

# Racist Violence Can't Be Separated From the Violence of Neoliberal Capitalism



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“I don’t see an American Dream; I see an American Nightmare.” —Malcolm X

As a renewed Black Lives Matter uprising fills the streets following a spate of high-profile police murders, the state-sanctioned murder of Black people continues on other fronts as well, including public health and economic injustice. In addition to protesting the widespread killing of Black people by police, activists have called attention to the systematic abandonment of Black communities as a function of both white supremacy and neoliberal capitalism. While some mainstream voices have focused on condemning the looting happening in the streets, many activists have called attention to the much larger-scale looting perpetrated by neoliberal capitalism against marginalized communities.

In this historical moment, the pandemic of racist violence cannot be separated from the violence imposed by neoliberal capitalism. The walls and cement

barriers now surrounding Trump's White House signify both the infectious ruthlessness that produces police violence at home and abroad and the war waged on those populations viewed as disposable. The paramilitary forces attacking peaceful demonstrators in the streets are inextricably related to those economic forces driving neoliberal capitalism and the politics of racial sorting, spiraling poverty and soaring inequality. These rapacious economic structures extend from a predatory financial sector to big corporations that produce massive misery, engage in unchecked exploitation, plunder the public sector, and concentrate wealth and power in the hands of a ruling elite.

The raging coronavirus pandemic and the pandemic of racist violence have pulled the curtain away from the brutality and horror of neoliberalism's individualizing of the social, which states that all social and political problems are solely a matter of individual fate and choice. This reduction of politics to personal referents is a duplicitous attempt to hide the systemic nature of massive racial and economic inequities.

The crisis has shattered the myth that each of us is defined exclusively by our self-interest and as individuals are solely responsible for the problems we face. It has also made clear the false assertion that we should look to either neoliberalism or the rich to solve the deeply rooted problems that have become evident in this moment of multiple pandemics.

Such myths have completely collapsed under the Trump regime as it becomes obvious during the pandemic that the shortages in crucial medical equipment, lack of testing, lack of public investments, and failed public health services, are largely due to right-wing neoliberal measures and regressive tax policies that have drained resources from health care systems, public goods, and other vital social institutions. The pandemic has torn away the cover of a neoliberal economic system marked by what Thomas Piketty calls “[the violence of social inequality](#).” Inequality is a toxin that destroys lives, democratic institutions and civic culture and is normalized through a pandemic pedagogy produced by a right-wing media culture that has become a poisonous sounding board for the rich and powerful.

Inequality is a toxin that destroys lives, democratic institutions and civic culture and is normalized through a pandemic pedagogy produced by a right-wing media culture.

In the midst of Trump’s attempt to politicize the COVID-19 pandemic and militarize the protests against police violence, a new and oppositional vision of the U.S. is developing. In this vision, it has become clear that fascism begins with the language of dehumanization, massive inequities in economic and racial justice, and the proliferation of the accessories of war on the part of the Trump administration to suppress dissent, beat journalists and assault peaceful protesters. What is being opposed in the streets and elsewhere by the

current generation of diverse activists is Trump's architecture of predatory neoliberal capitalism as an updated version of fascist politics.

These oppositional voices emerging in the midst of various pandemics are also calling for a restructuring of all the fundamental systemic structures of society that are rooted in forms of economic, racial and social injustice. In this struggle, the opposition to systemic inequality is both central to the call for racial justice and a crucial element in the larger struggle to build a mass movement necessary to demolish neoliberal capitalism, eradicate police violence, dismantle institutional racism and construct a democratic socialist society. This is not just a struggle for unity, as the mainstream press attempts to suggest with its images of protesters and cops hugging each other or joining arms: It is a fight for justice. Unity doesn't pay the rent, provide jobs, ensure a universal basic income, or address the soaring economic collapse that will leave millions without health care, food or any vestige of economic security.

