

FEATURE ARTICLE:
**POLITICAL FRAUDS, DONALD TRUMP,
AND THE GHOST OF TOTALITARIANISM**

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ABSTRACT. This article argues that far from being an eccentric clown who has bullied himself into becoming the Republican Party's presidential candidate, Donald Trump is the embodiment of a society in which civic literacy is in retreat and public values are now subordinated to a market driven fundamentalism and the rule of commerce. Donald Trump represents the dark side of casino capitalism, which has emptied politics out of any substantive democratic content. Giroux argues that as critical thinking, informed judgments, moral responsibility, and collective action disappear from the world of politics and the formative cultures that nourish such critical capacities, we are witnessing the emergence of a new form of authoritarianism, one that constitutes a kind of anti-politics. Anti-politics empties politics of any substantive meaning and elevates emotion over reason, ignorance over evidence, and powerlessness over engaged citizenship. At the core of Trump's political rise is both a crisis of thinking and a crisis of agency. Locked into paralyzing orbits of privatization, self-interest, and a market driven value system that defines social problems as a matter of individual responsibility, the American public's retreat from democratic struggles now finds expression in an unprecedented attack on reason, evidence, science, and critical thought, which has reached perilous proportions in the United States. The article concludes by emphasizing the importance of education as central to politics and the need for educators and other cultural workers to take seriously what it means to use the tools of rhetoric, pedagogy, and persuasion to make power visible and connect larger social problems to the modes of identification that people bring to the public sphere. At stake here is the need to develop avenues of resistance in which the symbolic and pedagogical dimensions of struggle become central to developing modes of resistance in the fight against the new modes of authoritarianism now engulfing the United States.

Keywords: Donald Trump; anti-politics; resistance; pedagogy; power; politics; democracy

In the current historical moment in the United States, the emptying out of language is nourished by the assault on the civic imagination. One example of this can be found in the rise of Donald Trump on the political scene. Donald Trump's popular appeal speaks to not just the boldness of what he says and the shock it provokes,

but the inability to respond to shock with informed judgement rather than titillation. Marie Luise Knott is right in noting that “We live our lives with the help of the concepts we form of the world. They enable an author to make the transition from shock to observation to finally creating space for action—for writing and speaking. Just as laws guarantee a public space for political action, conceptual thought ensures the existence of the four walls within which judgment operates.”¹ The concepts that now guide our understanding of American society are dominated by a corporate induced linguistic and authoritarian model that brings ruin to language, politics and democracy itself.

Missing from the commentaries by most of the mainstream media regarding the current rise of Trumpism is any historical context that would offer a critical account of the ideological and political disorder plaguing American society—personified by Trump’s popularity. A resurrection of historical memory in this moment could provide important lessons regarding the present crisis, particularly the long tradition of racism, white supremacy, nativism, exceptionalism, war mongering, and the extended wars on youth, women, and immigrants. What is also missing from the mainstream and some progressive media accounts, as Chip Berlet points out, is too little historical context, which would make clear that Trump presence on the American political landscape is the latest expression of a long tradition of “populist radical populist radical right ideology – nativism, authoritarianism, and populism...not unrelated to mainstream ideologies and mass attitudes. In fact, they are best seen as a radicalization of mainstream values.”² Berlet goes even further arguing that “Trump is not an example of creeping totalitarianism; he is the white man growing hoarse with bigoted canards while riding at the forefront of a new nativist movement.”³ For Berlet, the real question that Trump’s popularity necessitates and “needs to be asked is what is wrong with America, ‘that this racist, misogynist, money-cheating clown should be the frontrunner for the presidential nomination of one of its two major parties?’”⁴

Berlet is right when he suggests that calling Trump a fascist is not enough. But he is wrong in suggesting that all that the Trump clown wagon represents is a more recent expression of the merger of right-wing populism and racist extremism. History does not stand still and as important as these elements are they have taken on a new meaning within a different historical conjuncture and have been intensified through the registers of a creeping totalitarianism wedded not just to populism but also to a new and virulent form of predatory capitalism. What is necessary are analyses in which the seeds of totalitarianism are made visible in Trump’s discourse and policy measures.

