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BY HENRY GIROUX

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## *The Scourge of Fascist Politics and the Rise of White Nationalism from Orbán to DeSantis*



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### **The Orbánization of Fascist Politics**

The malicious passions of fascism are with us once again, evident in the emergence of diverse regimes of predatory repression and exclusion that increasingly legitimate their hatred of democracy through appeals to a notion of illiberal democracy—a project that calls for the elimination of freedom, dissent, and justice as essential elements of political life, if not democracy itself. Of particular importance is the growing attraction of nationalist Viktor Orbán, the prime minister of Hungary, to conservatives in the United States. Orbán’s popularity is due to his disdain of democracy and his use of political power to implement a range of reactionary policies, especially his belief that “there is a

[www.afgazad.com](http://www.afgazad.com)

[afgazad@gmail.com](mailto:afgazad@gmail.com)

liberal plot to dilute the white populations of the US and European countries through immigration.”<sup>[1]</sup> Expressing a notion of white replacement embraced by much of the Republican Party leadership, he has argued that “the western world was ‘committing suicide’ through immigration,” and has declared: “I see the great European population exchange as a suicidal attempt to replace the lack of European, Christian children with adults from other civilizations — migrants.”<sup>[2]</sup> Orbán’s notion of the nation is critical of the principles of freedom and equality because they lead “inevitably to greater immigration and equality between races” and are at odds with a notion of the nation that defines itself assertively through the logic of white supremacy and racial purity.<sup>[3]</sup> Orbán made this point clear in a July 22, 2022 speech. As Shaun Walker and Flora Garamvolgyi reported in *The Guardian*, Orbán stated: “We [Hungarians] are not a mixed race ... and we do not want to become a mixed race,” said Orbán on Saturday. He added that countries where European and non-Europeans mingle were ‘no longer nations.’”<sup>[4]</sup> Zsuzsa Hegendus, a long time Orbán advisor, resigned in response to Orbán’s mixed race comments stating that his remarks were comparable to “a pure Nazi text worthy of Goebbels.”

Orbán has declared war on liberal democracy and in doing so appeals not only to anti-communists, right-wing Christians, nativists, and homophobes, he also provides a model of Christian nationalism for those conservatives in the United States such as Donald Trump, Tucker Carlson, and Ron DeSantis who want to hollow out liberal democracy from the inside.<sup>[5]</sup> Orbán has not only emerged as a global spokesperson for Nazi ideology, he has also imposed his authoritarian rule not through the force of overt oppression, but through the destruction of civil society. Orbán’s notion of “illiberal democracy” is a laboratory for an updated form of fascism that trades in corruption, corporate cronyism, repression, religious fundamentalism, the control of the media, hatred of refugees, a war on women, transgender people, and an attack on critical education and advocates of climate change.<sup>[6]</sup> The historian Heather Cox Richardson lucidly captures the anti-democratic elements at work in Orbán’s notion of “illegal democracy.” She writes:

Orbán is the architect of what he calls “illiberal democracy,” or “Christian democracy.” This form of government holds nominal elections, although their outcome is preordained because the government controls all the media and has silenced opposition. Illiberal democracy rejects modern liberal democracy because the equality it champions means an acceptance of immigrants, LGBTQ rights, and women’s rights and an end to traditionally patriarchal society. Orbán’s model of minority rule promises a return to a white-

dominated, religiously based society, and he has pushed his vision by eliminating the independent press, cracking down on political opposition, getting rid of the rule of law, and dominating the economy with a group of crony oligarchs.<sup>[7]</sup>

What attracts American conservatives to Orbán is both his frontal attack on democracy and the methods he uses to consolidate power. As a populist authoritarian, he has become a global spokesperson for pathologizing democracy through a concerted and systemic appeal to white replacement theory. Orbán's support for white nationalism, reactionary family values, and homophobia, among other regressive issues, has translated into a range of discriminatory and policies designed to make social pariahs out of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. As Ishaan Tharoor has noted, Orbán has “banned adoption by same-sex couples ... made it impossible for transgender people to legally change their gender [and] passed a law that prohibited sharing content with minors seen as promoting homosexuality or sex reassignment.”<sup>[8]</sup> In addition, he has waged an attack on schools by implementing “provisions restricting education on homosexuality and establishing a searchable registry of convicted pedophiles.”<sup>[9]</sup>