Neoliberal pedagogy reproduces the myth that economic prosperity has nothing to do with economic justice, and that increasing levels of inequality and the concentration of wealth in few hands will produce prosperity and increased levels of social mobility. In the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, this narrative appears not only false, but also shockingly cruel and heartless. As the social is individualized, it becomes more difficult to translate private issues

into systemic considerations. One consequence is that inequality becomes normalized and the pandemic crisis is isolated from the political, economic, social and cultural conditions that fuel it. The coronavirus pandemic has made clear the false and dangerous neoliberal notion that all problems are reduced to matters of individual responsibility and that cost-benefit schemes should be prioritized over addressing human needs and saving lives. In this instance, individual responsibility is turned against society, frozen in the mutually informing registers of self-absorption and selfishness. Rather than fulfilling its democratic capacities when combined with feelings of compassion and solidarity, it is marooned in the suffocating logic of self-interest. The underlying cruelty of this ideology plays out in the magnitude of the disparity of effects produced by the pandemic and how they bear down on vulnerable groups. [As Judith Butler observes:](#)

For those who are homeless or unemployed, the economic forecast could not look bleaker. Without a working and equitable health care system, the affirmation of health care as a public good and a mandate of government, the unemployed are left to scramble for alternatives to avoid falling ill and dying for lack of care. This is the stunning cruelty of the U.S. that shocks large portions of the world. Many workers are not just temporarily out of work, but are registering the collapse of their

work worlds, the prospect of no paycheck, homelessness, a pervasive sense of being abandoned by the society to which they should rightly belong.

## **Challenging the Language of Neoliberal Fascism**

The pedagogical and ethical challenge here is to view inequality as part of a broader and more comprehensive politics that can only be understood both historically and relationally in terms of its connections to the central ethos and dynamics of neoliberal capitalism. This would include connecting inequality to the attack on the welfare state, unions, workers, climate change denial, deregulation, runaway privatization, crass selfishness and the defunding of public goods. It would also point to the rise of right-wing populism and fascist politics as part of the same political process of the working of finance capital and its ongoing machineries of exploitation, exclusion, class divisions, social death and racial cleansing. In the midst of the pandemic crisis, the health of the nation was replaced by a discourse that focused on the health of the economy and the strength of the stock market. Trump attempts to empty politics with this type of discourse, which functions to camouflage and erase his bumbling and incompetent response to the COVID-19 crisis.

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Moreover, Trump's language of political opportunism and militarism, along with his farcical press conferences, are egregious responses to massive protests calling for racial justice. Even worse, his staged photo op in front of St. John's church holding a Bible aloft echoes a history one associates with the Ku Klux Klan and images right out of D. W. Griffith's 1915 racist film, *The Birth of a Nation*.

In an equally menacing register, Trump exhibits with increasing frequency what the legendary veteran journalist Bill Moyers refers to, citing 98-year-old historian Bernie Weisberger, as "pretty undisguised fascism." In the White House's militarized world of lawlessness, Trump "has shown a willingness to shut down investigations into his conduct, offer pardons to those whose lawbreaking he approves of, and punish media organizations and social media platforms that are, in his mind, biased against him." He has politicized the military, suppressed dissent, engaged in widespread corruption, promoted politics as a spectacle and flooded the public with an incessant stream of lies. In this ecosystem of tyranny, issues of rampant police brutality, inequality and heightened racism are viewed as "battle spaces" subject to draconian military operations. In Trump's militarized politics of exclusion and disposability, violence becomes a weapon of class and racial warfare and the space of politics becomes dysfunctional, emptied of any real progressive substance. As public

goods are privatized and corporations deregulated, social bonds and communal cohesion begin to crumble and the energies and passion of fascist politics are mobilized.

