers feel free to choose which parts they acclaim. However, the white supremacist establishment on the right does not accept Hispanic or other men of color freely, but more as useful drones who otherwise have no place in a white supremacist future. The latest research shows that Trump's primary support comes from people who share his prejudices and hatreds (Smith and Hanley 2025), and want him to stomp out transgressions (successful women, gender non-conformists, people of color, and immigrants) by any means necessary. Trump promises what they want, but he does not lead a movement. Rather, he delivers what the followers demand. Whether this restores their sense of superiority is ultimately irrelevant, because the satisfaction is in the stomping, not the aftermath. They hope that the violence against immigrants and LGBTQ people never ends.

For aging Boomers like RFK Jr (71) and Trump (79), as well as for younger fascists like J.D. Vance (41) and Charlie Kirk's widow Erika Kirk (37), the mythological 1950s and before seems

equally compelling precisely because it is myth, not reality. Anyone can jump on the fantasy bandwagon because it matches nobody's actual lived experience, but rather, speaks to emotional longing for violence to exalt selfish gratification and punish the Others who don't fit the white masculine heteronormative archetype.

The Moral Majority of the 1970s, the Reagan Revolution of the 1980s, The Neocon and Tea Party movements of the 2000s, and Trump's MAGA movement since 2016 have all blended elite economic interests with alleged moral concerns polished with a Christian veneer. They finally achieved a "moral" success to punish women when the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade in 2022, such that far-right state legislatures have effectively banned abortion in 23 states. The Trump administration now uses Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) forces to terrorize neighborhoods, apprehend immigrants and US citizens alike, and expel them from the country with no legal proceedings. It took several decades, but the "wild card" fascists are now getting the racist and misogynist gratification they crave. All along however, major corporations and billionaires have been getting what they want—richer and more powerful, corporate profits soar, while college and everything else gets more expensive and the middle class becomes the precariat class. Eventually, the angry young men of today will realize that the Christianity and nationalism the various movements profess was an illusion, and their alleged compatriots and leaders were little more than opportunists who never cared about anyone or anything except their own self-aggrandizement. They hope for fulfillment, but will find only more aggrievement.

References

Adorno, Theodor, R. Nevitt Sanford, Daniel J. Levison, and Else Frenkel-Brunswik. 1950. *The Authoritarian Personality.*New York, NY: Harper & Row.

Altemeyer, Bob. 1998. "The Other 'Authoritarian Personality.'" *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 30: 47-92.

ANES (American National Election Studies) Guide. 2025. *Public Opinion and Electoral Behavior.* Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Election Studies: https://electionstudies.org/data-tools/anes-guide/index.html

Bonekemper, Edward H. 2022. *Myth of the Lost Cause: Why the South Fought the Civil War and Why the North Won.* New York, NY: Regnery Books.

Dawkins, Ryan, Zoe Nemerever, B. Kal Munis, and Francesca Verville. 2024. "Place, Race, and the Geographic Politics of White Grievance." *Political Behavior* 46 (3): 1813–35.

DiMaggio, Anthony, Amentahru Wahlrab, and Holona Ochs. 2024. "White Supremacy and the January 6 Insurrection: Mass Opinion and the Mainstreaming of 'Great Replacement' Theory." *Populism* 7 (1): 99–126.

DiMaggio, Anthony. 2022. *Rising Fascism in America.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Dusso, Aaron, and Tijen Demirel-Pegg. 2025. “Voter Support for Illiberal Candidates: Demonstrating the Differential Influence of Authoritarianism’s Three Facets on Vote Choice.” *Electoral Studies* 95 (June). doi:10.1016/j.electstud.2025.102931.

Frank, Nehemiah and Ezekiel J. Walker. 2025. “Charlie Kirk Is Dead—But Black America Remembers His Racism.” *The Black Wall Street Times*: https://theblackwallsttimes.com/2025/09/11/charlie-kirk-is-dead-but-black-america-remembers-his-racism/

Gallagher, Charles A. 2025. “‘They’re Eating the Dogs. The People That Came in, They’re Eating the Cats’: Xenophobia and Group Threat as a Path to the White House.” *Ethnic & Racial Studies* 48 (15): 2986–99.

Geiger, Jessica R., and Tyler T. Reny. 2024. “Embracing the Status Hierarchy: How Immigration Attitudes, Prejudice, and Sexism Shaped Non-White Support for Trump.” *Perspectives On Politics*, August. doi:10.1017/S1537592724000847.

Giroux, Henry and Anthony DiMaggio. 2024. Fascism on Trial: Education and the Possibility of Democracy. New York, NY: Bloomsbury.

Goldsmith, Benjamin E., and Lars J. K. Moen. 2025. “The Personality of a Personality Cult? Personality Characteristics of Donald Trump’s Most Loyal Supporters.” *Political Psychology* 46 (1): 225–43.

Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 2016. *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right.* New York, NY: The New Press.

Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 2024. *Stolen Pride: Loss, Shame, and the Rise of the Right.* New York, NY: The New Press.

Huft, Justin, Matthew Grindal, and Kristin Haltinner. 2025. “Ethnic-Racial Socialization and Far-Right Support Among White Young Adults.” *Sociological Quarterly* 66 (3): 539–68.

Justice, Jacob. 2025. “‘Get ‘Em Out’: The Constitutive Violence of Trump Rallies.” *Western Journal of Communication* 89 (3): 537–58.

Kirk, Charlie and Brent Hamachek. 2021. *Time for a Turning Point: Setting a Course Toward Free Markets and Limited Government for Future Generations.* New York, NY: Post Hill Press.

Kirk, Charlie. 2022. *The College Scam: How America’s Universities Are Bankrupting and Brainwashing Away the Future of America’s Youth.* Lafayette, LA: Winning Team Publishing.

Larsen, Jeppe Fuglsang, and Sune Qvotrup Jensen. 2025. “The New Far Right, Subcultural Theory, and the Sociology of Emotions.” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 48 (10): 1079–99.

Light, Michael T., Jingying He, and Jason P. Robey. 2020. “Comparing Crime Rates Between

Undocumented Immigrants, Legal Immigrants, and Native-born US Citizens in Texas." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 117, 51: 32340-32347.

Lilly, Kieren J., Thomas H. Costello, Chris G. Sibley, and Danny Osborne. 2025. "Identifying 'Types' of Authoritarians: A Latent Profile Analysis of Left- and Right-Wing Authoritarianism and Social Dominance Orientation." *European Journal of Personality* 39 (4): 518–34.

Lundskow, George and Sarah MacMillen. 2023. *QAnon and Other Replacement Realities: How Religious Emotion Threatens Free Society but Can Also Contribute to a Progressive Future.* New York, NY: Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Manning, Nathan, and Djordje Stefanovic. 2025. "'I'm 100% All for Equality, But': Aggrieved Egalitarianism in Young Adult White Men's Feelings of Victimization and Denial of Structural Inequality." *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, November 2, 1–16.

Manning, Nathan, and Djordje Stefanovic. 2024. "Beyond *Angry White Men*: A Progressive Sociological Imagination as an Alternative to Aggrieved Entitlement." *Journal Of Youth Studies*, June 25. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2024.2370280.

Martinez, Brandon C., and Gerardo Martí. 2024. "Latinx Blue Wave or Religious Red Shift? The Relationship between Evangelicalism, Church Attendance, and President Trump among Latinx Americans." *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*, June 18, 1–9.

Nalani, Andrew, and Hirokazu Yoshikawa. 2023. "White Christian Nationalism and Youth Development in the USA." *Society* 60 (4): 551–65.

Nicieza-Cueto, Esmeralda, and María de la Villa Moral-Jiménez. 2025. "Authoritarianism in the 21st Century: A Proposal for Measuring Authoritarian Attitudes in Neoliberalism." *Social Sciences (2076-0760)* 14 (7): 431. doi:10.3390/socsci14070431.

North, Gary. 2022. *The Biblical Structure of History: The Unfolding of God's Redemptive Purposes.* Moulton, AL: Axehead Press.

Nowrasteh, Alex. 2024. "Illegal Immigrant Murderers in Texas, 2013–2022: Illegal Immigrant and Legal Immigrant Conviction and Arrest Rates for Homicide and Other Crimes," Policy Analysis no. 977, Cato Institute, Washington, DC.

Palmer, Doug, and Ari Hawkins. 2025. "Trump Finalizes Trade Deals With 2 Southeast Asian Countries."
Politico:https://www.politico.com/news/2025/10/26/trump-trade-deals-malaysia-cambodia-00623129

Pape, R.A. & Ruby, K. (2021) The Face Of American Insurrection: Right-Wing Organizations Evolving Into A Violent Mass Movement. *Chicago Project on Security and Threats*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Division of Social Sciences.

https://d3qi0qp55mx5f5.cloudfront.net/cpost/i/docs/americas_insurrectionists_online_2021_07_02.pdf?mtime=1625859171

Parker, Christopher Sebastian, and Howard Lavine. 2025. “Status Threat: The Core of Reactionary Politics.” *Political Psychology* 46 (August): 80–104.

Pettersson, Katarina, Mark Daniel Marveggio, Peta Callaghan, and Martha Augoustinos. 2025. “Fatalism, Evolution, and Interpersonal Attractiveness: Psychological Theories and Emotions in Incels’ Constructions of Ingroup Identity and Outgroup Hate.” *European Journal of Social Psychology* 55 (2): 342–56.

Pickel, Gert, and Susanne Pickel. 2024. “A God Gap Driving a Revolution from Conservative to the Far Right in the United States—With Significance for Europe?” *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 65 (2): 311–38.

Radkiewicz, Piotr. 2021. “How Do Authoritarians Experience Freedom? Absolute and Conditional Freedom as Different Predictors of the Authoritarian Worldview.” *Personality and Individual Differences* 178 (August). doi:10.1016/j.paid.2021.110874.

Reiter, Bernd. 2025. “Aggrieved White Men and the Danger They Pose to Democracy and Peace.” *Social Sciences (2076-0760)* 14 (2): 93. doi:10.3390/socsci14020093.

Reyna, Christine, Andrea Bellovary, and Kara Harris. 2022. “The Psychology of White Nationalism: Ambivalence Towards a Changing America.” *Social Issues & Policy Review* 16 (1): 79–124.

Rhym, Chad, and Laura Garbes. 2025. “‘I Think It’s a Very Nasty Question’: Trumpian Anti-Black Racism and the Limits of Traditional Journalistic Standards.” *Ethnic & Racial Studies* 48 (15): 3000–3018. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2025.2501751.

Riccardi, Nicholas and Ali Swenson. 2025. “Charlie Kirk, who helped build support for Trump among young people, dies after campus shooting.” MSN: https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/politics/charlie-kirk-who-helped-build-support-for-trump-among-young-people-dies-after-campus-shooting/ar-AA1Mi8bV

Roose, Joshua M., and Joana Cook. 2025. “Supreme Men, Subjected Women: Gender Inequality and Violence in Jihadist, Far Right and Male Supremacist Ideologies.” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 48 (5): 528–56.

Rushdoony, Rousas John. [1967] 2001. *The Mythology of Science.* Vallecito, CA: Chalcedon/ Ross House Books.

Rushdoony, Rousas John. [1977] 1987. *A Biblical Psychology of Man.* Vallecito, CA: Chalcedon/ Ross House Books.

Rushdoony, Rousas John. 1986. *Christianity and the State*. Vallecito, CA: Chalcedon/Ross House Books.

Schrock, Douglas, Shantel Gabrieal Buggs, Bertan Buyukozturk, Kristen Erichsen, and Andre Ivey. 2022. “Signifying Aggrieved White Selves: Trump Supporters’ Racial Identity Work.” *Sociology Of Race And Ethnicity* 8 (1): 114–28.

Silver, Nate and Eli McKown-Dawson. 2025. “How Popular is Donald Trump?” *The Silver Bulletin*:https://www.natesilver.net/p/trump-approval-ratings-nate-silver-bulletin

Smith, David Norman. 2024. “The Agitator Supplies What the Base Demands: Trumpism Before and After Donald Trump.” *Critical Sociology* 50 (4/5): 813–43.

Smith, David Norman, and Eric Allen Hanley. 2025. “Authoritarianism From Below: Why and How Donald Trump Follows His Followers.” *Current Perspectives in Social Theory* 41 (January): 189–235.