Echoing fascists of the 1930s, Orbán has created a phantom set of enemies that include alleged threats from left-oriented intellectuals, communists, socialists, people of color, and those groups whose sexual orientation challenges white Christian notions of identity. Under Orbán, white replacement theory has become an ideological and cultural apparatus used to weaponize racial fears and legitimate a wide range of related assaults on education, the law, the press, LGBTQ individuals, progressive books, and corporations who support racial equity women's reproductive rights, fair elections, and the most vital set of beliefs and values that are crucial to creating the informed residents necessary to sustain a strong democracy. Orbán's racist policies provide a direct link to the modern extremist Republican Party, white supremacist pundits, reactionary journalists, and conservative educators in the United States who want to turn the United States into a hard-right oligarchy. Orbán has become a hero for those radical Republican politicians and their followers in the United States who believe in racial cleansing, view violence as a tool of political opportunism, use the state to crush their enemies, and promote an anti-democratic consolidation of power. With Orbán in power, they no longer have to take their cues, often hidden, from relevant fascist examples offered in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they now have Orbán to provide them with an updated fascist playbook.

### **White Replacement Theory in the Age of Counter-revolutions**

While white replacement theory has a long history in the United States and Europe, it has taken on a new urgency given its compatibility with a growing fascist politics and militant white nationalism. White replacement theory has become a central tenet of the modern Republican Party, which argues that white people as an alleged “native population” are being replaced by undocumented immigrants, Muslims, and others considered outside of the acceptable parameters of whiteness. Moreover, it is increasingly supported by prominent Republicans officials, pundits, and media celebrities such as Fox News’ Tucker Carlson.<sup>[10]</sup> Trump won the presidency in 2016 by bashing immigrants and referencing the public sphere as the privileged space of white Christian nationalism. As Judd Legum has reported, J.D. Vance the Republican nominee for a 2022 U.S. Senate seat in Ohio willingly endorsed Trump’s racism by asserting “that Democrats were plotting to let in 15 million additional immigrants because they were confident that 70% would vote Democratic.”<sup>[11]</sup> This racist sentiment was repeated by the notorious Texas Lt Governor Dan Patrick who stated on Fox News that Biden and the Democrats were “trying to take over our country without firing a shot” by allowing millions of immigrants to enter the country. He went on to repeat a central tenet of white replacement theory by claiming that Biden’s policies not only encourage immigrants to come to the U.S. in order to vote for the Democrats, but that they will have “two or three children,” adding up to millions of new voters who will take power away from the Republican Party.<sup>[12]</sup> Orbán’s view of white replacement theory is alive and well in the United States and is endorsed by a growing range of American politicians in order to both dehumanize non-Christians and non-whites and in doing so expel them from any claim to what it means to be an American.

There is more at stake here than a racist discourse that sets up a conflict between racial groups in the United States, there is also a counter-revolutionary movement that denies the “victories of the civil rights, women, and gay rights movements.”<sup>[13]</sup> As Adam Tooze observes this was a movement that began in the seventies and got more radicalized in the 1990s with the rise of the Tea Party and the emergence of Republicans such as “Newt Gingrich and Karl Rove all of which set the tone for a bare-knuckle, brawling style rooted in a friend/enemy world view, white nationalism, the legitimation of violence for political ends, and a deep rooted racism, particularly aimed at the first Black president.<sup>[14]</sup> All of these conditions helped set the tone not only for a deep distrust of government responsibility but also established the conditions for the rise of Donald Trump.