Of course, there is more at stake here than Trump's lack of moral and political leadership. There is also the needless loss of lives due to the dearth of a national policy capable of providing hospital beds, funding health facilities, expanding (rather than disbanding) a pandemic task force, and taking the advice of scientific experts rather than firing those who did not bend to Trump's disregard for evidence and demand for sycophantic loyalty. What the pandemic reveals in brutally cruel terms is a racially and ageist rationale on the part of the Trump administration for prioritizing untenable levels of inequality while advancing the assumption that lives be measured and valued only in terms of economic output. In this equation and present in the concept of herd immunity, the elderly, immigrants, the poor and people of color, viewed as disposable, are considered unproductive and unworthy of the protections against the virus that the ruling elite have at their disposal. Judith Butler illuminates this point, though more cautiously than I would. [She writes:](#) "Because 'the vulnerable' are not deemed productive in the new quasi-Aryan community, they are not valued lives, and if they die, that is apparently acceptable, since they are not imagined as productive workers, but 'drains' on

the economy. Although the herd immunity argument may not make this claim explicitly, it is there.”

Depoliticizing the discourse of economic inequality and its ruthless effects is a central project of neoliberalism — a project bolstered by forms of social and historical amnesia, the collapse of social conscience, and a struggle to narrow and control the stories that define a nation’s past and present. Under the Trump administration, record levels of inequality and rising volumes of poverty, misery and suffering are the price the administration is willing to endure in order to reward the ultra-rich and big corporations. [As Liz Theoharis makes clear](#), that in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Trump administration took a shockingly bold (yet revealing) step of rewarding the rich, once again, through the CARES Act, which was supposed to benefit those left financially adrift because of the economic fallout from the crisis. Under neoliberalism, an economic and racial crisis becomes a pretext for directing windfalls of money to Wall Street, the police, lobbyists and private insurance companies. As Theoharis observes:

“Since mid-March, the fortunes of the 600-plus billionaires in the United States have [jumped by \\$434 billion](#), or 15%. In the CARES Act that Congress passed, legislators slipped in a [tax break of \\$135 billion](#) for 43,000 of the country’s wealthiest business owners. (And, of

course, you need to add this to the unprecedented redistribution of wealth from the poor to the very rich that happened via the [\\$1.5 trillion Trump tax cut](#) of 2017.)”

In the age of the pandemic crisis, inequality is a plague normalized through the discourses of fear, unchecked individualism, the demonization of others, and the relentless investment in greed and self-interest. The furtherance of social and economic inequality and the expanding discourses of precarity, anxiety and fear have become central organizing principles of governance.

This is a model of neoliberal governance that [mimics totalitarian regimes of the past](#) and looks to align itself with the leadership and racist and repressive ideologies of a number of currently hardline authoritarian governments that include Brazil, Hungary and Turkey, to more moderate anti-democratic societies such as the United Kingdom under Boris Johnson’s bumbling leadership.

## **Politics as a War Culture**

In this global neoliberal discourse, inequality becomes a central tool of oppression and authoritarianism while politics increasingly occupies the status of a war machine. As the richest society on the planet, the United States is armed and radiates violence. How else to explain police in riot

gear [attacking peaceful protesters in Lafayette Square](#) with rubber bullets,

pepper balls, tear gas and other forms of weaponry? The violence of inequality and police brutality in Trump's world fade away in a market-driven worldview in which workers are called "human capital stock." In this instance, the grammars of ethics and suffering collapse into the unadulterated search for capital and profits and the rewarding of the financial elite. Hope collapses into narrow market-driven schemes and is renounced for its fidelity and obligation to justice and to what Jacques Derrida has called "the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead." Draping itself in the language of common sense, society is defined as a market removed from any notion of justice and social responsibility. As Jacques Ranciere has noted, what passes for democracy today "comprises traits that until quite recently were attributed to totalitarianism."

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In the age defined by the rule of finance capital, the productive economy is replaced by the financialization of the market, public goods are privatized, efforts at voter suppression are increased, police violence is legitimated at the highest levels of government, a frontal assault is waged on undocumented immigrants, and there is a widening inequality in wealth, income and power. Globally, there is a pandemic of inequality that receives too little attention even though the cost of such inequality is staggering in terms of the massive

suffering, misery and death it produces. COVID-19 has created a crisis that accelerates the urgency for saving lives in a time of mounting deaths worldwide. In addition, the massive protests against police violence against people of color points to another moment of reckoning in which racial hatred is writ large in the inequities of a criminal legal system fueled by a predatory capitalist society obsessed with the connection between money and white privilege and the marginalization of those considered disposable.