One example can be found in Steve Weissman’s commentary on Trump in which he draws a relationship between Trump’s casual racism and the rapidly growing neo-fascist movements across Europe that “are growing strong by hating others for their skin color, religious origin, or immigrant status.”⁵ Weissman’s willingness to situate Trump in European populist radical right movements inhabited by radical extremist such as Jean-Marie Le Pen’s National Front,

Greece's Golden Dawn political party, or Vladimir Shirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia provides a glimpse of what Trump has in common with the new authoritarianism and its deeply racist, nativism anti-immigration, and neo-Nazi tendencies. Unfortunately, few journalists have acknowledged the presence of white militia and white supremacists groups at Trump's rallies and almost none have acknowledged the chanting of "white power" at some of his political gatherings, which would surely signal not only Trump's connections to a racist past but also to the formative Nazi culture that gave rise to the endgame of genocide.⁶

Another example can be found in Glenn Greenwald's analysis of the mainstream media's treatment of Trump's attack on Jorge Ramos, an influential anchor of Univision.⁷ When Ramos stood up to question Trump's views on immigration, Trump refused not only to call on him, but insulted him by telling him to go back to Univision. Instead of focusing on this particular lack of civility, Greenwald takes up the way many journalists scolded Ramos because he had a point of view and was committed to a political narrative. Greenwald saw this not just as a disingenuous act on the part of establishment journalists but as a weakness that furthers the march of an authoritarian regime that does not have to be accountable to the press.

Trump may be bold in his willingness to flaunt his racism and make clear that money drives politics, but this is not new and should surprise no one who is historically and civically literate. Rick Perlstein is correct in arguing that Trump provides a service in making clear how conservative ideology works at its deepest levels and that he exposes the hypocrisy of dressing reactionary politics in a discourse of liberation.⁸ Some journalists such as conservative Peggy Noonan, argue that Trump is simply a symptom of massive disillusionment among the American public who are exhibiting a profound disdain, if not hatred, for the political and economic mainstream elites.⁹ This argument is often bolstered by the rise of Bernie Sanders candidacy within the ranks of the Democratic Party. Unfortunately, what it leaves out are the toxic racism, hatred, nativism, class bullying, fascist policies, and chilling embrace of an authoritarian form of market fundamentalism. What is forgotten by liberals and conservatives who tout this line is Rather than being insightful, this type of restricted discourse performs a cleansing operation, ridding the Republican Party and the history of the United States of some of its most vile right-wing nativist legacies.

Don and Kurtis Lee point out that

If Donald Trump were president, [he would end abortion rights, repeal Obamacare,] put U.S. ground troops in Iraq to fight Islamic extremists, rescind President Obama's executive orders that protect millions of immigrants from deportation, eliminate American citizenship for U.S.-born children whose parents are in the country illegally and 'police' but not necessarily revoke the nuclear pact with Iran. Trump wants to deport all immigrants in the U.S. illegally — an estimated 11 million people — but says he wouldn't break up families because their families would be deported too. 'We're going to keep the families together ... but they have

to go,' he said in a wide-ranging interview on NBC's *Meet the Press*. 'We have to make a whole new set of standards. And when people come in, they have to come in legally.' Deportees who qualify could return, he said. Trump would end Obama's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which allows young people brought to the country illegally as children to work and attend college without facing deportation.¹⁰

A final example is evident in Matt Taibbi's commentary on how Trump's toxic racism and discourse can lead to violence and how Trump reacted when it did. According to Taibbi, when two brothers from South Boston urinated on and severely beat up a Hispanic homeless guy, "one of the brothers reportedly told police that 'Donald Trump was right, all of these illegals need to be deported.' When reporters confronted Trump, he hadn't yet heard about the incident. At first, he said, 'That would be a shame.' But right after, he went on: 'I will say, the people that are following me are very passionate. They love this country. They want this country to be great again. But they are very passionate. I will say that.'"¹¹ Trump later modified this poisonous response, one that both appeared to condone and legitimate the violence done in his name, but the fact remains that he is not just disseminating hate, but creating the conditions for dangerous ideas to mobilize real life violence in a society seething with a toxic disdain for immigrants and those considered Other.