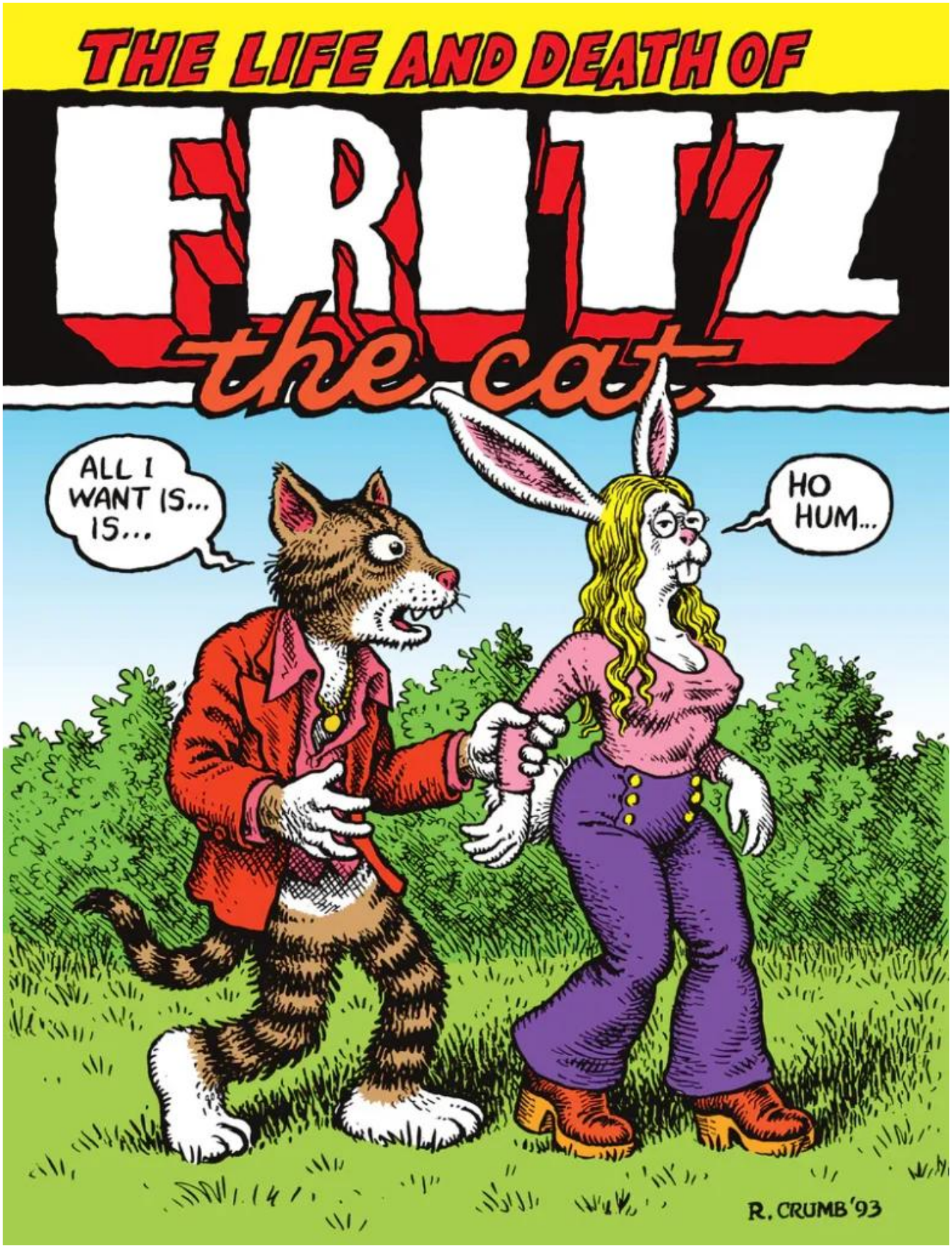
Stonecash, Jeffrey M. 2025. “The Democrats Loss of the White Working Class: Another Look at the Evidence.” *Political Research Quarterly* 78 (2): 524–39.

Torres-Vega, Laura C., Josefa Ruiz, and Miguel Moya. 2021. “Dangerous Worldview and Perceived Sociopolitical Control: Two Mechanisms to Understand Trust in Authoritarian Political Leaders in Economically Threatening Contexts.” *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (March). doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2021.603116.

Versteegen, Peter Luca. 2025. “Trump Voters’ Social Position in U.S. Society: Uniqueness and Radical-right Support.” *Political Psychology* 46 (1): 145–65.

Crumb, Early and Late

By | 2026: Vol. 25, No. 1


THE LIFE AND DEATH OF
FRITZ
the cat
ALL I WANT IS... IS...
HO HUM...
R. CRUMB '93

Works Discussed:

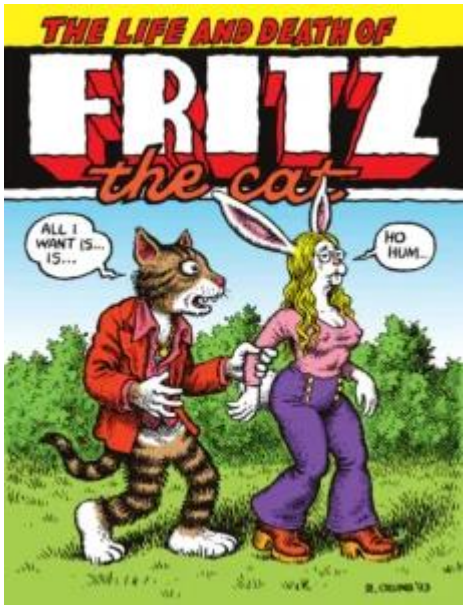
The Life and Death of Fritz the Cat, by Robert Crumb. Seattle: Fantagraphics, 2026.

Tales of Paranoia. By Robert Crumb. Seattle: Fantagraphics, 2026.

Crumb: A Cartoonist's Life. By Dan Nadel. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2025.

Thanks to the comprehensive biography of Robert Crumb by Dan Nadel, based substantially upon the artist's own archive, we can grapple better with the strange and sometimes dark corners of the life of the artist who, more than anyone else, changed the status of comic art. *Crumb: a Cartoonist's Life* (2025) brought us very close, sometimes uncomfortably close, to the very personal world that could breed genius and some very troubled real life modern beings.

In a relative handful of his prolific drawings and interviews, Crumb wrote or spoke about the weight of his own status. To be an acclaimed artist in a thoroughly disrespected art form (something that did not change until 1995 or so) posed a series of dilemmas. Jokingly, in a long-forgotten drawing, he could see himself as the artist on his deathbed, seeking to console himself with his fame and also recognizing the effort as a last vanity. More often and in a few of his 1980s comics in particular, Crumb portrayed his own persona as multiple, good or bad, benevolent visionary or evil capitalist old style or hip-modern, supporter of the women's movement or unrepentant seducer. Near the end of life and without longtime companion Aline at his side, he is by his own measure lonely, at times downright confused, still seeking some inner or outer, as in cosmic, truth that has eluded him since his Catholic boyhood days.



He had early on been, by Nadel's careful accounting, an artist in need of making a living for himself and at least one woman (sometimes more), and also a son, later, also a daughter. This need is the best explanation for Fritz, ultimately a frustrating page-filler, even if it did not begin that way. Originated back in his adolescent years of collaboration with his brothers, Fritz came to life in a fanzine-like fashion, made for friends and a few others, somewhere beneath

real publication.

An anthropomorphic creature who acted human-like with other animals—perhaps taking off Walt Kelly's hugely popular Pogo—Crumb's Fritz is a distinctly un-Pogo type. Meandering into the world of girlie-magazine *Cavalier*, once even on the front cover, this Fritz became the Crumb "product" suitable for forms of exploitation beyond the "Keep on Truckin'" T-shirts and mud flaps that his lawyers successfully sued when he and his first wife, Dana, ran out of money.

It had started out differently, or rather re-started from teenhood to the life of the young, not-entirely-responsible husband. Seeking paid artistic work but also adventure, young Crumb developed a habit of leaving his new wife behind (in Cleveland), going off on adventures that definitely included dames of the free-loving 'sixties. The comic version, Fritz for Crumb, offered readers a completely irresponsible animal with, as the old saying went, "the morals of an alley cat."

Fritz thus surrounds himself with typical hippie-hang-out male friends, and usually has somewhere close a plump lover, all too patient and clinging. If this narrative is drawn from real life of Crumb and wife Dana, we probably do not want to think about it too candidly. The artist himself was desperately trying to find a way forward, rather than returning to the drudgery of clever, contemporary drawings for greeting cards.

Fritz the professional poseur with no apparent talent or insights, but by his own measure, is a would-be "writer and poet." He seems to be in college somewhere, impossibly far from publishing anything, even from finishing a degree. He claims to be an alienated intellectual stuck in a commercialized society, but is really

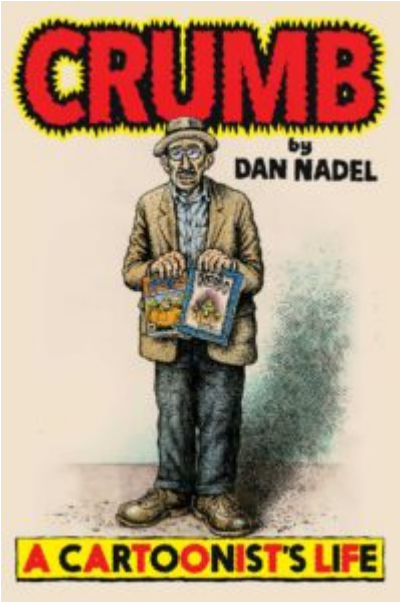
a two bit phony who can brag to a crow (aka African American) at how he has "studied the crow problem." At a moment's notice, he can also turn also into a pseudo-revolutionary, calling upon workers at large to arise (and then fleeing the actual cops who appear). He goes on the road, seemingly true to the Kerouac tradition, but only ends up back where he began, none the wiser.

Fritz never changes, from his earliest commercial appearance in *Help! Magazine*, 1965—the last effort of comics maven (and *Mad* inventor) Harvey Kurtzman to create a magazine of his own—to the end of the story only seven years later. Fritz the comic character meanwhile paled next to Crumb's real artistic breakthrough, the revelatory *Head Comix* (1969), based more on LSD and the imaginative recuperation of old comic characters than anything like 1960s-Fritz.

What happened to Fritz between 1965 and 1972 is animation history as well as comics history. As usual, Dan Nadel tells it best. In 1969, a minor television producer and a promising young animator named Ralph Bakshi contacted Crumb to propose that he and a producer would create an "adult" animation feature, the first of its kind. *Mad* founder Harvey Kurtzman, Crumb's idol but by then reduced to scripting "Little Annie Fanny" for *Playboy,* had already turned down an offer to make "Annie" into a film star. Crumb, rightly suspicious of the

consequences of his work's adaptation, wanted creative input if not control. Pressed for money and likely against his better judgment, he took $2,000 to fly from California to New York and to see some preliminary adaptations of his art work and story line.

Everything that happened afterward made Crumb sick at heart, as well as artistically outraged. He refused to sign the contract offered, and the studio dispatched a hustler to stay with wife Dana, who had power of attorney while Crumb was characteristically gone somewhere. She signed for him, and the project went ahead under a cloud. A half-century later, Rotten Tomatoes—or is it only AI?—suggests that the filmic satire on free love and revolutionary rhetoric in the 1960s can still make for fun watching. It is not hard to imagine the artist still grimacing and warning anyone who asks to stay away from the film.



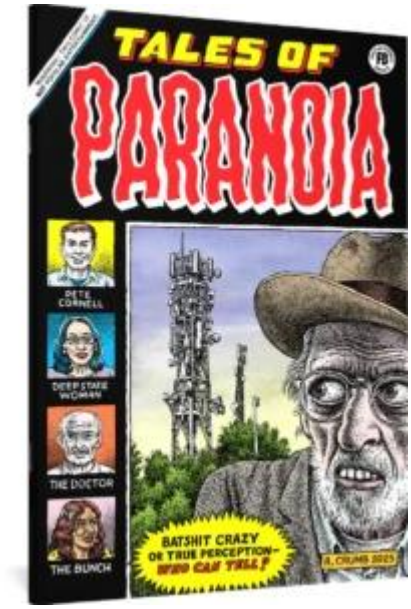
The final story in *The Life and Death of Fritz the Cat*, titled "Fritz the Cat 'Superstar,'" famously has his creation, still the same wretched exploiter of any girlfriend handy, now immersed in a cynical business deal of some kind and a TV talk-show star to boot. In short, all the "celebrity" things that Crumb was running away from. Outraged at this inattention, another girl friend stabs him to death with an ice-pick. As Crumb himself would have liked to stab the animated Fritz, if not Bakshi, who crashed a few animated features later, and went back to TV.

The depressing quality of all this might be seen against the descending reality of 1970, the end of the Flowers-in-your-hair 'sixties innocence and the reality of Hells Angels carrying out a deadly attack on hippies at Altamont. But I do not think this is a convincing view.

Faced with the inevitable celebrity crush—in an interview with me, published in *Cultural Correspondenc*e in 1977, he wondered how Bob Dylan had managed to survive the sudden cult around himself—Crumb fled to the hinterlands. That is, he had already set up house in still-rural California a vast distance away from the Bay Area spiritually but close enough to get a bus. There, he formed an old-time music band, the Cheap Suit Serenaders, that he carefully kept form becoming mainstream.

Moving to Winters (near but not too near the UC campus at Davis), he settled down to his lasting relationship with Aline, and drew strips for an environmental-minded local paper for a while. As creeping suburbanism gradually struck, the couple made plans to move to Southern France and to a kind of personal anonymity. It turned out to a splendid idea. Producing only what he wanted, in old age creating individual drawings for collectors while clearing paths in the woods made centuries earlier, he could almost be said to have lived happily ever after. It was a balm not to be an American or a celebrity. Aline taught yoga locally, for something like twenty years. Meanwhile, his masterpiece adaptation, *Genesis*, appeared in 2005 and occasional collections of the two emerged.

By 2026, Crumb is a widower feeling very much alone. Although his daughter seems intermittently nearby, he spends too much time with himself. Polishing and repolishing his artwork, he can produce a brilliant comic, including the old style characters seen on the cover (the most prominent among them "The Bunch," aka the late Aline). In a personal history of strange comics, *Tales of Paranoia* may be the strangest.



He is an old man here, as in real life, his face lined and his head balding. Nearly all the pages—apart from a story of the global business-scientific elite, "Deep State Woman"—include Crumb himself. Living up to the title, this Crumb repeatedly raises the spectre of elite conspiracy of science and business to sell drugs and otherwise keep us in thrall. Against the advice of a long-time friend, possibly his own doctor, he insists upon the possibility of high-level mind-control. Is he joking? Perhaps or perhaps not, and here is the entertainment of sorts, Crumb offering ways to peer into his mind.

It may help to know that he has been dyslexic since childhood, has always read books with difficulty, never driven a car, and so on. With Aline gone, he turns in upon himself, his own speculations.