As Kehinde Andrews [reminds us](#), the mounting death toll “should stand as a reminder to the scale of the task at hand if we are serious about addressing global inequality. Poverty is a pandemic claiming millions of lives each year, and the only way to address this is to take truly radical action.” Such action is particularly urgent at a time when nearly 1.3 billion people live in extreme poverty and “[approximately 3.1 million children die from undernutrition each year](#).” The story of widening inequality is not new, but its acceleration and the rapid accumulation of wealth in the hands of the rich can only be understood in terms of the millions who are cast into poverty, the criminal legal system and an endless struggle for survival. It is also crucial to mention the redirecting of funds away from crucial federal programs such as Medicaid, health care, public education and other welfare programs to providing more military arms for the police, building more prisons and providing tax cuts for

the rich. The spirit of greed, injustice and cruelty can be glimpsed in [scandalous statistics](#) such as the following:

In 1983, median household wealth in the United States was \$84,000.

Thirty-seven years of growing inequality later, it sits at \$82,000.

Meanwhile, as a point of comparison, the total wealth of the Forbes 400 was \$92 billion in 1982. Now, it's \$2.89 trillion.

As educators, it is crucial for us to examine how we talk, teach and write about inequality as an object of critique in an age of precarity, uncertainty and the current pandemic crisis. This is especially true at a time when a growing number of authoritarian regimes around the globe substitute the suppression of dissent and a culture of forgetting for thoughtful dialogue and critical engagement. How do we situate our analysis of education as part of a broader discourse and mode of analysis that interrogates the promises, ideals and claims of a substantive democracy? How do we fight against iniquitous relations of power and wealth that empty power of its emancipatory possibilities, and as [Hannah Arendt has argued](#), “makes most people superfluous as human beings”? How might we understand how neoliberal ideology, with its appropriation of market-based values, regressive notions of freedom and agency, uses language to infiltrate daily life? How does a pandemic pedagogy in the service of neoliberalism produce identities defined

by market values, and normalize a notion of responsibility and individuality that convinces people that whatever problem they face they have no one to blame but themselves? Repeated endlessly on right-wing media platforms, the underlying conditions that disproportionately produce chronic illness among poor people of color disappear among a public distracted, if not persuaded, by a pandemic pedagogy that celebrates unchecked self-interest, disdains social responsibility, and turns away from a society with its deep-seated institutional rot and unravelling of social connections and the social contract.

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Pandemic pedagogy thrives on inequality and becomes a militarized and heartless normalizing tool to convince the broader public that the lives of the elderly, sick and vulnerable should be valued according to how the latter contribute to the economy. And if they are willing to die in order not to be a drain on the economy, all well and good. Nothing escapes the cruel logic of neoliberalism with its arrogance and hubris on full display as it bathes in the glow of right-wing populism, ultra-nationalism and neofascism. Its accoutrements of dictatorship are everywhere and can be seen in the swagger of militia that storm state capitals, in police who punch and pepper spray protesters and push elderly men to the ground, and in military forces on the streets without badges reinforcing a climate of fear, repression and

unaccountability. There is more at work here than a lack of humanity on the part of the Trump administration. As the Irish journalist Fintan O'Toole observes, there is also the deepening grip of a culture of cruelty and dehumanization. He writes:

As a society the American people are being habituated into accepting cruelty on a wide scale. Americans are being taught by Trump and his administration not to see other people as human beings whose lives are as important as their own. Once that line has been crossed — and it is not just Trump and the people around him, but many of Trump's supporters as well — then we know where that all leads, what the ultimate destination is. There is no mystery about it. We know what happens when a government and its leaders dehumanize large numbers of people.