What is clear is that a widespread avoidance of the past has become not only a sign of the appalling lack of historical consciousness in contemporary American culture, but a deliberate political weapon used by the powerful to keep people passive and ignorant of the truth, if not reduced to a discourse drawn from the empty realm of celebrity culture. This is a discourse in which totalitarian images of the hero, fearless leader, and bold politicians get lost in the affective and ideological registers of what Hannah Arendt once called "the ruin of our categories of thought and standards of judgment."¹² Of course, there are many factors currently contributing to this production of ignorance and the diminishment of individual and collective agency. The forces promoting a deep seated culture of authoritarianism run deep in American society.

Such factors extend from the current state of celebrity and the narrowing of curricula in American schools to the transformation of the mainstream media into a deadly mix of propaganda and entertainment. The latter is particularly crucial as the collapse of journalistic standards that could inform the onslaught of information finds its counterpart in a government wedded to state secrecy and the aggressive prosecution of whistleblowers,¹³ the expanding use of state secrecy, the corruption of political language,¹⁴ and the disregard for truth, all of which have contributed to growing culture of political and civic illiteracy.¹⁵ The knowledge and value deficits that produce such detrimental forms of ignorance not only crush the critical and ethical imagination, critical modes of social interaction, and political dissent, but also destroy those public spheres and spaces that promote thoughtfulness, thinking, critical dialogue, and serve as "guardians of truths as facts," as Arendt once put it.¹⁶

The Privatization of Space and Time

Under the reign of neoliberalism, space, time, and even language have been subject to the forces of privatization and commodification. Public space has been replaced by malls and a host of commercial institutions. Commodified and privatized, public space is now regulated through exchange values rather than public values just as communal values are replaced by atomizing and survival-of-the fittest market values. Time is no longer connected to long term investments, the development of social capital, and goals that benefit young people and the public good. On the contrary, time is now connected to short-term investments and quick financial gains. More broadly, time is now defined by “the non-stop operation of global exchange and circulation”¹⁷ and the frenetic reproduction and perpetuation of an impoverished celebrity and consumer culture that both depoliticizes people and narrows their potential for critical thought, agency, and social relations to an investment in shopping, and other market-related activities. Under neoliberalism, time presents itself as a form of tyranny, an unquestioned necessity, and in speeding up the flows of work, leisure, knowledge, and everyday life it spawns a new kind of violence in which the flow of capital replaces the flow of thoughtfulness, atomization replaces a notion of shared solidarity, the spectacle undermines historical memory, privatization seeks to erase all notions of the public good, and manufactured precarity replaces any sense of security and long-term planning.

In the age of casino capitalism, time itself has become a burden more than a condition for contemplation, self-reflection, and the cultivation of thoughtful and compassionate social relations. The extended arc of temporal relations in which one could imagine long-term investments in the common good has given way to a notion of time in which the horizon of time is contained within the fluctuating short-term investments of the financial elite and their militant drive for profits at any price. What is lost in this merging of time and the dictates of neoliberal capital are the most basic elements of being human along with the formative culture and institutions necessary to develop a real, substantive democracy. As Christian Marazzi observes:

Taking time means giving each other the means of inventing one’s future, freeing it from the anxiety of immediate profit. It means caring for oneself and the environment in which one lives, it means growing up in a socially responsible way. [Taking time means] questioning the meaning of consumption, production, and investment [so as to not] reproduce the preconditions of financial capitalism, the violence of its ups and downs, the philosophy according to which ‘time is everything, man is nothing.’ For man (sic) to be everything, we need to reclaim the time of his existence.¹⁸

Civic death and disposability are the new signposts of a society in which historical memory is diminished and ethical evaluations become derided as figments of the

liberal past. Dispossession and depoliticization are central to the discourse of neoliberalism in which language is central to moulding identities, desires, values, and social relationships. As Doreen Massey observes, under neoliberalism the public is urged to become consumers, customers, and highly competitive while taught that the only interest that matters are individual interests, almost always measured by monetary considerations.¹⁹ Under such circumstances, social and communal bonds have been shredded, important modes of solidarity attacked, and a war has been waged against any institution that embraces the values, practices, and social relations endemic to a democracy.

This retreat into private silos has resulted in the inability of individuals to connect their personal suffering with larger public issues. Thus detached from any concept of the common good or viable vestige of the public realm, they are left to face alone a world of increasing precarity and uncertainty in which it becomes difficult to imagine anything other than how to survive. Under such circumstances, there is little room for thinking critically and acting collectively in ways that are imaginative and courageous.