This counter-revolutionary movement, then and now, is not merely a struggle over language and ideals, there is also the dangerous notion of racial displacement that fuels violence against those individuals and groups considered responsible for taking the place of whites. As Juliette Kayyem observes, the notion of violence at work here is not just about censoring and erasing the “the ideas, or politics, or voting patterns” but about eliminating the very presence of those groups that threaten the power and presence of whites.<sup>[15]</sup> As has been observed in the mainstream media, white replacement theory with its claim that whites are being replaced and threatened by immigrants and people of color has motivated a number of mass shooters ranging from Dylan Roof to Payton Gendron. White replacement theory has animated them not only to espouse white supremacist views but also the belief that they are foot soldiers in a civil war to protect the existence of white people, if not white civilization itself. One of the most publicized events in which white replacement theory took place and later mentioned in compromising language by then President Trump took place at a 2017 “Unite the right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, where torch carrying white nationalists and neo-Nazis chanted “you will not replace us” and “Jews will not replace us.” In response to the rally, Trump stated that there were “very fine people on both sides,” a position he still defends.<sup>[16]</sup>

### **Florida is the New Hungary**

Authoritarianism is not merely on the march in Europe and other places in the world, it has secured a strong and dangerous footing in the United States. While the growing fascist threat in America has been made clear by a number of academics and journalists extending from historians such as Jason Stanley, Timothy Snyder, Ruth Ben-Ghiat to Paul Street, Chris Hedges, and Anthony DiMaggio to name only a few, what has received too little attention is how the American appropriation of white replacement theory with its fascist undercurrents is producing a range of repressive state policies, many based on Orbán’s governing model. For instance, Orbán’s Hungary has become an exemplar, if not right-wing utopia, for many conservative politicians, especially Gov. Ron DeSantis. One conservative commentator, Rod Dreher, went so far as to claim that “Florida is becoming our American Hungary.”<sup>[17]</sup> Thom Hartman asserts that “Orbán’s Fidesz Party and the GOP in most Red States have become virtually indistinguishable, from cronies owning the media, to packing the courts, to rigging elections through purging voters and gerrymanders, to putting polluting businesses in charge of regulatory agencies.”<sup>[18]</sup> Zach Beauchamp, writing in *Vox*, adds to this view stating that “DeSantis is inventing what he calls an “American Orbánism and that “there is no doubt that Hungary, an authoritarian

state in all but name, is becoming more and more important in the American right-wing imagination.”<sup>[19]</sup>

Both Orbán and DeSantis have their sights set on the American federal government with Orbán now inserting himself into American Republican politics in a big way. Such claims are borne out by the fact that DeSantis has taken a number of lessons from Orbán. For instance, he has signed the so-called “Don’t Say Gay” bill banning “classroom instruction by school personnel or third parties on sexual orientation or gender identity” up through third grade.” By cracking down on LGBTQ rights, he expands his war against youth of color by including another vulnerable population. He also mimics Orbán’s tactic of using state power to punish critics, corporations, educators, and others considered alleged enemies of the right. This is particularly clear in DeSantis’s attack on the Walt Disney Corporation. In retaliation for Walt Disney’s belated opposition to the “Don’t Say Gay” law, DeSantis passed a law terminating the self-governing privileges, special tax regulations, and legal status held by Disney World in Orlando, for 55 years. In going to war against Disney and transgender people, DeSantis follows in Orbán’s footsteps of intimidating corporations and groups that refuse to follow his fascist agenda. Just as Orbán wields the power of the state to punish businesses “for not falling in line with his brutal and discriminatory attacks,”<sup>[20]</sup> DeSantis is using the political power of the state to punish not only Disney but other corporations such as Google and Coca-Cola, all of whom refused to buy into his racist and discriminatory policies.