One entertaining sidebar looks way back upon Crumb and wife, Dana, taking their first LSD

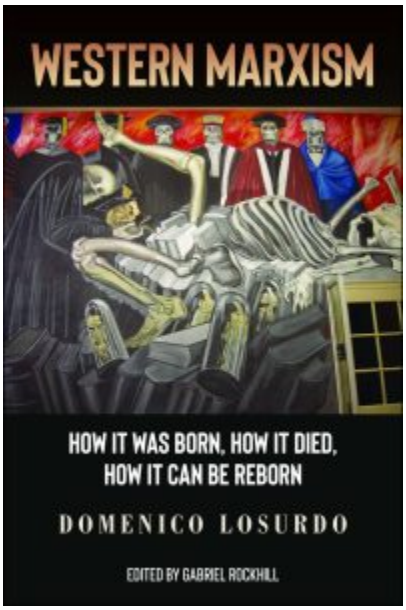
trip together in Cleveland, 1966. This is of special interest because, famously, he “saw” a world of vernacular advertising, likewise earlier generations of popular clothes and hobbies, all this setting him upon a path of his own. In “The Very Worst LSD Trip I Ever Had,” he mainly suffers nausea and a sense of seeing or not seeing something that he can’t remember.

Another story, surely the best pages of the book, has Aline back to life remembering how her own books of comics seem to be cursed again and again, as the publisher goes bankrupt shortly after her books or collaborations with him reach print. The conversation ends back in the present, with the “spirit” Aline reminding Crumb to improve his always-poor posture and to clean the stove after he makes a meager supper for himself. He clearly cannot make sense of his life without her. She is thus always somehow present for the perplexed and doddering artist.

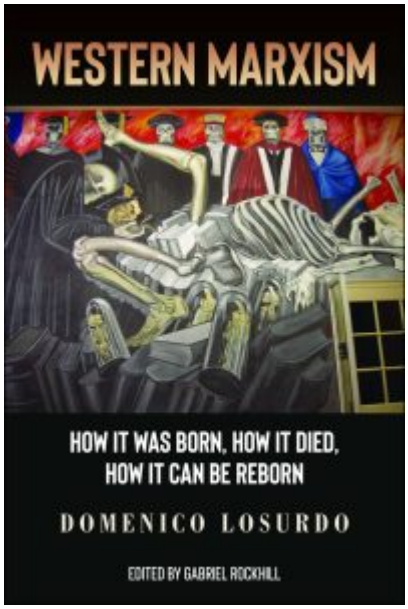
By placing *Fritz the Cat* alongside *Tales of Paranoia*, we may contemplate the beginnings and endings of Crumb’s artistic oeuvre. Somewhere between these, Crumb had placed his stamp upon comic art. No one who draws comics or thins about comics, possibly anywhere in the world, can escape his work. A weighty thought.

Domenico Losurdo’s Western Marxism: How it was Born, How it Died, How it Can Be Reborn

By | 2026: Vol. 25, No. 1



Italian Marxist Domenico Losurdo’s screed against *Western Marxism* is a product of the Cold War that dominated global politics between the end of World War II until the Fall and Collapse of Soviet Communism in 1989 and the early 1990s. The structuring Manichean dichotomy that organizes its polemic is a Battle between East and West, with the East representing Soviet Communism and communist-led national liberation struggles, while the West represents colonialism and imperialism. Losurdo’s ridiculous argument is that Western Marxists totally ignore Western colonialism and national liberation struggles and are thus complicit with Western imperialism/colonialism. I shall argue, however, that Losurdo’s attack on Western Marxism is ultimately apologetics for Stalinism and the Soviet Union and totally distorts the fact that Western Marxists have largely championed National Liberation struggles.



Losurdo's narrative is especially noxious for those of us who became aware of Marxism and National Liberation Movements in the 1960s and 1970s, and especially for a generation like my own which was radicalized by the civil rights movements, the New Left and anti-war movement, and later the feminist and pro-LBGTQ+ movements. For us patriarchal capitalism was a racist system of oppression at home and imperialism abroad against which we organized and struggled. When I came to Columbia University as a graduate student in philosophy in 1965, I shared my parents' New Deal Democratic Party belief that FDR was their God and Savior, who hauled them out of the depths of the Depression, sending them to college to get degrees and then to Washington where they received government jobs, until World War II arrived and my father went to Pearl Harbor to serve in the Navy for the rest of the war.

Initially, this meant that I shared my parents' patriotism and belief in the U.S. military as a beneficent force for good. This belief was soon to be tested by the Vietnam War, and I recall vividly going over with fellow Columbia graduate students to hear Noam Chomsky lecture on Vietnam at Barnard in 1966, that was across the street from Columbia. Professor Chomsky gave a brilliant lecture on imperialism, and I and my fellow students were immediately anti-war activists, sharing the perspectives of the New Left. Chomsky, at the time a Professor of Philosophy at MIT, was known to philosophy students for his controversial philosophy of mind and linguistic theory, but proved himself a brilliant public lecturer, providing an entire history of post-World War II Vietnam and both its French and American colonization, the National Liberation Movement that drove out the French, the raging Civil War in the country, and how the US intervened against the Communist North in support of a corrupt South Vietnamese government in the ongoing Vietnam war, providing a sharp critique of U.S. interventionism and imperialism. I walked away with a much deeper understanding of the dynamics of Vietnam and imperialism, and a great respect for Noam Chomsky who I would later meet and whose writings had an impact on my view of media and politics.

My immersion in the New Left was intensified by the reading of Erich Fromm, much of which I read in college, and Herbert Marcuse, whose books I and my cohort seriously read in graduate

school (although in reading groups, not in our seminars!). At Columbia in May 1969, I heard Herbert Marcuse lecture one evening, and talked with him for the first time the next day during a reception in the Philosophy Department. We were asking Marcuse about Heidegger and his study with him, and what he thought of Heidegger today. Marcuse joked that he heard Heidegger was chiseling his philosophy in stone in Germany, highlighting what he took as the reactionary and archaic nature of Heidegger's thought which he expounded upon for a whole. None of the philosophy professors showed up, and at one point Marcuse asked me and other graduate students to escort him to the West End Bar where earlier Alan Ginsberg and the Beat poets hung out, and where at the time my fellow graduate students also ate, drank, and discussed philosophy, politics, and other issues of the day.

By my third year as a graduate student I was increasingly immersing myself in studies of Marxism and neo-Marxism and in 1969 I received a German Government Fellowship (DAAD) to study philosophy in Tubingen where I took the seminars of utopian Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch. I also bought pirate edition of the Frankfurt School and began a life-time immersion in the tradition of Critical Theory. Further, I went to anti-Vietnam war demonstrations in Germany where students and progressives were strongly against U.S. imperialism, as they were in Paris where I completed my Ph.D. and participated in French New Left politics and demonstrations against the Vietnam war and imperialism.

After returning to the U.S. in 1973 I received a job at the University of Texas teaching Marxism and like many of my 1960s cohorts we began participating in Marxist journals, conferences, and groups. Hence, Losurdo's picture of Western Marxism and its alleged failure to critique and engage colonialism and imperialism overlooks that the emergence of the New Left and its Western Marxism emerged as a major set of theories and politics which were strongly anti-imperialist and pro-National Liberation Movements. The positive aspect of his book Is Losurdo's fierce denunciation of Western imperialism and racism, but this strong critique is undermined by his claim that only Stalin and the Soviet Union and Maoist China were anti-imperialists who supported anti-colonial struggles, totally white-washing Stalinism and its repression of non-Russian nations and peoples in the Soviet Union, to say nothing of his system of Gulag concentration camps which rival Hitlers.[i]

Indeed, Losurdo spends page after page detailing the horrors of Hitler and fascism, ignoring totally the vast literature documenting the horrors of Stalinism. Stalin is praised for his laser focus on production, but Losurdo does not discuss Stalin's work brigades, labor campaigns, suppression of the peasants, and elimination of dissidents which rival Hitler and German fascism.

Losurdo's "critique" of Western Marxism is even more pathetic than his praise of Stalinism and the overlooking of its crimes. His book is full of very short denunciations of Ernst Bloch, Herbert Marcuse, Horkheimer and Adorno, and others who allegedly ignore colonialism and National Liberation Struggles. His denunciation of Marcuse for ignoring imperialism is especially appalling and revealing to completely ignore the Western Marxist critique of imperialism and support for National Liberation movements.[ii]

Equally dishonest is his failure to give an account of Western Marxism, to engage its key thinkers, and to provide convincing interpretations and critiques. His passing references to Ernst Bloch for ignoring colonialism are all negative and fail to point out that Bloch was a powerful critic of fascism and of the Vietnam war where he was a passionate critic, going to demonstrations, writing polemics against it, and even appearing on the radio and television.[iii] When I interviewed Bloch for the last time in the 1970s he was very eager for my report on the Portuguese revolution which was just taking place and I had visited Portugal, taken part in demonstrations and discussed the revolution with Portuguese students and protesters. In my interview with Bloch shortly after I returned from Portugal, we discussed his great interest in anti-colonial revolutions in India, China, and throughout the Third World, totally refuting Losardo's ludicrous claim that Bloch was indifferent to anti-colonial struggles.

Of the three most acknowledged founders of Western Marxism, — Lukacs, Korsch, and Gramsci -– Losardo has little to say, and, of course, Lukacs and Gramsci escape all critique as they were life-long fellow communists, although Losardo makes little or no effort to expound their contributions to Western Marxism, as if he could not stand to point out that it had any positive aspects, innovations, or analyses and reconstructions of Marxism for the contemporary era. As for Korsch, Losardo tactfully ignores him, referring to him only one time in the book in the context of an assault on his fellow Italian Marxist Lucio Colleti[iv] who cites Korsch as a "revolutionary Marxist" (p. 97), and Losurdo does not take issue with this designation.

Indeed, in his American exile from Nazi Germany, Korsch was very interested in colonial studies and wrote about the Philippines, for instance, in his 1947 article "Independence Comes to the Philippines," where he analyzed the transition from nominal colonial rule to new forms of imperialist control, which he described as using puppet governments to control states that were nominally recognized as independent.[v] Korsch argued that while formal independence was recognized, Western domination continued through different mechanisms, with the Philippines serving as an example of this shift in neo-imperialist strategy.[vi]

Losurdo also has trouble dealing with Herbert Marcuse who emerged as a leader of the "New Left" in the 1960s and 1970s who was active in the anti-Vietnam war movement and an avowed anti-imperialist.[vii] Since Losurdo cannot attack him in substance on his defense of national liberation movements and attacks on imperialism, he must mock the German-American exile from Hitler's fascism, claiming that for Marcuse "subjective hopes and aspirations ends up overwhelming analytical lucidity. Marcuse sighs, 'quantitative change would still have to turn into qualitative change, into the disappearance of the state… at least in some of the liberation struggles in the Third World'" (Marcuse in Losardo, p. 250). Yet then Losurdo mocks Marcuse as a romantic searching for "the advent of a 'new anthropology' in Vietnam," when Marcuse refers to park benches in North Vietnam as only big enough for two lovers to enjoy their privacy (ibid.)

Losardo has an easier time in shaming Horkheimer and Adorno. The Introduction notes that Horkheimer dismissed those engaged in anti-colonial national liberation struggles as "the savage barbarism of the East" (21), and Adorno and Horkheimer's support of the US in the

Vietnam war famously earned them the enmity of German students in the 1960s who disrupted Adorno's seminars and occupied the Frankfurt Institute.[viii] Yet Losurdo also completely ignores the many contributions to Neo-Marxism in Adorno and Horkheimer's work.[ix]

Moreover, the mocking Stalinist Losurdo is not only petty in his potshots at Western Marxists, but is incredibly repetitive, repeating time after time the heinous crimes of Hitler and Western colonialism, while praising again and again the wonders of Stalin and Soviet Communism. He makes it appear that Stalin and Russia alone defeated Hitler, leaving out the thousands of allied soldiers and others who fought and died to defeat fascism.[x] He repeats ad nauseum his praise of the Soviet Union and China, repeating over and over their miraculous feats of industrialization and production, as rapturously as the most committed capitalist ideologues of production praise the wonders of capital and the free market. And while Losurdo compiles ad nauseam the horrors of imperialist colonialization, there is not a word uttered about the crimes, camps, and repression in the East communist bloc, for in Losurdo's blinkered vision the West is the incarnation of Evil, while the East is purely Good…

Although Losardo notes the collapse of the Soviet Union he has hardly a word to say about Putin who is currently waging genocidal slaughter in the Ukraine. Losardo's book was published in 2017 well after Putin invaded and illegally annexed the Crimean peninsula in March 2014.[xi] Putin's invasion of Ukraine and his genocidal slaughter of its people, ongoing as I write in early 2026, represents the same sort of imperialism that Losurdo condemns in Hitler/German and other forms of Western imperialism. The sole reference to Putin is in the context of a fantasy that Losardo projects of Western powers wanting to seize and control China and Russia in the present day where he writes: "The war that the United Sates is preparing for is against China, the country born of the greatest anticolonial revolution in history and, directed by an experienced Communist Party, or against Russia, which under Putin, has wrongly, according to the White House, thrown off the neocolonial control that Yeltsin had accepted and adapted to (thanks to savage and predatory privatization, the West was in fact able to control the immense energy patrimony of the country)" (210).

The publication of this highly embarrassing polemic by Monthly Review Press is the low-point in their publication of many excellent books that helped educate my generation and many subsequent generations in the tradition of Marxism and radical thought. While *Monthly Review* represented a tradition of orthodox Marxism, they never, to my recollection, fell into the clutches of Stalinism to the extent of Losordo's Manichean vision of Good East vs Evil West. *Monthly Review* published many books and articles in its journal attacking Western imperialism and promoting National Liberation Movements, but I don't recall any vicious and ludicrous polemics against the New Left and Western Marxism to the extent of Losardo's book.

Thus, ultimately, Losurdo's polemic tells us more about the Stalinist mind and the poverty of orthodox Marxist polemics than about the rich legacy of thought of Western Marxism, which I will describe in a forthcoming book *Neo-Marxism in the Contemporary Era* (Routledge, in press). I look forward to what I hope are productive discussions about Neo-Marxism which will help us to appraise its contributions and limitations in creating a critical theory of society and

radical politics in the direction of democratic socialism and human liberation.