Surely, the celebration and widespread prevalence of ignorance in American culture does more than merely testify “to human backwardness or stupidity;” it also “indicates human weakness and the fear that it is unbearably difficult to live beset by continuous doubts.”²⁰ Yet, what is often missed in analysis of political and civic illiteracy as the new normal is the degree to which these new forms of illiteracy not only result in an unconscious flight from politics, but also produce a moral coma that supports modern systems of terror and authoritarianism.

Neoliberal Attacks on civic Literacy

Civic illiteracy is about more than the glorification and manufacture of ignorance on an individual scale: it is producing a nation-wide crisis of agency, memory, and thinking itself. How else to explain, for instance, the mainstream media’s willingness to provide a platform for Donald Trump whose views express an unchecked hatred of immigrants, women, the welfare state, and any viable notion of the public good. As Richard Hofstadter, Noam Chomsky, and Susan Jacoby have made clear ignorance is not simply about the absence of knowledge, it is a kind of ideological sandstorm in which reason gives way to emotion, and a willful limitation of critical thought spreads through the culture as part of a political project that both infantilizes and depoliticizes the general public.²¹ Trump is simply the most visible embodiment of a society that is not merely suspicious of critical thought but disdains it. Trump is the quintessential symbol of the merging of a war-like arrogance, a militant certainty, and as self-absorbed unworldliness in which he is removed from problems of the real world. The clueless Trump is far from a kind of clownish fiction some writers have described him to be. And while liberals such as Michal Tomasky have pointed to his appeal to racial resentment, a gladiatorial style, and his ability to combine a war like discourse and elements of conservative

fundamentalism with a flair for entertainment,²² this type of analysis regrettably shies away from talking about Trump's presence on the political landscape as an indication and warning of the specter of totalitarianism confronting Americans in new forms.²³

Trump is the embodiment of a political party and casino driven social order in which informed judgments, moral responsibility, and collective action disappear from the world of politics. Trump's often insulting, humiliating, misogynist, and racist remarks signify more than the rantings of an antediluvian, privileged white man who is both savvy in the world of public relations and harbors a vastly distorted vision of what politics should be. Trump represents the new face of what Hannah Arendt once called the "banality of evil."²⁴

Unapologetic about the racist nature of his remarks, unreflective about a savage economic system that is destroying the planet and the lives of most of its inhabitants, and unaware of his own "criminal" participation in furthering a culture of fear and cruelty, he is typical of an expanding mass of pundits, anti-public intellectuals, and right-wing fundamentalists who live in a historical void and for whom emotion overtakes reason. His call for a multi-billion dollar wall between Mexico and the United States is about more than a waste of resources, it is part of a discourse of punishment, cruelty, and disposability that informs all totalitarian regimes. Trump may be incapable of understanding "the complex realities of immigration and immigration reform in the United States," but what he does understand is that pandering to fear and nativism resonates with the deepest impulses of anxiety, racism, and authoritarianism.²⁵

Clearly, the attack on reason, evidence, science, and critical thought has reached perilous proportions in the United States. A number of political, economic, social, and technological forces now work to distort reality and keep people passive, unthinking, and unable to act in a critically engaged manner. Politicians, right-wing pundits, and large swaths of the American public embrace positions that support Creationism, capital punishment, torture, and the denial of human-engineered climate change, any one of which not only defies human reason but stands in stark opposition to evidence-based scientific arguments. Reason now collapses into opinion, as thinking itself appears to be both dangerous and antithetical to understanding ourselves, our relations to others, and the larger state of world affairs. Under such circumstances, literacy disappears not just as the practice of learning skills, but also as the foundation for taking informed action. Divorced from any sense of critical understanding and agency, the meaning of literacy is narrowed to completing basic reading, writing, and numeracy tasks assigned in schools. Literacy education is similarly reduced to strictly methodological considerations and standardized assessment, rooted in test taking and deadening forms of memorization, and becomes far removed from forms of literacy that would impart an ability to raise questions about historical and social contexts. While critical literacy in and of itself guarantees nothing, it is an essential step toward a mode of critical agency, the ability to narrate oneself, and the production

of a discourse that challenges common sense and the neoliberal assertion that there is no alternative to the existing state of affairs.