He is also punishing the people of Florida, mostly Democratic Party voters in Osceola and Orange Country, who will be held responsible for “Disney’s \$2 billion bond debt, which translates into “a 20% to 25% tax hike costing \$2,200 to \$2,800 per family of four [while also picking up] the tab for the operating services that Disney currently provides.”<sup>[21]</sup> The attack on Disney, in particular, is also part of DeSantis’s attempt to make the false assertion that the GOP is protecting their kids from the bogus claim of grooming them for sexual violence. Such attacks are part of the GOP’s broader culture of fear that instructs white Christians to protect themselves not only against Black people, undocumented immigrants, Muslims, people of color, and women defending their reproductive rights, but also trans-gender youth who are now relegated to the status of social pariahs. DeSantis’s attack on transgender youth is particularly vicious because the supporters of the Don’t Say gay bills have adopted the shocking strategy of claiming that supporters of the bill are both sympathetic to pedophiles and “grooming” children to be gay or question their gender.”<sup>[22]</sup>

Ironically, this type of pernicious far-right extremist discourse is put forth by Republicans in the name of protecting children when in fact it serves to terrorize them, their families, and their caregivers.<sup>[23]</sup> Journalist Will Bunch writing in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* that the GOP's expanding war on LGBTQ children not only channels hatred against these youth but is creating the conditions for mass violence. One high profile example of the potential for such violence, while prevented, took place in Idaho on June 12, 2022. On that date, the police arrested thirty-one people linked to the white nationalist group, the Patriot front. The group, armed with metal poles, and a smoke grenade, was on its way to disrupt an annual Pride in the Park event to celebrate gay and lesbian people. The police charged the group with conspiracy to riot. Natasha Lennard writing in *The Intercept* pointed out that in May of 2022 “self-described ‘Christian fascists’ attempted to force their way into an LGBTQ+ bar in Dallas, Texas, which was hosting a family-friendly drag queen brunch for Pride. The fascists threatened attendees, chanting that the adults were “groomers” — a dangerous, dated trope once again gaining furious traction in right-wing media.”<sup>[24]</sup> Will Bunch provides two terrifying examples of how the Christian fascist insurgency is creating the conditions for deadly violence against schoolteachers who support transgender rights. He writes:

We are now seeing a dangerous loop in which the most extreme voices on the far right — led, ironically, by so-called pastors — are making genocidal comments about our brothers and sisters in the LGBTQ community.... The increasingly dangerous, violent rhetoric has been amplified to “11” by the likes of Mark Burns, a prominent South Carolina televangelist and Donald Trump enthusiast who just ran for Congress (and lost, thankfully) and who said this month that LGBTQ-friendly schoolteachers are “a national security threat” guilty of treason, which should be punishable by execution. In Idaho, where that Pride parade violence was narrowly averted, Pastor Joe Jones of Shield of Faith Baptist Church in Boise kicked things up a notch by declaring in a video that subsequently went viral: “God told the nation that he ruled: Put them to death. Put all queers to death.”<sup>[25]</sup>

DeSantis along with Governor Gregg Abbott of Texas are on the frontlines of a barrage of hate-filled homophobic language and punitive bills aimed at trans individuals and LGBTQ rights more broadly. These are policies that echo the genocidal discourse of Nazi Germany. DeSantis is an especially dangerous politician who echoes Orbán's embrace of a radicalized notion of white Christianity, a regressive notion of family values, and the use of the state to punish groups, corporations, and institutions that he views as a threat to his

power. His association with Orbán's policies is important to stress because it not only reveals the deeply fascist politics in Hungary that he mimics, but also provides a blueprint of how Orbán's white replacement theory and brand of authoritarianism is being implemented in the United States. Commenting on DeSantis's danger to the United States, one liberal commentator for *New York Magazine* states that "He has ignored the slice of Republicans who disdain Trump's authoritarianism and courted anti-vaxxers, QAnon believers, and insurrectionists. And he has demonstrated repeatedly a 'no enemies to the right' strategy that inevitably binds him to the party's most fanatical elements."<sup>[26]</sup>

DeSantis's fascist politics and feral contempt for democracy is not just an effort to score campaign points. It is part of a larger project to move the country to an authoritarian state. It is worth repeating that the GOP's attack on trans people and transgender children are fueled by an expansive notion of white replacement theory that has become the signature narrative to legitimate a range of regressive policies to ensure the concentration of economic, political, and social power in the hands of white Americans. This is a version of white supremacy based on unadulterated fear, one committed to the malevolent furies of racism, disability, religious fundamentalism, and racial cleansing. It is rooted in a view of hyper-masculinity that celebrates violence as a crucial element of virility, identity, and agency. It also believes that anyone who does not live up to this masculine code is weak, feminized, and a threat to white Christians. White replacement theory offers the central trope in asserting and acting on the merging of the macho charge of weakness and impurity with the call to violence.