## **Depoliticization and the Authoritarian Turn**

Neoliberalism is not only an economic system, it is also an ideological apparatus that relentlessly attempts to structure consciousness, values, desires and modes of identification in ways that align individuals with its governing structures. Central to this pedagogical project is the attempt to prevent individuals from translating private issues and troubles into broader systemic

considerations. By doing this, it becomes difficult for individuals to grasp the historical, social, economic and political forces at work in shaping a social order as a human activity deeply immersed in specific relations of power. Neoliberalism's attempt to erase or rewrite historical and social forces makes it difficult for individuals to both imagine alternative notions of society, themselves as collective actors, and view their problems as more than the limitations of faulty character, moral failure or a problem of personal responsibility. Reducing individuals to isolated, discrete, hermetically sealed human beings whose lives are shaped only by notions of self-reliance and self-sufficiency is a pedagogical strategy that utterly depoliticizes people leading them to believe that however a society is shaped, it is part of a natural order. President Trump echoed this "no alternative" narrative when asked about celebrities and rich people having special access to being tested for the coronavirus while few others had access. He replied, "Perhaps that's been the story of life."

This individualization of the social with its mounting privatization, gated communities and social atomization undermines collective action, any viable notion of solidarity, and weakens the notion of global connectivity. The philosopher Byung-Chul Han has rightly argued that contemporary neoliberal society is shaped by a dysfunctional notion of solitude and hermitically sealed

notions of agency, all of which undermine the values and social connections vital to a democracy. He writes:

Those subject to the neoliberal economy do not constitute a we that is capable of collective action. The mounting egoization and atomization of society is making the space for collective action shrink.... The general collapse of the collective and the communal has engulfed it. Solidarity is vanishing. Privatization now reaches into the depths of the soul itself. The erosion of the communal is making all collective efforts more and more unlikely.

This panoptical nature of hyper-individualism is more aligned to shared fears than shared responsibilities. Under such circumstances, trust and the notion that all life is related become difficult to grasp as the myopic language of private self-interest inures individuals to wider social problems such as extreme inequality. There is no understanding in this discourse of the damage fanatical entrepreneurialism does to our embodied collectivity. Nor is there any value attributed to the important responsibilities, social values and notion of the common good that exceeds who we are as individuals, or how we have been shaped by diverse social forces in particular ways.

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solitude and hermitically sealed notions of agency, all of which undermine the values and social connections vital to a democracy.

It should be clear that questions of economic and social justice cannot be addressed by a neoliberal pedagogy that enshrines self-interest and privatization while converting every social problem into individualized market solutions or regressive matters of personal responsibility. Under neoliberalism's disimagination machine, individual responsibility is coupled with an ethos of greed, avarice and personal gain. One consequence is the tearing up of social solidarities, public values and an almost pathological disdain for democracy. This radical form of privatization is also a powerful force for the rise of fascist politics because it depoliticizes individuals, immerses them in the logic of social Darwinism, and makes them susceptible to the dehumanization of those considered a threat or disposable.

Just as the spread of the pandemic virus in the United States was not an innocent act of nature, neither is the rise and pervasive grip of inequality. What is clear is that neoliberal support for unbridled individualism has weakened democratic pressures and eroded democracy and equality as governing principles. Moreover, as a mode of public pedagogy, it has undercut social provisions, the social contract and support for public goods such as education, public health, essential infrastructure, public transportation and the most basic elements of the welfare state. As a form of pedagogical practice,

neoliberalism has morphed into a form of pandemic pedagogy that sacrifices social needs and human life in the name of an economic rationality that places reviving economic growth over human rights. As a lived system of meaning and values, self-reliance and rugged individualism are the only categories available for shaping how individuals view themselves, their relationship to others and to the planet. The individualization of everyone and the reduction of social problems to private troubles is paralleled by sanctioning a world marked by borders, walls, racism, hate and a rejection of government intervention in the interest of the common good. Most importantly, neoliberal individualization personalizes power, creating a depoliticized subject whose only obligation as a citizen is defined by consuming and living in a world free from ethical and social responsibilities. In many ways, it does not just empty politics of any substance, it destroys its emancipatory prospects.