Notes

[i] On Stalin's Gulag, see Aleksandr Isaevich Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*. New York: Harper, 1973, on-line athttps://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Gulag_Archipelago (accessed January 24, 2026). See also a Google AI-generated page of articles and books on Stalin's crimes at https://www.google.com/search?q=Stalinism+repression+of+non-Russian+nations+and+peoples+in+the+Soviet+Union+Gulag+concentration+camps+&sca (accessed January 24, 2026).

[ii] See Douglas Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*. Berkeley and London: University of California Press (USA) and Macmillan Press (England), 1984; and *Herbert Marcuse. The New Left and the 1960s*. Volume Three, *Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse*, edited with Introduction by Douglas Kellner. London and New York: Routledge, 2004. My book on Marcuse stresses his deep involvement with the New Left and the papers collected in *Herbert Marcuse. The New Left and the 1960s* demonstrate his involvement with the New Left, support of National Liberation Movements and critiques of imperialism.

[iii] See the chapter on Bloch in my forthcoming volume *Neo-Marxism in the Contemporary Era*. New York and London: Routledge (in press).

[iv] Losurdo expends much energy and many passages assaulting his fellow Italian Marxists like Lucio Colleti, but I do not have the knowledge of Italian Marxism to properly appraise Losurdo's attacks in this domain. I do recall, however, that *Telos* editor Paul Piccone and other contributors to the journal published many praise-worthy articles by Italian Western Marxists and promoted this tradition that the Stalinist Losurdo wants to bury and suppress. For a positive view of Italian Marxism, see Paul Piccone, *Italian Marxism*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2020.

[v] Karl Korsch, "Independence Comes to the Philippines", *Asia*, 21, 11, (1947). On Korsch's consistently revolutionary theory, see Douglas Kellner, *Karl Korsch's Revolutionary Historicism.* Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1977.

[vi] E. San Juan Jr., "Imperialism Under Its Victims' Eyes," in *U.S. Imperialism and Revolution in the Philippines* on-line at https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9780230607033_2 (accessed November 12, 2025).

[vii] For documentation, see Note ii above.

[viii] Uncle Wiki provides profuse documentation of these events along with pictures and video at https://www.google.com/search?q=Adorno+and+Horkheimer%E2%80%99s+support+of+the+US+in+the+Vietnam+war+famously+earned+them+the+enmity+of+German+students+in+the+1960s+who+disrupted+Adorno%E2%80%99s+seminar+and+occupied+the+Frankfurt+Institute&sca(accessed November 13, 2025).

[ix] I demonstrate the contributions to Neo-Marxist theory of Horkheimer, Adorno, Pollock, and other members of the Frankfurt school in my book *Critical Theory, Marxism, and Modernity*. Cambridge, UK and Baltimore, Md.: Polity Press and John Hopkins University Press, 1989, as well as in my forthcoming book on Neo-Marxism cited in Note ii.

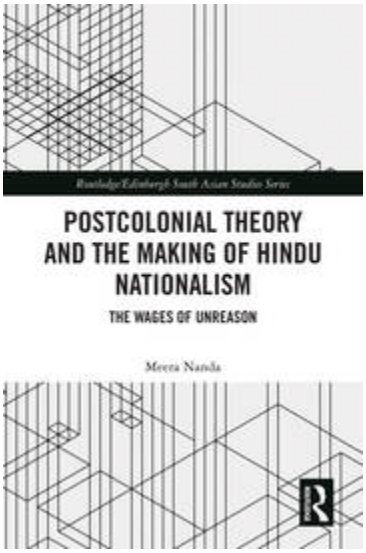
[x] In addition, Losurdo ignores the contributions in the fight against fascism by Neo-Marxists, especially by members of the Frankfurt School who fought fascism through their work with the OSS. See the contributions Marcuse made in his work in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in papers I collected in *Technology, War, and Fascism*, edited with Introduction by Douglas Kellner. London and New York: Routledge, 1998 (Volume One, *Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse*); Portuguese translation, *Technologia, Guerra e Fasismo*, 1999; Sao Paolo, Brazil: UNESP. Losurdo's acolyte, Gabriel Rockhill, who edits the book under review and contributes a celebratory Introduction, makes the ludicrous claim that Marcuse worked for the CIA because he was a member of its predecessor the OSS. See Gabriel Rockhill's, *Who Paid the Pipers of Western Marxism, The Intellectual World War*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2025. See also the critical review of the book by Charles Reitz, "When Marxist Intellectuals Collaborated With the CIA," *Counterpunch*, December 12, 2025) at

https://www.counterpunch.org/2025/12/12/when-marxist-intellectuals-collaborated-with-the-cia/#:~:text=Given%20the%20accompanying%20context%20of,criticisms%20of%20Old%20Left%20policies(accessed January 24, 2026.

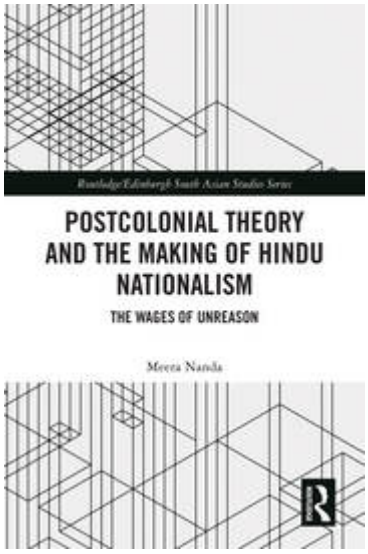
[xi] Mark Galeotti and Irene Cano Rodríguez, *Putin Takes Crimea 2014: Grey-zone warfare opens the Russia-Ukraine conflict.* Oxford UK: Osprey Publishing, 2023.

Meera Nanda’s Postcolonial Theory and the Making of Hindu Nationalism

By | 2026: Vol. 25, No. 1



Once confined to the arcane recesses of literary theory seminar rooms and abstruse academic journals, postcolonialism can say today that it is thoroughly in vogue. More than mere lingo for the self-righteous pseudo-left, it is now the policy for academic administrators who cannot seem to get on the bus fast enough. Even amidst the vigorous “anti-woke” politics of the moment, many professors are still asked to “decolonize” their syllabi. In fact, the verbal form of the term – which gets ever more meaningless the more it is applied – seems to have no end in sight. In psychoanalysis, medicine, and law, the movement toward decolonization seems without end. At its best, this is an attempt to broaden the canon of texts and ideas, traditions and points of view that have been wrongly neglected in western intellectual circles. At its worst, it is a disingenuous attempt to codify a formalized multi-culturalism by the academy as commodity form.



But what matters at a deeper level still is postcolonialism's valorization of anti-Western and anti-rationalist traditions. This is occurring at a time when the forces of capitalism and globalization as well as an unregulated form of technological logic is withering the vitality of Enlightenment humanism, thereby weakening any coherent counter-vailing critique.[1] In viewing history as a canvas for cultural politics where western power is to be viewed not merely in terms of its *anti*-Enlightenment traditions and forces, i.e., those that were actually responsible for the colonial enterprise, it instead conflates this with Enlightenment ideas and principles.[2]By setting their sights on the Enlightenment, science, values such as secularism and human progress, the critique of tradition and custom, postcolonial theorists move almost check by jowl with the political right. The reactionary movements of the modern world have always been anti-Enlightenment. In their defense of hierarchy, of tradition, and of the non-rational, they have always sought to protect private power over democratic accountability, hierarchy over equality, and private interest over the public good. With the left increasingly identifying with such intellectual fads, it is little wonder why today's movements against the rising tide of authoritarianism and growing appeal of fascism is milquetoast at best.

Meera Nanda's important new book seeks to make a further connection. She sees that the attack on western rationalism, a long tradition within the postmodern left, is in fact politically suspect. The object of her book is to demonstrate a connection – more of an elective affinity than direct association – between the spread of postcolonial theory and the rise of the anti-modernity of the Hindu Right in India. Following up on her superb 2003 book, *Prophets Facing Backward*, she wants to show how science and technology can be wedded to anti-Enlightenment ideas and regressive cultural values, this time showing how postcolonial theorists have aided this project.[3] As she argues: "I am not suggesting that the Postcolonial Left singlehandedly lit the fires of Hindu chauvinism. What I am claiming is that it has enabled the fire to spread by disabling a principled critique of Hinduism and Hinde nationalism that could have acted as a fire retardant."[4]

Nanda argues that the origin of this phenomenon begins with the cultural and political despair that overcame intellectual circles in India in the 1970s. Beginning in the 1960s, there was

rising discontent over the degree of corruption and growing social disparities. The Indian National Congress, the party that spear-headed and achieved independence was composed of a miscellany of wealthy landowners, industrialists, rural landlords, urban professionals, an upwardly mobile middle class and farming families. The class structure failed to incorporate the rural and urban poor. "This nexus," Nanda writes, "between Congress and the dominant classes led to a massive failure to deliver on the promise of a better life for those left out."[5] What resulted was a social crisis leading to a state of emergency decree by Indira Gandhi from June 1975 through March 1977. Jayaprakash Narayan, a veteran of Mahatma Gandhi's Sarvodaya movement, "would take a page out of events of 1968 in Europe and call upon the 'youth power' to usher in his '*Sampoorna Kranti*' or 'Total Revolution.'"[6]

Narayan's total revolution consisted of an opposition to parliamentary democracy as well as a commitment to *swaraj*, or "indigenous-ness" which itself implied a complete rejection of foreign ideas and institutions. This reflected Gandhi's own conservative ideals: specifically, adherence to an ideal social order made up of "self-regulating communities bound by moral restraints of *dharma* that limited human desires."[7] It is here that one of Nanda's most consistent themes is developed: the thesis that this anti-western, anti-rationalist turn is akin to the intellectual and political currents in Weimar Germany. These ideas, which would nourish and give rise to Nazi ideology was based on the idea that modern rationality and its secularist values were to be demolished for a backward-looking aspiration toward tradition and community. "Like the Weimar conservatives," Nanda writes, "postcolonial intellectuals have made clearing the ruins of the Enlightenment reason their primary goal. Like the *Volkisch* romantics of early-twentieth century Germany, they too are searching for a Third Way, an 'alternative modernity' rooted in indigenous modes of knowing and living."[8]

The term "conservative revolution" captures Nanda's argument well. She dissects the ideas of influential Indian postcolonial intellectuals such as Ashis Nandy, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Partha Chatterjee, Aditya Nigam, Vandana Shiva, Claude Alvares and others. What unites them is a sense that a resistance to western traditions and thought is crucial for protecting the *Gemeinschaftliche* forms of life of traditional rural Indian culture and community. Here is where the elective affinity between their supposedly left-wing critique of western Enlightenment traditions and the right-wing politics and ideology of Hindu Nationalism come into focus. For both movements seek to undermine not only the normative values of secularism and universalism, but they also seek to displace western science with indigenous traditions of knowledge. What Nandy calls "critical traditionalism" conveys the idea that these traditional forms of life and knowledge can be seen as alternatives to western modernity and its values of individualism, work, secularism and productivity.

In fact, modern science is repudiated for its "epistemic violence." For Nandy, the people have an "epistemic right" to live in accordance with their own ideas about what they consider right, wrong, true and false. As Nanda summarizes this view, the people "not only have the freedom of having their opinions but also of having their own facts as well."[9] For the postcolonial theorist, western science's epistemic violence essentially consists in its separation of fact from value. As Nanda explains:

The values of objectivity or value-neutrality that modern science ideally aspires for were declared to be fascistic signs of mental illness because they demand a separation of the object of knowledge from the ethical-social-aesthetic values of the knowing subject. This reduces the lived, first-person experience of the natural and social worlds to pure abstractions, shorn of all meaning and purpose.[10]

Figures such as Bacon and Galileo are indicted by these thinkers for "denuding the world of magic and mystery."[11] So, Nandy argues, reflecting on the course of western cultural history, the Catholic Church was in fact justified and right to persecute Galileo since he was a force in pushing the objectivistic, value-neutral understanding of nature.