If DeSantis mirrors a larger version of global fascism, he has created his own model for destroying those institutions that create the conditions for individuals to be critically engaged residents. DeSantis is one of the larger players in a Republican Party rooted in the politics of retrenchment, a politics embedded in fear, bigotry, and hatred, which is attempting to rewrite history in the image of a militant Confederacy, the fascist politics of the 1930s, and the racist 1950s. Under the reign of the modern Republican Party, the merging of historical amnesia and repressive forms of education have become the major tools in which to produce the language of white supremacy. At stake here is an ongoing attempt to reproduce and legitimate the lie that America is a white nation, and that citizenship is exclusively reserved for white Christians. There is a religious dimension to this form of upgraded fascism. In this case language is transformed into a profound propaganda tool in which ignorance is elevated to the status of a profound and incorrigible faith and evokes both a racist political agenda and a fascist world view. But fascist



language as a theocratic tool does more than function to “to influence, manipulate, and mystify the masses,” it also glorifies irrationality and the will to power.<sup>[27]</sup> As Emilio Gentile observes, it is more than “a language of mystification,” it is also “a language of mythification, in the sense that it expresses fundamental values of a culture founded on the supremacy of mythical thought, as a basic category of interpretation of reality. Thus it is not a language that ‘masks’, but rather a language that ‘reveals’ the identity of a group that uses it to define itself, the meaning and purpose of its existence and actions.”<sup>[28]</sup> Put bluntly, it boldly proclaims “illiberal democracy,” as an “irrefutable dogma, to which everyone ha[s] to subscribe.” Central to that dogma is a language of white supremacy, hate, and violence that offers up a worldview in which the fascist identity is constructed, inhabited, and celebrated. It is, in this context, that the Republican Party’s racist and fascist discourse, as modeled after Orbán’s fascist world view, has to be understood as a discourse that not only flattens and limits the power of reason, but functions as a cultural force in the formation of fascist modes of agency, identity, and desire while legitimating its totalitarian politics.<sup>[29]</sup>

How else to explain the Republican Party’s current “love of white supremacist militias and their embrace of both Nazi and Confederate iconography,” or their aggressive systemic policies of voter suppression, their racialized language of law and order, and their relentless attack on transgender youth and their guardians.<sup>[30]</sup> What excuse can be given for a Party that supports Blake Masters, the Arizona Republican Senate Candidate who, as Jonathan Chait reports “has suggested January 6 was a false flag directed secretly by the FBI...blamed gun violence on Black people. (‘It’s people in Chicago, St. Louis, shooting each other. Very often, you know, Black people, frankly.), [and] has endorsed the ‘great replacement’ theory.”<sup>[31]</sup> Chait goes on to claim that “Neo-Nazi blogger Andrew Anglin gave Masters a fulsome endorsement on the white-supremacist site the *Daily Stormer*.”<sup>[32]</sup> Equally despicable is the Party’s endorsement of Carl Paladino for a House seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, who stated in 2021 that Adolf Hitler was “inspirational,” “the kind of leader we need.”<sup>[33]</sup> As David Badash reports, Paladino has also “called Black people ‘dumb and hungry,’ claimed they are ‘conditioned’ to only vote for democrats, while insisting he’s not a ‘racist.’ He also said a woman who had accused Donald trump of sexual assault ‘probably enjoyed’ it.”<sup>[34]</sup> Then there is Doug Mastriano, the Republican candidate for governor of New York who according to Eliza Griswold writing in *The New Yorker* “has come to embody a set of beliefs characterized as Christian nationalism, which center on the idea that God intended America to be a Christian nation,

and which, when mingled with conspiracy theory and white nationalism, helped to fuel the [Jan. 6]insurrection.”<sup>[35]</sup> Finally, but not least, the flames of white supremacy are glaringly evident in the relentless defense or dismissal by Trump and his political allies of the violence that took place on January 6 against the U.S. Capitol.