Civic literacy is the bedrock of any democratic society and its decline suggests that totalitarianism has become the crisis of our time. The increasing atomization of society, the commodification of thought, the rise of the surveillance state, the transformation of schools into dead zones of the imagination, the war on black youth—all of these anti-democratic tendencies in American society point to a social order in which tyranny destroys everything that politics makes possible. Trump's message is simply a more strident version of what extremists in both political parties have been saying for years. They cling to an ideological market based fundamentalism that attempts to explain everything. In such a world there is no doubt only enemies who dissent, critical thought that is labeled as dangerous, and a circle of certainty brimming with ignorance. In addition, fashion a world in which terror becomes the organizing principle of society—terror based on a fear of the other, fear of criticism, and fear of democracy itself. Similarly, they advocate forms of ideological fundamentalism in which human bonds can only be shaped within a survival-of-the-fittest set of social relations. All social relations are dominated by the twin logic of combat and commercial transactions. Matters of empathy and shared responsibilities are viewed as a weakness. There is more at stake in this form of totalitarianism than the curse of the inability to think, there is the militarization of all social relations, a kind of death march in which violence, disposability, and greed become the organizing principles of all aspects of social life.

The Threat of Totalitarianism in the US

For Arendt the inability to think, to be thoughtful, and assume responsibility for one's actions spoke not just to a regrettable type of civic and political illiteracy, but was crucial for creating the formative cultures that produced totalitarian regimes. Absent any residue of moral responsibility, political indignation, and collective resistance, crimes committed in a systemic way now emerge, in part, from a society in which thinking had become dangerous and non-thinking normalized. Of course, thinking critically is largely produced in public spheres that instill convictions rather than destroy them, encourage critical capacities rather than shut them down, invest in public spheres rather than eliminate them by turning them over to private interests.

What Donald Trump represents is rarely talked about in the media. He is the most current egregious highly visible symbol of a terrifying stage or right-wing nativist demagoguery in American society haunted by the protean elements of a new totalitarianism. Totalitarian forms are still with us but they no longer find expression exclusively in the rounding up and killing of Jews, gays, people of color, and intellectuals or in the spectacles of militarism with the heightened show of armies of thugs dressed in military uniforms and black boots.

Instead of Nuremberg rallies, we get spectacles of violence and celebrity culture. Instead of public book burnings, we get a culture awash in anti-intellectualism and an attack on critical education; instead of death camps, we get a system of mass incarceration. The new totalitarianism is echoed in the resurgence of religious bigotry that runs through American society like an electric current and is personified in the media celebration of bigots such as Kentucky clerk Kim Davis who believes that her religion gives her the right to both deny marriage license to gays and disavow the separation of church and state. Unfortunately, Davis is more than an embarrassment politically and ethically, she reflects a sizable number of religious fundamentalists who have the backing of Republican Party and presidential candidates such as Ted Cruz and Mike Huckabee.

Totalitarianism throws together authoritarian and anti-democratic forms that represent a new historical moment in American history. Economic fundamentalism now governs all of society rather than just the market and in doing so it promotes a poisonous brand of politics while enacting draconian policies against women, low-income youth, immigrants, Black youth, workers, the elderly, and the poor. Marked by vast inequalities in wealth and power, it imposes massive hardships and suffering on much of the American public and it does so with little regard for the culture of cruelty it creates and willfully legitimates. Military fundamentalism points to a society that now militarizes everything from knowledge to schools. In this scenario, an increasing number of behaviors are criminalized, militarism feeds the punishing and incarceration state, and a kind of hyper masculinity now parades as the new model for legitimating aggression and violence in multiple spheres and against an increasing range of populations extending from women and black youth to Mexican immigrants. One of the most deadly fundamentalisms is education. We now live in a world in which illiteracy has replaced literacy and civic values have gone the way of the typewriter. As the orbits of privatization increase furthering what has been called by Mark Fisher the “empire of the self,” knowledge is transformed into the flow of non-stop information just as education collapses into training. Students are now defined as test-takers and celebrity culture has overtaken any viable notion of a critical, questioning, and informed culture. Trump’s rise in the polls is tantamount to the undermining of civic literacy, historical memory, and the public spheres that support them. His penchant for responding to critiques by humiliating his opponents suggested more than an over the top rudeness. Such dismissals point to a hatred of dissent, dialogue, and thoughtfulness coupled with an embrace of unchecked loyalty.