We can see how this indictment of modern science leads to a further concern about secularism. It is one thing to call into question the powers and cultural prevalence of instrumental reason, as did countless humanistic critics form left and right in the west. But once we see the connection between modern scientific rationalism not as an instrumental or technical application of science, but as a new vantage point from which we can call into question the prevailing norms of the community into which I have been born and socialized, then things become politically problematic. But this is precisely the point that the postcolonial theorists want to press. What Vandana Shiva once termed "monocultures of the mind" refers to this negation of traditional forms of knowing and thinking in favor of the West's rationalism.[12]

But Nanda argues that it is here that we see the demise of the secular ideal in India. Once we embrace folk traditions and ways of knowing, then we enter the realm of real relativism. Once we jettison the sphere of justification, of the exchange of reasons for our moral beliefs and forms of authority – something essential to the value of secularism as a place holder for democratic rationality – then we are at the whim of the powerful and their arbitrary "reasons" for asserting their authority. As Nanda writes: "Khap panchayats, for example, derive their extra-legal powers to enforce retrograde laws against inter-caste and inter-faith marriages precisely because their claim to have 'their own reasons' which the state has no business interfering with."[13]

These ideas and critiques of the left postcolonial theorists feed into a new form of modernism that is being enacted in India today. From the British historian of fascism Roger Griffin, Nanda borrows the term "palingenetic" to describe a form of modernism where a "reborn India was to be a modern, technologically advanced nation, but with the soul of ancient Bharat, the quintessential land of *Gemeinschaft*."[14] Palingenetic modernism is this embrace of modern technological forms of reason, science and technology but with the backward glance toward tradition, custom and religion. It is therefore wrong to see what is happening in India – and, one can say by extension, in many parts of the world that are seeing a surge in far-right politics – as conservativism or reactionary politics. For the palingenetic modernists, it is not a conservation of the past that they seek to achieve, but "an attempt to provide a new metanarrative, a new coherent story, that can replace the sacred canopy that religion, traditions, and local customs provided before it was battered by the forces of modernity."[15]

The project is therefore to provide alternative patterns of reason, to revive the "spiritual," mystical and mythical elements of human experience, and to protect and to amplify the traditional forms of power, hierarchy and order that they believe constituted the past. The project to make India "Bharat" therefore means to create this new modernity: one where technological progress is wedded to traditional belief systems and forms of life. These traditional values are to displace the modern attitudes of reason, skepticism, individualism, materialism, and so on. Nanda sees parallels with the romantic backlash against the Enlightenment with thinkers such as Johann Gottfried Herder and his seeking for truth *das Volk* and the need to revive organic forms of community to protect against the colonization of individualism and materialism. These ideas were set out before the postcolonial theorists by revivalist thinkers such as Sri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda whose aim was to revive the spiritual life of traditional Hindu culture. But in their zeal to oust western thought as "epistemic violence" and a continued contamination from colonialism, Nanda argues, "[t]he Postcolonial Left is only reviving the revivalists and, in the process, providing aid and comfort to the current crop of Hindu revivalists."[16]

The postcolonial left and the thinkers of the Hindu right therefore, for Nanda, point in the same direction. By jettisoning western scientific values and epistemic skepticism, experiment and progress, they advocate for indigenous knowledge produced from within the structure of Hindu beliefs – what they term "inner science" – as a legitimate competitor to western science. As Nanda describes it:

At the heart of inner sciences lies a "rishi state of mind" achieved through yoga, tantra, and mantras. In this state of altered consciousness, the "rishi mind" can tune into cosmic consciousness and "primordial vibrations." Since all matter is simply a manifestation of cosmic consciousness and primordial vibrations, it can be known by a "direct experience" of this consciousness.[17]

One might ask: what is the point of it all? After all, can we not say that there is a destructiveness to modern science and technology? Perhaps western values such as individualism, liberalism and materialism have created one kind of modernity, one that has its own contradictions and damaged history? Why can we not consider alternative social formations, perhaps those inspired by indigenous communities that live closer to nature and human need rather than an alienated urban existence and reliance on capital? What seems to be in Nanda's crosshairs is not these concerns, however. Rather, it is how the left has gradually eroded the principles and ideals of Enlightenment reasoning and instead romanticized traditional cultures at the expense of such ideals and principles. Indeed, one can make the case that postcolonialism as a theme and concern can be integrated into a more critical, rational, non-postmodern theory.[18] But, Nanda forcefully asserts, the postcolonial theorists "well-intended radicalism, however, has hollowed out the substance of modern standards of rationality and modern aspirations of freedom and justice that cut across cultures."[19] This reinforces Ernest Gellner's critique of postmodern relativism when he argued that "everything about the condition of mankind in our age makes it utterly plain that cognitive relativism is false. It is false because an enormous mass of social facts establishes this, and *not* because it

would have disastrous consequences if true."[20]

What Nanda wants to defend is the way that western reason enables us to see both "the rational unity of mankind" as well as the "moral unity of mankind." For both are the true inheritance of western science and rationalism; a science and rationalism that can serve as a means for self-critique and the confrontation with traditional forms of authority and domination. This was the appeal for many in the non-western world who saw in the west's categories of modern rationality a means to break down the encrusted values systems and superstitious mentalities that prevented the establishment of republican forms of government.[21] Nanda emphasizes that the better path for critical and radical intellectuals is to champion the scientific capacity that all human share: "Rather than defend tradition against the onslaught of science, the more fruitful task for those who are concerned with the subaltern would be to nurture what Popper calls a 'second-order tradition,' that is, *a tradition of critically assessing the inherited tradition*."[22]

Far from being a means of suppression and domination, the scientific attitude developed most robustly in western culture is not a unique property of western culture. In fact, it is essential to see that it an inheritance for all humanity. Universalism is not a cultural value of the west, it is a potential standpoint for any thinking, reflecting human being. It provides a "trans-cultural" vantage point to secure the validity of truth-claims, whether about the natural world or the moral-political world. Nanda is right to insist on the dual values of rational and moral universalism. For without these we are at the whim of cultural categories that insulate power relations from critical scrutiny. She is right to stress that "universal does not mean uniform," that all human beings possess the capacity for basic scientific reasoning and theory, or an "abductive instinct," and that only the exchange and scrutinizing of reasons can provide for those kinds of political authority that are accountable to a common, public interest.

In many ways, Nanda's trenchant critique of the irrationalism of postcolonial theory echoes similar critiques by others in recent years.[23] But what stands out is its defense of the deep structure of science and Enlightenment ideas and their salience for any viable expression of left politics. In western democracies, Left politics, ideas and theory has essentially become little more than fashionable nonsense. The culturalist turn to identity politics, gender and race at the exclusion of class as the essential variable of power has merely legitimated the deep structures of power while at the same time strengthening the far right. Postmodern theory and its ideological successors have gutted the Left of its most radical ideas: that of reason, universalism, democracy and equality. Nanda will have none of it. Her book stands as a stark warning to the effect Left intellectuals can have, when they get theory wrong, on the process of political and cultural regress. In her own words: "What the Left theorized, the Right has weaponized. Postcolonial theory has become an argument for. Making India Bharat. If this sad saga has any message for the Ivory-Tower Left, it is this: Be careful of what you wish for."[24]

Notes

[1] See the recent polemic by Aldo Schiavone, *Occidente senza Pensiero*. (Bologna: Il Mulino,

2025).

[2] For an important corrective to this narrative, see Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

[3] Meera Nanda, *Prophets Facing Backward: Postmodern Critiques of Science and Hindu Nationalism*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

[4] Meera Nanda, *Postcolonial Theory and the Making of Hindu Nationalism: The Wages of Unreason*. (New York: Routledge, 2025), 7.

[5] Nanda, *Postcolonial Theory and the Making of Hindu Nationalism*, 53.

[6] Nanda, *Postcolonial Theory and the Making of Hindu Nationalism*, 54.

[7] Nanda, *Postcolonial Theory and the Making of Hindu Nationalism*, 56.

[8] Nanda, *Postcolonial Theory and the Making of Hindu Nationalism*, 64.

[9] Nanda, *Postcolonial Theory and the Making of Hindu Nationalism*, 83.

[10] Nanda, *Postcolonial Theory and the Making of Hindu Nationalism*, 83.

[11] Nanda, *Postcolonial Theory and the Making of Hindu Nationalism*, 84.

[12] Vandana Shiva, *Monocultures of the Mind: Perspectives on Biodiversity and Biotechnology*. (London: Zed Books, 1993).

[13] Nanda, *Postcolonial Theory and the Making of Hindu Nationalism*, 106.

[14] Nanda, *Postcolonial Theory and the Making of Hindu Nationalism*, 147.

[15] Nanda, *Postcolonial Theory and the Making of Hindu Nationalism*, 153.

[16] Nanda, *Postcolonial Theory and the Making of Hindu Nationalism*, 186.

[17] Nanda, *Postcolonial Theory and the Making of Hindu Nationalism*, 217.

[18] For an example, see Filippo Menozzi, *Postcolonial Historical Materialism: The Heritage of Critical Theory*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2025).

[19] Nanda, *Postcolonial Theory and the Making of Hindu Nationalism*, 233-234.

[20] Ernest Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*. (London: Routledge, 1992), 55.

[21] This was particularly true in China during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. For an important study of this integration of western reason in Chinese intellectual

and political life, see Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May 4th Movement of 1919*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986). This should be contrasted with the project of creating an anti-Western cultural politics while at the same time incorporating western scientific, industrial and technical modes of modernization. See Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernisn in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

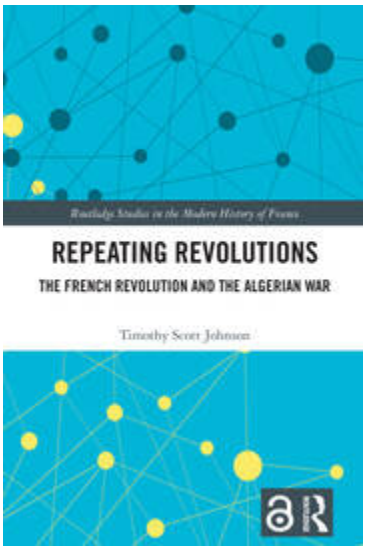
[22] Nanda, *Postcolonial Theory and the Making of Hindu Nationalism*, 238.

[23] Most importantly see Kevin B. Anderson and Janet Afary, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Vivek Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*. (London: Verso, 2013); and Vasant Kaiwar, *The Postcolonial Orient: The Politics of Difference and the Project of Provincializing Europe*. (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2015).

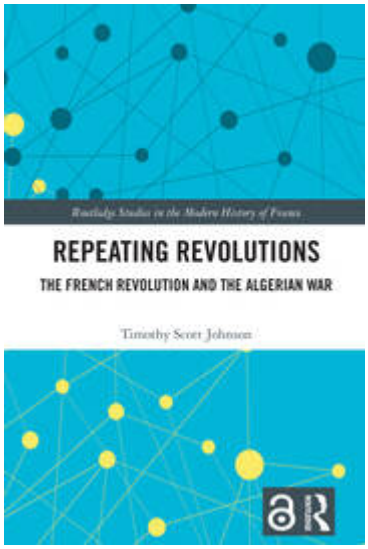
[24] Nanda, *Postcolonial Theory and the Making of Hindu Nationalism*, 225.

Timothy Scott Johnson’s Repeating Revolutions: The French Revolution and the Algerian War

By | 2026: Vol. 25, No. 1



Repeating Revolutions examines how France’s revolutionary past became a working political language during Algeria’s struggle for decolonization from the 1930s through the 1960s. Johnson’s central claim is that invocations of “1789” mattered because they operated as historical analogies that shaped political perception and legitimated action. Defenders of empire appealed to revolutionary universalism to portray French rule as progressive development and to recast coercion as tutelage. Anticolonial actors mobilized the same inheritance to indict the Republic for violating its own principles and for converting rights into imperial privilege. Johnson also follows procolonial militants and counterinsurgency theorists who treated decolonization as the return of revolutionary disorder traced to regicide. His wager is that tracking these analogies situates opposed actors inside a shared field of argument and clarifies how Algeria and the Revolution were co-constituted as objects of knowledge in scholarship and state discourse, with attention to militant politics.



The Introduction provides the book's conceptual architecture with unusual clarity. Johnson treats the coupling of 1789 and the Algerian War as a "timeknot," drawing on Dipesh Chakrabarty's language for entanglement through reference and expectation. His premise is that repetition yields difference (Deleuze). Each return to 1789 re-describes the Revolution and re-describes decolonization, even when speakers present themselves as guardians of stable meaning. Johnson also treats the Revolution as political myth, a shared narrative resource that naturalized expectations about progress and emancipation, as well as narratives of national decline. He identifies recurring plots, including a paternal plot in which independence appears as the culmination of French universalism and a declension plot in which Algeria confirms that revolutionary rupture never ended. Analogy, in this account, is a form of historical thinking that rewrites the past it cites. The effect is to keep "1789" unstable and contested, with continuing political productivity across changing contexts.

Method is central to the book's contribution. Johnson describes his approach as intellectual history "in the open air." He reads specialist historians alongside public commentary and follows social scientific work where it stabilized categories of interpretation. He also brings militants and military theorists into view when their texts entered broader circuits of persuasion, including courtrooms and propaganda infrastructures. This scope allows him to treat scholarly debate as part of political history and to treat political rhetoric as a form of historical reasoning. It also supports one of the book's most consistent strengths: attention to the institutions that circulate analogy, including anniversaries and publishing venues, along with state information systems.

Chapters 1 and 2 chart the prewar and early-war terrain. Chapter 1, "Debating the Revolution's Legacy," shows Algerian nationalists invoking French revolutionary symbols well before 1954, often to expose republican hypocrisy. Johnson distinguishes reformist appeals for inclusion within a republican frame from rhetoric that cast colonial privilege as a new *ancien régime*. He then turns to metropolitan debates after World War II, when antifascism strengthened the Revolution's authority as a language of renewal. Specialists worried about anachronism and about the contamination of revolutionary history by Cold War polemics.

Johnson's reconstruction of the controversy around Daniel Guérin and his anti-Jacobin reading is especially instructive because it demonstrates how disputes over Robespierre became disputes over the legitimacy of revolutionary politics in the present.

Chapter 2, "The Soul of the Republic and the Algerian Crisis," treats 1789 as a moral standard for judging the Republic's conduct in Algeria. Johnson opens with the July 14, 1953, march in Paris and the violence that followed, using commemoration to stage colonial contradiction. Critics of repression and torture invoked the Declaration of the Rights of Man and a language of republican virtue. Johnson also traces how memories of occupation entered these arguments, so that Algeria could appear as a threat to the Republic's moral integrity and to civic responsibility. The chapter is strongest when it shows how appeals to revolutionary virtue could discipline the left's own self-understanding and set limits on what counted as legitimate resistance.

Chapter 3, "Dual Revolutions," centers on 1958 as a moment of condensed historical imagination. The bicentennial commemoration of Robespierre's birth coincided with the crisis that ended the Fourth Republic and returned de Gaulle to power after the May 13 events in Algiers. Johnson shows how commemoration and broadcast programming widened the audience for revolutionary scripts within a broader public debate. On the left, "committees of public safety" in Algiers signaled counterrevolution and revived fears of fascist recurrence. Procolonial activists and segments of the army framed the moment as civic mobilization in defense of French Algeria. Johnson also tracks the Bonapartist coding of de Gaulle, which linked emergency authority to an older cycle of revolution and consolidation. This chapter is particularly effective in showing how commemorative infrastructure can intensify analogy and convert it into an everyday interpretive reflex.