We live in a new era of fascist violence. DeSantis has become a bellwether for where this political, cultural, and educational fascist project is heading, revealed most recently in the far-right 2020 platform produced by the Texas GOP state party. Setting a hate-filled and racist tone for going into the 2022 election and the presidential race of 2024, the platform embodied an extremist agenda tantamount to what Will Bunch writing in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* termed “a strikingly antebellum feel.”<sup>[36]</sup> Among its shamelessly racist and homophobic declarations were the following: the repeal of the Voting rights act of 1965; defining homosexuality as “an abnormal lifestyle choice;” “rejecting the certified results of the 2020 presidential election;” retaining the right to secede from the U.S.; teaching students that life begins at fertilization, and any attempt at gun control is a violation of both the Second Amendment and Texans’ God given rights.<sup>[37]</sup> There is more at work here that an authoritarian project reeking with the potential for violence, if not a full-fledged insurrection, there is also an attempt to normalize violence while aiming it at specific groups. DeSantis and the Texas Republican Party share the same call to white supremacy and project a future based on a rebranded version of fascism. For DeSantis, Trump, and their allies white supremacy is the thread that holds together their voter suppression policies and ongoing attacks on critical race theory, Black and Brown people, educators, students, abortion rights, and gay and LGBTQ rights. It is also the bare-knuckle ideology at the heart of a politics that has made democracy a meaningless word and inspired Trump’s most fanatical and unhinged supporters to inflict violence on anyone who gets in their way. How else to explain that in the United States today it is dangerous to be a health-worker, school-committee member, local alderman, or a public-school teacher.<sup>[38]</sup> In the age of Trumpism and unchecked violence in the service of political opportunism, it is also dangerous for anyone to question Trump’s lawlessness, his utter contempt for the constitution, and his deep-seated disdain for democracy.<sup>[39]</sup>

What is often missed by liberals and the mainstream media are how these issues are connected as part of a wider totalitarian project, made clear in the war on critical education. It is impossible to fight this fascist project without recognizing how Republicans are making education central to a politics that views history and critical thinking as dangerous. At the forefront of this project is a systemic effort in producing

widespread forms of pedagogical repression that whitewash history and, as James Baldwin once noted, define Black people in the American imagination only in reference to slave codes. This is not only a project given new life by Orbán, it has been updated by DeSantis and provides a model for the rest of the country. DeSantis both attacks education in order to both mobilize his base and to do away with public education. His repressive educational policies are designed to create the conditions for destroying schools as democratic public spheres while simultaneously undermining the critical tasks of educators to teach young people and others how to be ethical, thoughtful, and engaged individuals.

At the core of this attack is a depoliticizing project whose aim is teach students how to obey, inhabit a deadening regimen of conformity, and adjust to living in a world in which repression and violence are normalized. DeSantis and his Republican allies live in a moral vacuum that has betrayed the social contract, justice, and democracy itself. White replacement theory fuels the notion that power, and whiteness are synonymous, mutually inform each other, and are sanctioned by God. Any criticism of this mutually degrading relationship constitutes one as an enemy to be dehumanized, objectified, and subject to violence. The collective use of us versus them serves as a measure by which to validate whiteness against all others while also “serving as a handy mechanism for crushing opposition.”<sup>[40]</sup> White supremacy is constantly being replenished by a form of historical and social amnesia coupled with the use of right-wing disimagination machines to promote widespread forms of manufactured ignorance. The main instruments for doing so center around right-wing attacks on public and higher education and the educational force of the wider culture, including apparatuses such as the social media, internet, and that constitute broader forms of miseducation.