Totalitarianism’s curse finds public and political support for a mode of non-thinking in which rails against any attempt to ask what it might mean to use knowledge and theory as a resource to address social problems and events in ways that are meaningful and expand democratic relations. This is a form of illiteracy marked by the inability to see outside of the realm of the privatized self, an illiteracy in which the act of translation withers, reduced to a relic of another age. The United States has become a country in which a chronic and deadly form of

civic ignorance finds its most visible expression into a disimagination machine that celebrates the Donald Trumps of the world. The world of politics is far from clownish and in fact points to a poisonous future at a time in which the educational force of the culture is being used to promote a poisonous form of civic illiteracy. Donald Trump is not the singular clown who has injected bizarre and laughable notions into American politics, he is the canary in the mineshaft warning us that totalitarianism relies on mass support and feeds on hate, moral panics, and “the frenzied lawlessness or ideological certitude.”²⁶

As American society moves from a culture of questioning to a culture of shouting, it has restaged politics and power in ways that are truly unproductive, frightening, and anti-democratic. Jerome Kohn writing about Arendt’s notion of totalitarianism provides a commentary that contains a message for the present age, one that points the possibility of hope triumphing over despair—a lesson that needs to be embraced at the present moment. He writes that for Arendt “what matters is not to give oneself over to the despair of the past or the utopian hope of the future, but ‘to remain wholly in the present.’ Totalitarianism is the crisis of our times insofar as its demise becomes a turning point for the present world, presenting us with an entirely new opportunity to realize a common world, a world that Arendt called a ‘human artifice,’ a place fit for habitation by all human beings.”²⁷ And if Trump represents a symbol of a threatening totalitarianism, the legacy of individual and collective struggle now on the horizon in the struggles emerging among the Black Lives Matter Movement, fast food workers, environmentalists, and a range of other groups point to a different future in which the dangerous ideology and the unbridled braggadocio of the loud mouth authoritarians will be challenged and overcome by the urgency of hope in the face of despair. Rather than view Trump as an eccentric clown maybe it is time to portray him symbolic of the legacy of a totalitarian past whose story needs to be told again. Trump signifies the merging of a number of fundamentalisms in American history ranging from a historic racism, nativism, and Christian fascism to the contemporary merging militarism, rise of the surveillance state, and a predatory form of casino capitalism. And in making such connections, there is not only the power of resistance but a call to civic action to prevent such horrible narrative from appearing once again.

Avenues of Resistance

I want to conclude by arguing that inherent in Arendt’s notion of the banality of evil is her view of education as central to politics. That is, for her the educative nature of politics is dialectical in that it is central to both creating the formative cultures of thoughtlessness and Nazi pedagogy and in creating those modes of politics in which matters of critique, desire, and agency are central to constructing critical and socially responsible citizens alive to the demands of economic, racial, and political justice. For those of us who believe that education is more than an extension of the business world, it is crucial to address a number of issues that

stress the educative nature of politics as part of a broader effort to create a critical culture, democratic public spheres, and a collective movement that supports the connection between critique and action and redefines agency in the service of the practice of freedom and justice. Let me mention just a few.

First, educators, artists and others can address and make clear the relationship between the attack on the social state and the transformation of a range of democratic public spheres into adjuncts of corporate power. The neoliberal attacks on the welfare state, social provisions, public servants, and the public good must be understood and addressed as not simply an agenda to solidify class power but as an attack on democracy itself. Nor can it be understood outside of the production of the atomized neoliberal subject who is taught to believe in a form of possessive individualism that disdains matters of compassion, solidarity, and the type of sociality crucial to a democratic society. In a society in which the “social self” has been transformed into the “disembedded individual,” any viable notion of the public good is now repudiated by the privatizing and atomistic values at the heart of a hyper-market driven society.²⁸