Chapters 4 and 5 track the analogy's circulation across solidarity politics and Algerian critique as the prospect of independence became harder to evade. Chapter 4, "To Be French Today Is to Be Algerian," follows metropolitan activists and the Jeanson network trial, where defendants and lawyers drew on revolutionary language to frame clandestine support for the FLN as fidelity to French principles, including the right to insurrection. Johnson treats the trial as a scene in which legal argument and press coverage turned historical reference into political self-fashioning, often through appeals to continuity with anti-Nazi resistance. Chapter 5, "Broken Mirrors," reframes the problem from Algerian perspectives through Frantz Fanon and Jean Amrouche. Johnson shows how attachment to revolutionary promise could coexist with racialization and exclusion, and how 1789 could become compromised when France claimed the Revolution and denied its rights to colonized subjects. Chapter 5 clarifies why Algerian actors sought a decolonized historical grammar as metropolitan solidarity intensified. It also clarifies how revolutionary reference could sustain French centrality within emancipatory idioms.

Chapter 6, "Revolution and Counter-Revolution," moves to procolonial and counterinsurgent archives. Johnson connects counterrevolutionary traditions to revolutionary war theory and to the propaganda infrastructures of the French Army, with attention to the political culture that

culminated in OAS militancy. Here 1789 serves as warning and diagnosis. Decolonization appears as ideological subversion and the FLN appears as heir to revolutionary violence that demands counterrevolutionary response. Johnson's work here is especially useful on the overlap between appeals to republican order and integralist projects of restoration since both could enlist revolutionary imagery and repudiated revolutionary emancipation.

Chapters 7 and 8 shift from political rhetoric to knowledge production. Johnson argues that historians and social scientists made North Africa legible as historical in ways that challenged orientalist assumptions of stasis. This work made analogies to *ancien régime* France more plausible for metropolitan audiences by supplying categories through which Algeria could appear as a society in motion. He then follows the conceptual formation of the "Third World" through revolutionary analogy, tracing how Alfred Sauvy's formulation echoed Sieyès's Third Estate and translated an older script into global politics. Johnson closes by returning to analogy as method, emphasizing that comparisons rewrite the past they cite and reorganize what later historians can see. His suggestion that the experience of Algeria contributed to the later legibility of other revolutionary histories, including Saint-Domingue, is one of the book's most compelling bridges between intellectual history and historiography.

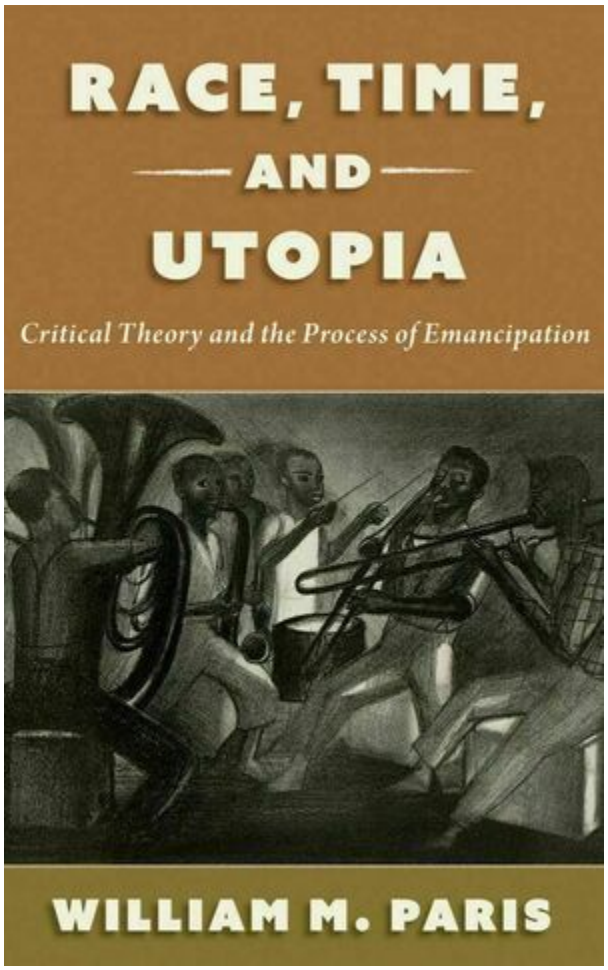
Johnson's study succeeds on its own terms. It offers a persuasive account of analogy as historiographical operation with political consequences, and it does so without converting historical actors into vehicles for theory. The writing is restrained. The conceptual claims are explicit. The chapters consistently link discourse to the institutions that circulate it. The book also clarifies how revolutionary reference can authorize solidarity and delegitimate empire, with implications for coercive governance and for scholarly periodization. The result is a study with substantial value for historians of modern France and decolonization, along with readers interested in the politics of historical knowledge.

The book also invites questions that sharpen its historiographical value. The archive is strongest for Francophone publics and literate elites. How far did revolutionary analogy travel beyond those circles? What changes if Arabic-language political culture becomes the primary archive, or if rural worlds structured by other forms of authority take analytic priority? A second question concerns causality. Johnson demonstrates that analogy organized perception and legitimated action. The evidentiary threshold for showing outcome effects remains higher than the threshold for showing rhetorical or ethical justification. What sources would allow a stronger claim about outcomes, such as internal memoranda or administrative correspondence? The book also raises a methodological question that merits explicit discussion: when does analogy function as explanation, and when does it function as alibi?

Repeating Revolutions will reward historians of modern France and decolonization, especially readers interested in commemoration and political myth. It will suit graduate seminars that move between intellectual history and the history of empire. Its central lesson is that revolutions persist through the histories later actors tell about them, and those histories shape what becomes thinkable as emancipation.

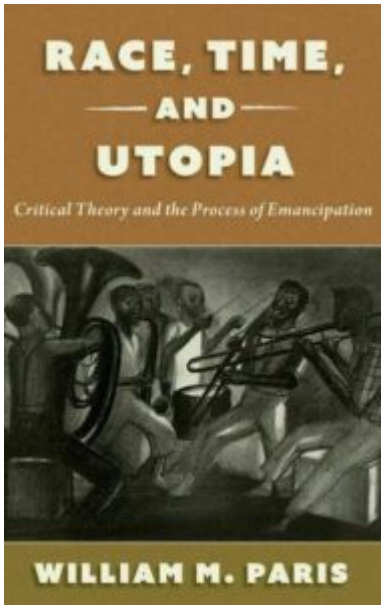
William M. Paris' Race, Time, and Utopia: Critical Theory and the Process of Emancipation

By | 2026: Vol. 25, No. 1



In this book, philosopher William Paris develops an account of racial injustice that centers the relationship between freedom and time. In his own words, Paris aims to "develop the hypothesis that racial domination is at bottom the domination of time by one group over another and thus emancipation must entail delivering the control of time out of the hands of one set of agents and into another's."[1] Put simply, modern capitalist societies are "comprised of distinct forms of life that organize time according to different rhythms and values."[2] A fortiori, two questions orient this text: 1) how should we diagnose and conceptualize the temporal domination of racial justice? 2) if we have internalized this form of life then what resources can we develop principles for a transformed and free form of life that we have never experienced? To answer 1), Paris offers readers an account of racial fetishism which refers to the "cognitive distortions into the experience of all agents living in racially unjust societies that

make it appear as if race operations independently of our social practices."[3] To answer 2) Paris argues that Black Power thought can be the basis for "envisioning a society where social relations are transparent and open to critique from the racially dominated" and the subsequent creation of a world "where the justifications for how we organize our social time are brought under the control contestable political institutions rather than political institutions being constrained" by racist capitalist relations.



Paris' *Race, Time, and Utopia* is an original work that enhances research agendas that are centered on philosophy of race, continental philosophy, and Africana philosophy. The work is also theoretically ambitious and productively engages the ideas of Black nationalists like Du Bois, Martin Delany, and Marcus Garvey. The originality in this sense is hard to overstate. Since the 1980's, there's been a consensus among Black/Africana philosophers of race that Black nationalist ideas are 'essentialist', 'retrograde', and at best should be revised to fit within the paradigmatic confines of liberal democratic theory. But Paris breaks with this dominant tendency in the field and shows how Black Power thought can be something other than a nationalist relic of masculine, patriarchal rage that centers men at the expense of Black women and queer people. Students and professors in philosophy, Black Studies, or those who specialize in Black diasporic thought from other disciplines would undoubtedly benefit by engaging Paris' arguments.

Race, Time, and Utopia is grounded in critical theory and philosophy of race. However, his argument for understanding racism as a phenomenon grounded in 'non-synchronicity' and deep engagement with Black nationalists like Garvey or Black Power theorists like James Boggs gives his ideas a decolonial normative potential that most of the dominant rubrics in philosophy of race simply don't have. I highly recommend this text. Some of the key Black thinkers in the text could've been engaged beyond their earlier works, especially Du Bois and Fanon. Yet, Paris's refreshing engagement of Black Power thought for the purposes of normative theory has the potential to inaugurate new trends in philosophy of race towards an engagement with the basic concepts (i.e. Black Nationalism, Pan-Africanism) that the Black Diaspora have used

to understand themselves. If Paris' arguments are any indication of what to expect from philosophers of race, the view that an autonomous historical dynamic unites and coheres around the ideas produced by Black theorists throughout modern history (abolitionism, the Back to Africa movement, Black nationalism, African nationalism, Pan-Africanism) may one day be popular in the field. But that day has yet to come.

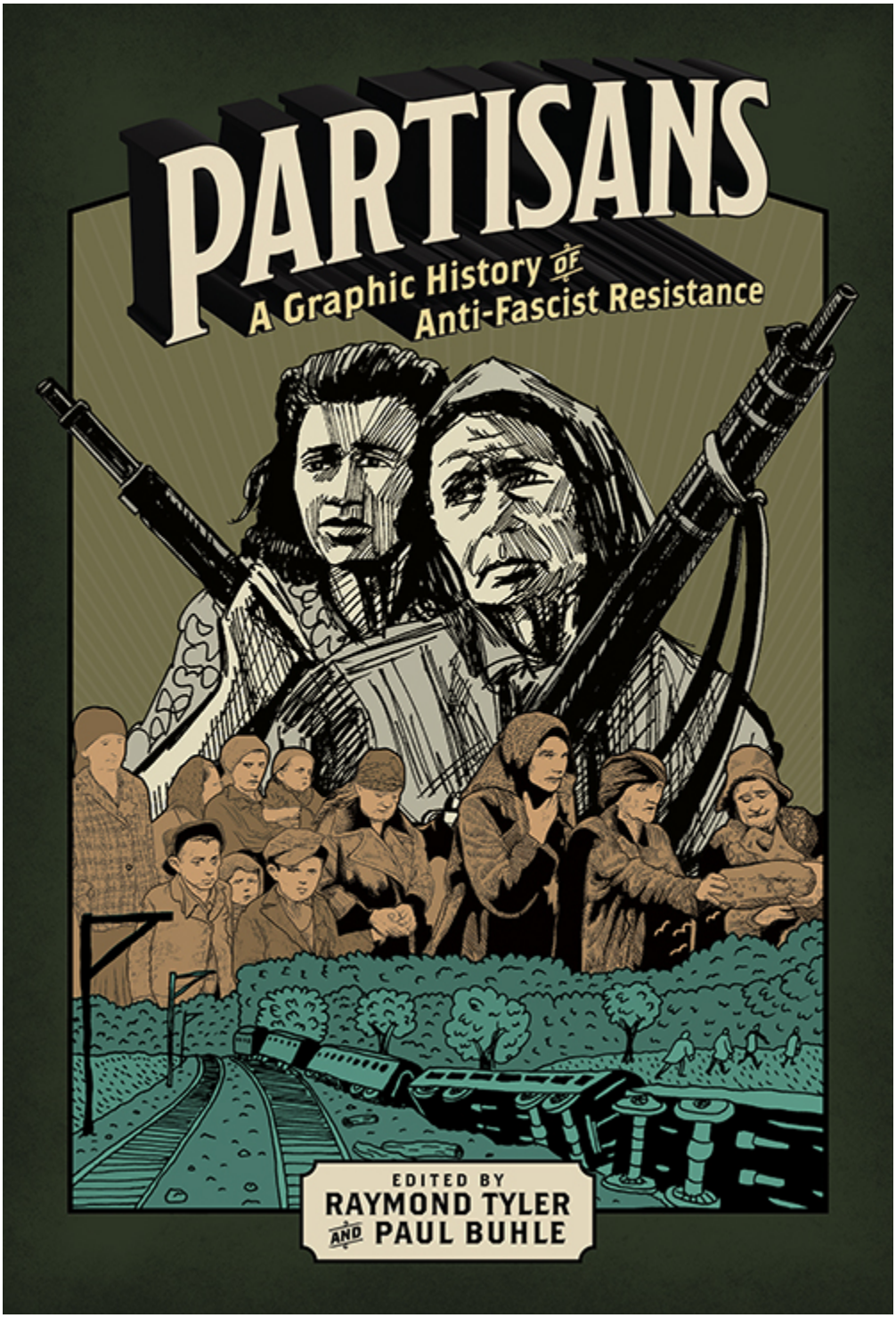
[1] William M. Paris, *Race, Time, and Utopia: Critical Theory and the Process of Emancipation*, (Oxford University Press, 2025), 4.

[2] Paris, *Race, Time, and Utopia*, 5.

[3] Ibid, 19.