DeSantis’s ideological war is also matched by a number of policies designed to criminalize dissent and provide the blueprint for turning GOP led states into laboratories of authoritarianism. For instance, DeSantis has created the Office of Elections crimes, which would enforce with the threat of a felony any alleged electoral violation. The real purpose of this office has little to do with voter fraud since there is almost no evidence it exists at a scale warranting an election police office. On the contrary, it is code for intimidating Black voters and adds another repressive tool to enforce voter suppression.<sup>[41]</sup> In an effort to eliminate any constraints on his power, DeSantis is willing to punish anyone he views as a political enemy, including, as I have mentioned, corporations that refuse to endorse his policies. As Ruth Ben-Ghiat notes, he “punished the popular Tampa Bay Rays for having the temerity to express sadness about the recent

mass shooting of children in Texas—and for making a \$50,000 donation to Everytown for Gun Safety’s Support fund. Opposing GOP gun rights policies earned the team a veto of their planned \$35 million baseball complex.”<sup>[42]</sup> DeSantis disdains dissent as was evident in his signing a bill that criminalizes peaceful protests in residential neighborhoods. Moreover, his white supremacist ideology was on full display when he created a poll tax that prevents over a million ex-felons from voting, most of whom are “low-income individuals and racial minorities.”<sup>[43]</sup>

DeSantis’s desire to instill fear in others and engage in a culture of cruelty appears boundless. One of his “most disgraceful new low[s]” included going after the Special Olympics by forcing them to give up a mask mandate among athletes with intellectual disabilities, knowingly endangering the lives of people who are more vulnerable to Covid.<sup>[44]</sup> He shamelessly publicly bullied teens to take off their masks while he held a press conference at the University of South Florida.<sup>[45]</sup> In the same vein of cruelty, just a few days from the five-year anniversary of Orlando’s Pulse nightclub massacred, he “vetoed \$150,000 in state funds that would have provided counseling for survivors — despite a budget that has \$9.5 billion in reserves.”<sup>[46]</sup> In line with his Orbán-like ‘war’ “on LGBTQ+ Floridians, DeSantis “eliminated \$750,000 approved by the Florida Legislature for the Orlando-based Zebra Coalition to create housing for homeless gay and transgender youth.”<sup>[47]</sup> Apparently, DeSantis drive and cruelty were on display long before he entered politics, and have served him well in his attempt to be “the G.O.P.s combatant-in-chief.” One of his former baseball teammates at Yale recalls that “he was the most selfish person I have ever interacted with...He always loved embarrassing and humiliating people. I am speaking for others—he was the biggest deuce we knew.”<sup>[48]</sup>

Orbán, DeSantis, Trump, and their legitimating pundits and political clerks are symptomatic of a fascist politics that reaches across national boundaries suggesting the merging of white nationalism and global financial and political interests that are unified in their attempt to impose a regime of capitalist and racist barbarism worldwide. In light of these new global fascist political alliances, it is crucial for the left to rethink three cultural topographies central to analyzing the emergence of an upgraded fascist politics and violence in the United States and abroad. **First**, there is the discourse of illiberal democracy now embraced by the Republican Party, especially as it has developed in Hungary under the leadership of Viktor Orbán, the new global model of an upgraded form of fascist politics. Orbán has become a major influential force in shaping the politics of the Republican Party, and for legitimating a range of repressive policies. Fascist politics in the

U.S. must be addressed not merely as a form of domestic terrorism, but as a global threat which demands new international forms of resistance. **Second**, there is the issue of how the racially charged discourse of “Great Replacement Theory” fans the flames of white supremacy and legitimates a range of repressive fascist policies in Florida under the rule of Governor DeSantis.<sup>[49]</sup> Focusing on DeSantis is important because he has become a bellwether for appropriating a fascist language that has been increasingly translated into policies that offer a model of what a fascist politics would look like at a national and global level. **Third**, fascist politics in the current era has to be understood through a new language in which matters of culture, education, and agency are examined both for the ways in which they enlist individuals into fascist ideologies and how they can be used to redefine elements of understanding and political agency as crucial sites of struggle and resistance. Education in multiple sites plays a fundamental role in producing cultural apparatuses that have become disimagination machines that both normalize fascist politics and depoliticize those who might challenge it.