As I have mentioned earlier in this essay, militarism has a deadly grip on American society as both an ideology with its celebration of the ideals of war, violence, and military heroism and as a policy that fuels the arms race, invests billions in military weapons, and spends more on the tools of surveillance, war, and state violence than on schools, health care, and the welfare state. Brown University’s Watson Institute for International Studies has done extensive research on military spending and the costs of war and states that as a result of the Iraqi War alone “American taxpayers will ultimately spend roughly \$2.2 trillion on the war, but because the U.S. government borrowed to finance the conflict, interest payments through the year 2053 means that the total bill could reach nearly \$4 trillion.”²⁹

At the very least, any viable form of resistance against the onslaught of totalitarianism will have to develop as Rabbi Michael Lerner of *Tikkun* has pointed out a Marshall Plan in which funding is sufficient to make all levels of education free, while also providing enough social support to eliminate poverty, hunger, inadequate health care, and the destruction of the environment.³⁰ There is nothing utopian about the demand to redirect money away from the military, powerful corporations, and the upper 1 percent.

Second, progressives need to develop a new radical democratic imaginary that challenges the notion that a market economy is synonymous with democracy. Capitalism and democracy are antithetical and the ways in which democracy is undermined by casino capitalism needs to be endlessly addressed as part of the pedagogical and political task of rupturing what might be called neoliberal taken-for-granted, especially regarding the assumption that the market should govern all of social life. The greatest threat posed by authoritarian politics is that it makes power invisible and hence defines itself in universal and commonsense terms, as if it is beyond critique and dissent. Moreover, disposability has become the new

measure of a savage form of casino capitalism in which the only value that matters is exchange value. In an age of increasing precarity and state violence, more and more disadvantaged individuals, from poor youth of color and the elderly to those groups who do not contribute to the economy and the bottom line, are considered excess, redundant, superfluous and condemned to zones of terminal exclusion. Coupled with making the machinery of neoliberal power visible is the need to overcome the fragmentation of the left while not denying the various modes of oppression at work in the United States.

Put differently, there is a need for young people, workers, educators, artists, and others to become part of a broader social movement aimed at dismantling the repressive institutions that are moving the United States into a new authoritarian age. Fortunately, this is already happening with the Black Lives Matter movement and other youth groups who not only refuse to be written out of the discourse of democracy, but are also mobilizing to challenge the ideological, structural and ethical foundations of an oppressive social order.³¹ This is especially true with regards to addressing the mass incarceration state, which drains billions of dollars in funds to put people in jail when such resources could be used to fund health care, free higher education, much needed infrastructure, a social wage, free day care, and so it goes. These movements are fighting against what has become an intolerable violence that has become the organizing principle of the totalitarian state, and in doing so they are creating not merely a broad-based social movement that eschews single-issue politics; they are redefining the very meaning of politics.

What I am suggesting is that progressives, in the spirit of what young people are creating, need to develop a more comprehensive view of society and a keener recognition of the mutually informing registers of politics, oppression, and political struggle. There is a noble and informing example of this type of analysis in the work of theorists such as Michael Lerner, Stanley Aronowitz, Angela Davis, and the late Martin Luther King, Jr., who drew connections between militarism, racism and capitalism as part of the call not for reform but for a radical restructuring of American society.

Third, against the new thoughtlessness that drapes the American public in the abyss of ignorance, infantilism, consumerism, militarism, and environmental stupidity, there is a need to create those pedagogical spaces in which shared faith in justice replaces the shared fears of precarity, hatred of the other, and a fear of the demands of justice. Against the savage brutality of the new totalitarianism, there is a need to develop new discourses, vocabularies, values, desires, and a sense of spirituality that brings people together around a need for critique, passion for justice, and a desire for new modes of collective resistance and struggle. We may be in the midst of “dark times” but the light of hope is never far off and while it offers no guarantees, it posits the possibility of a future that will not mimic the horrors of the past and present.

The great writer James Baldwin once said we are living in dangerous times and that the society in which we are living is “menaced from within” and that young

people had to “go for broke.” And while he acknowledged that “going for broke” would mean meeting the “most determined resistance,” he argued that it was necessary for young people to rise up and use their energy to reclaim their right to live with dignity, justice, equity and a sense of possibility.³² Baldwin got it right and so do the young people who are now taking up this challenge and, in doing so, are imagining a future free of the curse of totalitarianism that now hangs like a punishing sandstorm over the present.

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