Paul Buhle and Raymond Tyler's Partisans

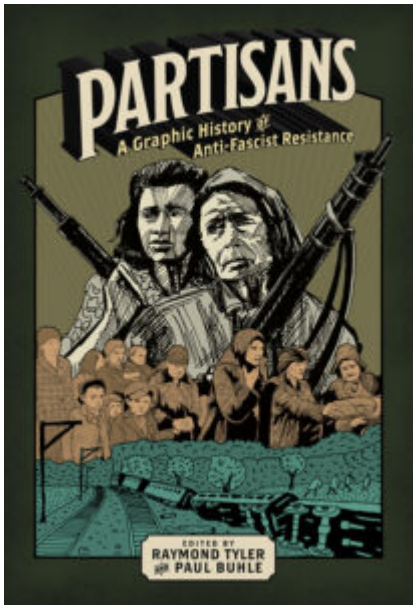
By | 2026: Vol. 25, No. 1



A chapter by comic artist Kevin Pyle in the new graphic non-fiction collection *Partisans* centers on the "spomeniks," massive, abstract concrete monuments that the Communist dictator Tito commissioned all over postwar Yugoslavia. Some 14,000 in all, the spomeniks were the new

regime's way of simultaneously commemorating the sacrifice of the anti-fascist partisans during World War II, and declaring that the people of the ethnically divided country would forge a new future, together.

Today, the majority of the spomeniks stand ruined, destroyed, or decaying and overgrown, testifying to the ruin of the partisans' hopes for Yugoslavia as Serbs, Croats, and Bosnian Muslims went back to killing each other after the country collapsed again in the 1990s.



Partisans reclaims the complicated history of the armed anti-fascist resistance in occupied Europe during World War II, which editors Raymond Tyler and Paul Buhle argue, in their Introduction, "must not, cannot, be forgotten in our own time." What they mean, of course, is that fascism isn't dead; today's far right is vicious, vengeful, violent, and eager to rehabilitate and celebrate the fascist leaders of Germany, Italy, Spain, and the subservient regimes in Hungary, Greece, Croatia, Slovakia, and elsewhere that the partisans fought against. "We must find our own creative ways, individually and collectively, to rise to the challenge."

Tyler and Buhle don't suggest what those ways might be, but the 15 artists and writers who contributed to their book collectively tell a story marked by sabotage, assassination and summary executions, arson, bombings, and reprisals against collaborators. Partisan warfare was heroic and selfless, sometimes visionary, but also ruthless, bloody, and unforgiving, often mirroring the brutality of the forces the insurgents were fighting against. Since the opposing sides were not separated by trenches or battle lines, an ability to not see the other side as human was nearly as prevalent among the partisans as it was among their foes.

The question lurking behind this history: What degree of courage, commitment, and sacrifice will it take to defeat the neo-fascists today?

The editors start by defining their terms. "The Resistance" is the larger anti-fascist movement, taking in anyone who opposed the wartime German occupation in one way or another,

whatever their ideology, such as by providing intelligence or aid to those fleeing the occupied zones. “Partisans” were the armed resistance, usually drawn from left-wing movements, including “those allied in some ways with communist parties aimed ultimately at social transformation.” They were not regular soldiers, but ordinary civilians from all walks of life, although in some countries, they included veterans of the Spanish Civil War and people who had been engaged in political opposition to fascism before the occupation.

This is accurate so far as it goes, but it’s worth adding that the armed resistance also included groups that were not leftists, such as, in France, groups tied to Charles de Gaulle’s Free French, and in Greece, the National Groups of Greek Guerrillas (EOEA). The more important point is that while partisans came from a variety of political backgrounds—or none at all—during the fighting, they often developed their own political consciousness and a desire for their struggle to generate a new society rather than a return to the old, prewar order. The degree of cooperation between partisan groups within each occupied country ran from high to low to nonexistent.

Nor does a single model describe how they fought.

In tightly controlled countries like France, the Netherlands, and Northern Italy—after Mussolini was overthrown and the German army moved in to occupy it—partisan activity consisted of sabotage, raids, targeted killings, and hit-and-run combat. In Yugoslavia and Greece, it was closer to all-out warfare, sometimes approaching the level of pitched battles. Denmark, which is not represented in *Partisans*, offered very little armed resistance to the Germans, but the Danish underground engaged in nonviolent resistance and sabotage and rescued almost the entire Jewish population of the country, while in neighboring Norway, with its tough, mountainous geography, the resistance included commando raids and assassinations. A lot depended on the terrain, the population, and the strength of the German grip.

Partisans begins with a short prologue about the Spanish Civil War, followed by 10 chapters covering the armed anti-fascist insurgencies in France, Hungary, Greece, Yugoslavia, Italy, the Soviet Union, the Netherlands, and Jewish Eastern Europe. The stories it tells vary, too.

Sharon Rudahl’s piece covers the role that the American singer and dancer Josephine Baker played in the French Resistance. Tina Robbins and Anne Timmons relate how three Dutch girls were recruited into the struggle and their part in a campaign of assassinations of collaborators and SS officers. Franca and Isabella Bannerman illustrate Franca’s experience as a *staffetta*, or courier, transporting supplies, weapons, and intelligence for the Italian anti-fascist partisans. David Lasky tells the story of a Jewish partisan in Eastern Europe, not skipping the violence such people often experienced at the hands of Russian partisans. Sander Feinberg and Summer McClinton cover the Hungarian resistance, including the wartime efforts to rescue Hungarian Jews. Seth Tobocman’s chapter focuses on the astonishingly successful Yugoslav resistance. Daniel Selig’s chapter on the French resistance takes time to sort out the ideological splits among the *Maquis* or rural guerrilla bands (nicknamed for the scrublands within which many of them operated).

The artists and writers respond to the variety of stories they tell in *Partisans* with a variety of styles of illustration. Tobocman applies his trademark angular images to the story of the Yugoslav fighters. McClinton uses a more realistic style to illustrate Feinberg's account of the Hungarian struggle. Timmons uses a classic postwar comic book style to tell the story of the three heroic Dutch women. A standout, for me, is David Lester's chapter on the ferocious Greek resistance, which embraced armed insurgency, strikes and mass demonstrations, and the establishment of autonomous, directly democratic liberated zones of some 750,000 people. Lester's black-and-white drawings are dramatic, movingly human, and splashed with a blood-red wash that evokes the savage nature of the fighting.

While every country's brand of resistance to the occupation took a different shape, there were similarities. Women, who were excluded from the armed forces in nearly all countries before the war, took an active role in the partisan struggle in many of them: as fighters, as intelligence gatherers, and in leadership roles. And while the political consciousness that developed in the Resistance was often nebulous, it often included direct democracy or more democracy, reflecting both the experience of self-organizing during the war and disgust with the corrupt and reactionary politics of the decades that preceded it.

Both of these threads are visible in *Partisans*, and this raises the question of how they played out after the fighting was over. In France, Italy, and Yugoslavia, women got the vote almost as soon as the war ended, but still faced an uphill battle for their full rights as autonomous individuals; in Greece, too, they gained full suffrage, but had to wait a bit longer, until 1952. In much of Western Europe, a capitalist-friendly form of democratic socialism prevailed that raised living standards and eased economic and social inequality.

In other respects, the aftermath of the anti-fascist insurgencies was more complicated, and Tyler and Buhle seem to have made an editorial decision not to delve too deeply into this part of the story.

In almost all countries—except the ones that joined the Communist bloc—the victorious Allies were anxious for politics to return to something like the prewar status quo, and in many places it did, despite some reforms and the abolition of monarchy in Italy and the Balkan states, for example. In his chapter on the French Resistance, Selig notes that the Communist FTP (Francs-tireurs et partisans), who played a prominent part in the struggle, were nudged aside by the provisional government headed by de Gaulle, and were imprisoned by the thousands for crimes like looting and murder. The French partisans never formed a political party of their own.

"After the war, many resisters were disappointed that the reestablished Forth Republic did not coincide with the ideal of profound change that had motivated them," Selig writes. An even worse fate struck the Greek guerrillas who had effectively liberated their country but who, by then, were already tearing themselves apart in a bitter fight between Communist and non-Communist formations: an aspect of the story that Lester doesn't cover in his chapter. After the German surrender, Stalin refused to wholeheartedly support the Communist EAM-ELAS, and sat back while the conservative royalist government, supported by the US and the UK, crushed

it. There as elsewhere, the people who had risked the most were ground down between the two sides in the Cold War struggle for power in postwar Europe.

Notably, the one European country where the partisans did create the postwar order was Yugoslavia, where Tito's authoritarian government restored a multiethnic state and steered it adroitly between the Soviet and Western blocs until his death in 1980. (Tito had argue with Stalin for continuing to support the Greek Communist partisans.) Pyle and Tobocman engage with this part of the story and the murderous ethnic warfare that followed, Tobocman suggesting that dictatorship provided a "poor education" for creating a lasting multicultural society. But here again, post-Soviet Russia and NATO played a role in encouraging Serb, Slovene, and Croat nationalisms to reassert themselves after Tito's death, brutally redrawing Cold War battle lines across the former Yugoslavia almost as soon as the Cold War was over.

This is the tragic aspect of the partisans' story, and it extends to the countries that aren't covered in this book, including Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Germany itself, where only one underground faction—the Communists—reaped the rewards of victory, backed by Stalin. Yugoslavia was not the only anti-Axis insurgency that asserted control of the state after the war ended: but the others were in non-European countries that *Partisans* leaves out.

Anti-Japanese guerrillas in the Philippines were astonishingly effective during the occupation; by the end of the war, they controlled all but 12 of the country's 48 provinces. Independence followed, although the US continued to exercise a degree of economic and military control over the new country. In Vietnam, the Viet Minh (League for Independence of Vietnam) successfully fought both the Vichy French colonial government and the Japanese occupiers and declared independence after the war: only for de Gaulle's government, and then the US, to engage them in a 30-year neo-colonial war.

In Indonesia, the situation was more complicated, and politically murky. Opponents of the Dutch colonial government collaborated with the Japanese occupiers, who late in the war encouraged them to prepare for independence—and the war of liberation against the returning Dutch authorities that would follow.

Arguably, the nature of the struggles in East Asia was very different from those in Europe, but these were the countries where the resistance resulted in the most profound change. Outside Europe, World War II and the Japanese invasions weakened the colonial grip, and the insurgencies that began or gained strength during the occupation were ready and able to assert independence afterward. Not so in Europe itself, where the British, American, and Soviet forces, not to mention the Free French, were determined not just to defeat the Nazis but to remake the postwar order in their favor. A book that covered the wartime partisan movements across both regions could have established a richer context for the political transformations that followed.

That's not to say that the artists and writers who collectively created *Partisans* should have produced a different book.

The price the insurgents paid was frightful; some 20,000 died in struggle in Greece—slightly less than the toll they extracted from the occupiers—and Yugoslavia claimed as many as 245,000 partisans died. Civilian losses, of course, were far higher. Few practiced non-violent civil disobedience, since this would have been a near-invitation to murder. Insurgency was a personal as well as a collective matter, carried out either violently or in support of violence, often at close quarters, and the *Partisans* depicts this as explicitly as a comix-format book could be expected to. The book reveals the insurgents and others who participated in the resistance as almost insanely brave. It also suggests the toll their struggle took, including psychologically.

The trauma remains.

For decades, the French have fought over who can rightfully claim membership in the Resistance as well as the conduct of the Vichy collaborationist government. One way to view the Bosnian and Kosovar wars is as a reversion to the ethnic bloodletting of World War II. The Russian government eagerly and inaccurately tars its Ukrainian victims as "fascists" and "Nazis." Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, whose Brothers of Italy party is a successor to Mussolini's Fascists, recently commemorated an episode at the end of the war in which thousands of Italian troops were thrown into sinkholes by Tito's Yugoslav forces, and which she alleged was followed by decades of "unforgivable" silence. The Italian left, whose legacy is the struggle against fascism, tend not to feel the same.

While little of this part of the story is covered in *Partisans*, it lies very close to the surface.

Tyler and Buhle don't spell out what they take to be the "challenge" the insurgents' achievements pose; the world is different today, and neo-fascism arises from this different set of circumstances. But they ask us to think about how we should respond in light of how the partisans did and what they achieved. In their Introduction, Tyler and Buhle say, "History does not repeat itself. But the example offered by the Partisans' courage must not, cannot be forgotten in our own time. We must find or own creative ways, individually and collectively, to rise to the challenge."