The neoliberal strategists not only use education to mask their abuses and the effects of their criminogenic policies, they also — in a time of crisis, when mass dissatisfaction of the masses might lead to chaos, revolts and dangerous levels of resistance — move dangerously close to creating the conditions for a fascist politics. The noted theologian Frei Betto is right in stating that under such conditions, “...they cover up the causes of social ills and cover up their effects with ideologies that, by obscuring causes, fuel mood in the face of the effects. That’s why neoliberalism is now showing its authoritarian face — building

walls that divide countries and ethnic groups, executive power over legislature and judiciary, disinformation about digital networks, the cult of the homeland, the brazen offensive against human rights.”

Neoliberalism has undermined the belief that human beings both make the world and can change it.

**Neoliberalism and its regressive notion of individualism and individual responsibility has undermined the belief that human beings both make the world and can change it.** The pandemic has ushered in a crisis that undermines that belief and opens the door for rethinking what kind of society and notion of politics will be faithful to the creation of a socialist democracy that speaks to the core values of justice, equality and solidarity. Under such circumstances, private resistance must give way to collective resistance, and personal and political rights must include economic rights. If inequality is to be defeated, the social state must replace the corporate state and social rights must be guaranteed for all. There can be no adequate struggle for economic justice and social equality unless economic inequality on a global level is addressed along with a movement for climate justice, the elimination of systemic racism and a halt to the spiraling militarism that has resulted in endless wars. This can only take place if the anti-democratic ideology of neoliberalism, with its collapse of the public into the private and its institutional structures of domination, are fully addressed

and discredited. Étienne Balibar is right in stating that the triumph of neoliberalism has resulted in the “[death zones of humanity](#).” Following Balibar, what must be made clear is that neoliberal capitalism is itself a pandemic and a dangerous harbinger of an updated fascist politics.

## **Overcoming Pandemic Pedagogy**

The kind of societies that will emerge after the pandemic is up for grabs. In some cases, the crisis will give way to authoritarian regimes such as Chile, Hungary and Turkey, all of which have used the urgency of COVID-19 as an excuse to impose more state control and surveillance, squelch dissent, eliminate civil liberties and concentrate power in the hands of an authoritarian political class. As is well documented, history in a time of crisis also has the potential to change dominant ideologies, rethink the meaning of governance, and enlarge the sphere of justice and equality through a vision that fights for a more generous and inclusive politics. It is crucial to rethink the project of politics in order to imagine forms of resistance that are collective, inclusive and global, capable of producing new democratic arrangements for social life, more radical values and a “[global economy which will no longer be at the mercy of market mechanisms](#).” This is a politics that must move beyond siloed identities and fractured political factions in order to build transnational solidarities in the service of an alternative radically democratic society. Making the pedagogical more political means challenging those forms of

pandemic pedagogy that turn politics into theater, a favorite tactic of Trump. In this case, the performance works to suspend disbelief, hold power accountable and unravel one's sense of critical agency. Pandemic pedagogy does more than undermine critical thinking and informed judgments, it dissolves the line between the truth and lies, fantasy and reality, and in doing so, destroys the foundation for understanding, engaging and promoting that social and economic justice. The endgame under the rubric of a pandemic pedagogy is not simply the destruction of the truth, but the elimination of democracy itself.

Central to developing an alternative democratic vision is development of a language that refuses to look away and be commodified. Such a language should be able to break through the continuity and consensus of common sense and appeals to the natural order of things. At stake here is the need to reclaim both critical and redemptive elements of a radical democracy in order to address the full spectrum of violence that structures institutions and everyday life in the United States. This is a language connected to the acquisition of civic literacy, and it demands a different regime of desires and identifications to enable us to move from "shock and stunned silence toward a coherent visceral speech, one as strong as the force that is charging at us."