The fight against a global fascism must wage a war of resistance against these new political and cultural formations along with those agents of gangster capitalism who are establishing policies that erase historical memory, normalize a loathing for the truth, resuscitate a politics of aggrieved whiteness wedded to racial cleansing and violence, and use of the state as an agent of force. Repressive power does not only reside in the apparatuses of state violence and the realm of economics, it also works through machineries of persuasion that employ a language of dehumanization, manufactured ignorance, lies, and misinformation in order to deny people their crucial needs while pushing them into a desperate attempt to merely survive. The battle against fascism is as much a battle over consciousness and agency as it is a struggle over democratizing economic and state institutions. The language of fascist politics thrives on ignorance, complicity, and political theater. For the modern Republican Party and its global adherents to illiberal democracy, matters of war, cruelty, and violence offer a communal experience wedded to upholding capitalism’s death drive. With the collapse of civic culture on a global scale, the language and promises of a fascist politics offer to the masses what Ernst Bloch once called the “swindle of fulfillment.” This amounts to more than an affirmation of the language of violence and degradation, it represents an updated politics in which the success of illiberal democracy depends on convincing the masses to give up their political agency, renounce any vestige of social responsibility, and embrace hatred as an organizing principle of both governance and communal life. No one can afford to look away any

longer, because the price to pay is not only complicity with fascism and its death drive, but the destruction of democracy and the planet as we might imagine it for the better. My dear friend and mentor, Howard Zinn, in an interview in 2005, stressed the urgency of fighting back against injustice, learning how to struggle for a better world, and placing education at the center of that fight. His words are more prescient today than ever. He writes:

I believe neutrality is impossible, because the world is already moving in certain directions. Wars are going on. Children are starving. And to be neutral, to pretend to neutrality, to not take a stand in a situation like that, is to collaborate with whatever is going on, to allow it to happen. I did not want to be a collaborator with what was happening. I wanted to enter into history. I wanted to play a role. I wanted my students to play a role. I wanted us to intercede. I wanted my history to intercede and to take a stand on behalf of peace, on behalf of a racial equality or sexual equality. And so I wanted my students to know that right from the beginning, know you can't be neutral on a moving train. <sup>[50]</sup>

I want to follow up on Zinn's poetic comments with what might be obvious but needs to be repeated. There is no agency without a sense of militant hope, and there is no meaningful form of resistance that can ignore the totality of politics, one that is comprehensive and wedded to a radical restructuring of society rather than incremental reforms. There is no justice if economic inequality is not addressed through the registers of class, race, gender, sexualities, and ecological responsibility, to name a few; there is no politics that can ignore the subjective ways in which domination is internalized. As Wilhelm Reich once noted, fascism menaces both the body and the mind. This suggests that the left must rethink how a politics of identification can work to address the way people think, narrate their desires, speak in a language they own, and play a role in enabling them to articulate their critical understanding of the world into collective forms of action. The left in its various registers has to overcome its fragmentation in the name of an anti-capitalist consciousness, reframe the language of solidarity and the public good, and work to develop an international social formation in defense of a socially just society. At the same time, we need to find new ways to inspire people through our own actions to think and act courageously. In the spirit of Howard Zinn, it is important to believe that history is open, though the gates are closing fast. The issue is not whether one is pessimistic, but how we use the resources we have to make it harder for things to get worse while struggling for a society in which the promise of a socialist democracy appears on the horizon of possibility.

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*Henry A. Giroux currently holds the McMaster University Chair for Scholarship in the Public Interest in the English and Cultural Studies Department and is the Paulo Freire Distinguished Scholar in Critical Pedagogy. His most recent books are [America’s Education Deficit and the War on Youth](#) (Monthly Review Press, 2013), [Neoliberalism’s War on Higher Education](#) (Haymarket Press, 2014), [The Public in Peril: Trump and the Menace of American Authoritarianism](#) (Routledge, 2018), and the [American Nightmare: Facing the Challenge of Fascism](#) (City Lights, 2018), *On Critical Pedagogy*, 2nd edition (Bloomsbury), and *Race, Politics, and Pandemic Pedagogy: Education in a Time of Crisis* (Bloomsbury 2021). His website is [www. henryagiroux.com](http://www.henryagiroux.com).*

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