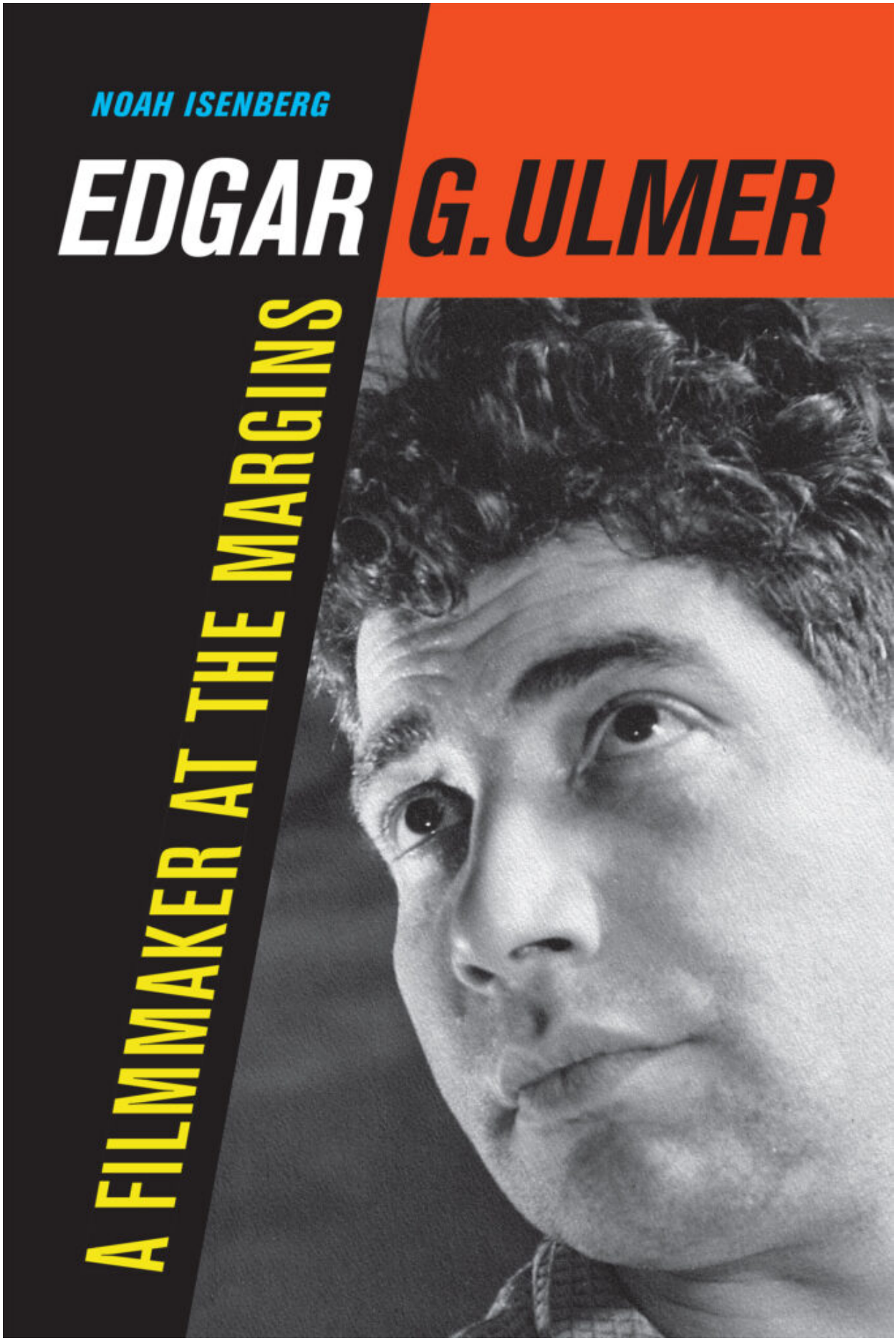
The underlying issue is how our context differs and what means are appropriate to address it. Today, we use the word fascism to describe the far-right resurgence. But is the fascism of Trump the same as that of Hitler, Mussolini, and the Japanese militarists? Will the same methods be required to dislodge and defeat it? If we don't think so, then are we right to call it fascism? If we do, then are we wrong to think—as we apparently do—that elections, protest, and non-violent civil disobedience are the appropriate response? Or are we fooling ourselves, as so many were in the years leading up to Hitler's invasion of Poland?

The answer is not simple, because circumstances differ from country to country, as they did during the war. But it's worth noting that today's neo-fascists, from Trump and the MAGA movement to Orbán in Hungary to Putin in Russia to the AfD in Germany to the Rassemblement national (National Rally) in France, are determined to get and hold power, and never again give it up. They might present a smooth, sophisticated contemporary politicians, but like their

predecessors, they aim to cleanse society, once and for all and by force, of the people and the movements that they believe have infected it and destroyed its (imagined) past glory. It’s unlikely that defeating them will be a peaceful matter.

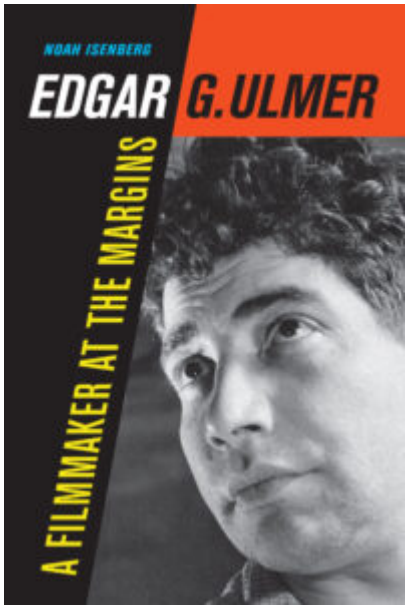
Noah Isenberg’s Edger G. Ulmer: A Filmmaker at the Margins

By | 2026: Vol. 25, No. 1


NOAH ISENBERG
EDGAR G. ULMER
A FILMMAKER AT THE MARGINS

Perhaps now, a decade or so since the landmark study of a unique but mostly forgotten director, can the importance of Edgar Ulmer be appreciated. Or perhaps not. Ulmer so successfully evades categorization, and dwelt so often and long in the low-production-value world of films, that he has not yet truly emerged as an important cinematic creator, and may never! But we hope for better, as the old categories wobbly and sometimes give way. Pauline Kael would never have approved, since Ulmer worked with a Left that she never ceased cursing in print. But she has been dead a long time.

The scope of Isenberg's scholarship— to take the single most unique aspect of this study first—is pretty astonishing. He had access, more or less, to the family files, in the hands of Shirley, Ulmer's widow. And Shirley, in collaboration with their daughter, worked furiously for years to get Ulmer's films shown and recognized. Still, the global character of Ulmer's life, the multi-lingual sources, the sheer breadth of his sixty-some films, his relationship with producers (when he actually had a producer) and actors, would pose a serious problem for even the most sympathetic film historian. Isenberg, a far-reaching scholar, had done better than anyone else could do, perhaps than anyone else would wish to do so well.



Central European to the core, Ulmer first took life in a Moravian village in the modern-day Czech Republic in 1904, but soon after, the family moved to Vienna. This would be crucial. His wine-merchant father and his mother, a sometime opera singer, seem standard types of the age. Secular Jews in a cultural center, they would have remained a comfortable family if his father had not died in 1916, in an Austrian uniform, fighting the Italians. Some critics have attributed this or that Ulmer film with an absent father to Edgar's status. Actually, Vienna counted for everything.

Young Edgar Ulmer wanted badly to be a modernist novelist, a la Thomas Mann, but never could finish the novel in his head, with its reputedly vivid depiction of wartime Vienna. Destiny

took him elsewhere. Later fashioning himself as an “aesthete from the Alps”and avid admirer of Von Stroheim (p.15), he had been placed in foster-care in Sweden by his mother, following his father’s death, a misfortune that turned into good fortune by moving back to Vienna in 1920 in the household of the Schildkraut family, well connected in the arts (Rudolph Schldkraut would later become a distinguished Hollywood actor of the “ethnic” type). There he found his calling in the Burg Theater, where he could be tutored by the then-famous Max Reinhart.

Our budding actor reached the US at age 19, in 1924, with a supporting role in “The Miracle,” a play directed by Reinhart, with Rudolph Schildkraut playing the lead. There, in New York, Ulmer imbibed “Yiddish Broadway” in its glory years, an introduction that must have led in roundabout ways to his directing four Yiddish films a decade later.

Brilliant in claiming past, possibly dubious credits for himself, Ulmer managed to get hired by Hollywood mogul Carl Laemmle that same year, at Universal’s Art Department. He toiled at Universal for four crucial years, meeting future collaborators all around, meanwhile directing small-budget Westerns. Back in Germany, he worked with the famed F.W. Murnau on the high-rated and artistic film *Sunrise* (1927) perfecting his notion of the cinematic set design. Ulmer may have returned to Hollywood in ten days—the evidence is unclear—but back in Germany at the end of the decade, he collaborated in the creation of a cinematic classic, *Menschen am Sonntag* (1930). A film with little plot but great impact on cinema far beyond Germany, it captured a Sunday in Berlin of ordinary things, ordinary people. The accidental meeting of two young men with two young women, largely performed by amateurs (at low cost), could be praised by the likes of prestigious Russian critics as being outside and against the cinema of the capitalist film world.

This experience, according to Isenberg, set Ulmer on his unique and idiosyncratic path. *Damaged Live*s (1930) treating venereal disease, was bold, remarkable and a minor hit. Metaphorically speaking, many fellow artistic German immigrants would recollect that all their lives were damaged, especially because the Germany they left behind had disappeared under Hitler. When the opportunity arose, they had something important to say, often enough through connections with the Hollywood Left.

The Black Cat (1934), one of the most remarkable films of its time by way of contemporary plot and expressionist set, would be important for Ulmer himself also for its music, a dark romanticism. In popular memory, it would be the glorious reuniting on screen of Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi, as two rivals in the past world war now fighting (among other things), to the common ruin, over a female they both desire. It was one of Universal’s top hits of the year and a model for horror films, closer than others to the continuing horrors of actual war in the actions of its survivors. War is never glorious.

The Black Cat had, of course, nothing to do with the famed short story by Edgar Alan Poe upon which innocent movie-goers must have thought it was somehow based. Artistic-minded critics would say that it fairly summed up, in ambience and set, the German art film of the Weimar period. The “omniscient camera,” somehow entering the minds of the actors, seemed to open a

brilliant future for Ulmer. This future closed soon, within the mainsteam, when he took a young Shirley Alexander from the arms of Laemmle's favorite nephew into his own.

Still a young man with some brilliant work behind him, Ulmer was now "dead in Hollywood." In strange and unpredictable ways, this personal tragedy worked to his advantage. Constantly forced to scrounge for directing jobs and money, Ulmer exercised the most amazing creativity. His four Yiddish-langage films, starring stage personalities and at least one famed cantor, have never been equalled—because the Yiddish world audience disappeared by 1945, Israel took less than no interest in Yiddish culture, and assimilation as much as wiped out the possibilities in the US. *Grine Felder/Green Fields (1937)* remains the most viewed Yiddish film of all time.

But as magnum cultural history scholar George Lipsitz pointed out decades ago, the Yiddish trio constituted only a chunk of Ulmer's most remarkable work. His discovery of a vibrant ethic and racial vitality slightly well below the surface of middle class magazines and tabloid newspapers brought him to make nearly a dozen films, both possible and also necessary, because he needed help in scounging the money and even the sets for this work.

Three Ukrainian-themed films could be said to have almost called an articulate diaspora into existence—more than a million Ukrainian immigrants in North America, an overwhelming lower-class population, here found a voice. And not only a voice, in dialogue and singing, but very much a life in folk dance, a film appearance that stirred an organized Ukrainian folk dance circuit into existence. I only happened to see an hours-long performance in New York in 1980, performed in ethnic costumes for a labor history event at Columbia University, connected vaguely to the CPUSA.

Moon Over Harlem (1939), an entry in the short-lived boom of films made about African American life and once again on hustled-together funds, offered a glimpse of reality. No matter that it focused on criminality and offered a typical love story: in the casual ambience of the African-American actors, Ulmer offered audiences something that they could learn from and perhaps enjoy. Likewise, *Club Havana* (1945) among others sought to offer up exotic music and a touch of culture not so exotic to the populations in New York and elsewhere who spoke and also sang outside of English on a daily basis.

One could argue that Ulmer gave something like the same treatment to "Teens," a category only coming into existence in wartime, with soda shops and swing music providing a glimpse of the home front awaiting war news. *Jive Junction* (1943) was also an effort to relate current "jive" music popular with teens, to the continuing effort to make the classical repertoire relevant, very much to the taste of Ulmer himself.

No account of Ulmer could avoid *Detour* (1945), which almost defined noir film by stripping it down to essentials (a parking lot as Los Angeles) and offering a sense of the spiritual emptiness of postwar America.

It would be impossible to recount, let alone analyze, the dozens of films that do not escape Isenberg's earnest efforts at details of production and sometimes, deeper inspirations. Ulmer's

own aspiration, as far as it can be grasped, was simply to go on.

It would be irresponsible of a reviewer who collaborated on several volumes about Hollywood Blacklistees and their film efforts, not to note that Ulmer reached into the Left community before and after 1950, when some very available, i.e., unemployed screenwriters would be available for for some of his hardest-hitting films. These would include the militantly anti-capitalist *Ruthless* (1948), written by Alvah Bessie and Gordon Kahn, his remarkable Western (set in Mexico), *The Naked Dawn* (1955), written by the otherwise forgotten Julian Zimet, and *The Cavern* (1964, his last film) written in part by an uncredited Dalton Trumbo.

The reviewer also feels compelled to note three low-budget favorites that would likely escape notice otherwise. *The Naked Venus* (1959) used footage from contemporary European nudist campus (above the waist shots only) for a mother's plea against American-stye moral repression. *Beyond the Time Barrie*r (1960), said to have been shot largely in a department store window), in the true SciFi vein of the time, warns against the effects of atomic waste poisoning the inhabitants of the future. That Ulmer gave Hedy Lamarr the opportunity to make an adult film about sex and love when the Breen Office wanted no realism, would alone make *The Strange Woman* (1946) worth seeing.

Shirley Ulmer, hanging in with her husband through thick and thin (including his occasional adultery), a sometime script doctor or stage director and sometimes even a fill-in cameo actress, was a believer, a real trooper. With their daughter, Arienné, Shirley worked furiously to reach the small but growing crowd of 1970s devotees that appeared with the campus revival of old films, and to reach beyond. UCLA's 1983 declaration of Ulmer as "King of the Bs" surely marked a new phase, and a touring version sponsored by the Goethe Institute, guaranteed respectability of a sort.

Thus *Detour* became the first B film to be included in the National Film Registry of the Library of Congress. International fame for the late Edgar Ulmer followed, and eventually, it would become easy for even mainstream critics to discuss prestigious new films in relation to his lasting influence. Peter Bogdanovich, thirty years after an interview with Ulmer, thus praised *Bluebeard* (1946, a film that some described as a love-poem to the streets of Paris) and emphasized once more that the director's genius had triumphed over his impoverished means of production.

Noah Isenberg closes with the thought that Ulmer would surely have joined the "indy" digital era of individual creation with joy. Indeed. But it was his special qualities, in a film era that demanded so much material support, that made him unique.

* Special thanks to magnum American Studies savant George Lipsitz for his appreciation and his insights into Ulmer long before the rest of us grasped the director's importance.