Of course, there is more at stake here than a struggle over meaning; there is also the struggle over power, over the need to create a formative culture that will produce informed critical agents who will fight for and contribute to a broad social movement that will translate meaning into a fierce struggle for economic, political and social justice. Agency in this sense must be connected to a notion of possibility and education in the service of radical change.

Reimagining the future only becomes meaningful when it is rooted in a fierce struggle against the horrors and totalitarian practices of a pandemic pedagogy that falsely claims that it exists outside of history.

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Václav Havel, the late Czech political dissident-turned-politician, once argued that politics follows culture, by which he meant that changing consciousness is the first step toward building mass movements of resistance. What is crucial here in the age of multiple crises is a thorough grasp of the notion that critical and engaged forms of agency are a product of emancipatory education.

Moreover, at the heart of any viable notion of politics is the recognition that politics begins with attempts to change the way people think, act and feel with respect to both how they view themselves and their relations to others. There is more to agency than the neoliberal emphasis on the “empire of the self,”

with its unchecked belief in the virtues of a form of self-interest that despises the bonds of sociality, solidarity and community.

The U.S. is in the midst of a political and pedagogical crisis. This is a crisis defined not only by a brutalizing racism and massive inequality, but also a constitutional crisis produced by a growing authoritarianism that has been in the making for some time. The recent attacks by the police on journalists, peaceful protesters and even elderly people marching for racial justice echoes the violence of the Brownshirts in the 1930s. Let's stop the futile debate about whether or not the U.S. is in the midst of a fascist state and shift the register to the more serious question of how to resist it and restore a semblance of real democracy.

Under such circumstances, education should be viewed as central to politics, and it plays a crucial role in producing informed judgments, actions, morality and social responsibility at the forefront not only of agency, but politics itself. In this scenario, truth and politics mutually inform each other to erupt in a pedagogical awakening at the moment when the rules are broken. Taking risks becomes a necessity, self-reflection narrates its capacity for critically engaged agency and thinking the impossible is not an option, but a necessity. Without an informed and educated citizenry, democracy can lead to tyranny, even fascism.

Trump represents the malignant presence of a fascism that never dies and is ready to reemerge at different times in different context in sometimes not-so-recognizable forms. The COVID-19 crisis and the pandemic of inequality and racism have revealed elements of a fascist politics that are more than abstractions. The struggle against a fascist politics is now visible in the rebellions taking place across the United States. While there are no political guarantees for a victory, there is a new sense that the future can be changed in the image of a just and sustainable society. There is a new energy for reform taking place in the aftermath of the killing of George Floyd. Massive protests for racial, economic and social justice are emerging all over the globe. As I have argued in *The Terror of the Unforeseen*, at stake here is the need for these protests to transition from a pedagogical moment and collective outburst of moral anger to a progressive international movement that is well organized and unified. Such a movement must build solidarity among different groups, imagine new forms of social life, make the impossible possible, and produce a revolutionary project in defense of equality, social justice and popular sovereignty. The racial, class, ecological and public health crisis facing the globe can only be understood as part of a comprehensive crisis of the totality. Immediate solutions such as defunding the police and improving community services are important, but they do not deal with the larger issue of eliminating a neoliberal system structured in massive racial and

economic inequalities. David Harvey is right in [arguing](#) that the “immediate task is nothing more nor less than the self-conscious construction of a new political framework for approaching the question of inequality, through a deep and profound critique of our economic and social system.” This is a crisis in which different threads of oppression must be understood as part of the general crisis of capitalism. The various protests now evolving internationally at the popular level offer the promise of new global anti-fascist and anti-capitalist movements. In the current moment, democracy may be under a severe threat and appear frighteningly vulnerable, but with young people and others rising up across the globe — inspired, energized and marching in the streets — the future of a radical democracy is waiting to breathe again.

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