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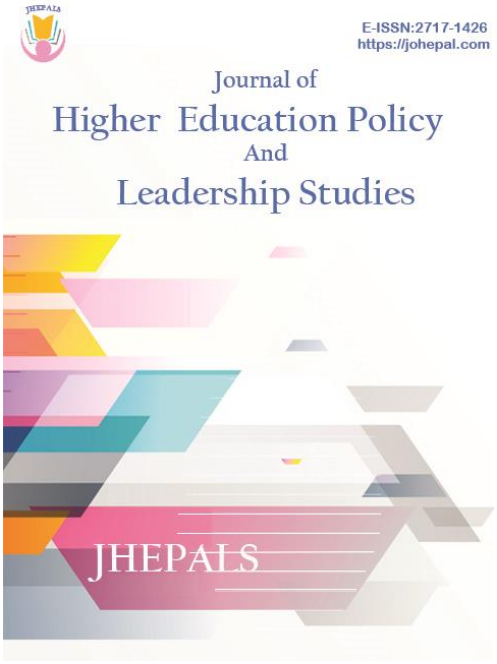

Honorary Editorial Member's Reflection:

Thinking Beyond the Language of Apocalyptic Lies and Violence

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At a campaign rally in Erie, Pennsylvania, Trump invoked a chilling convergence of law, order, and violence—a cornerstone of what can only be described as his politics of disposability. By referencing *The Purge*, a dystopian film where the government legalizes all forms of violence, including murder, for 12 hours, Trump escalates his rhetoric to a dangerous metaphor. In his hands, "the purge" becomes more than just a narrative device; it embodies a vision in which state-sanctioned violence reaches its grotesque climax. This is not just careless talk. Trump's invocation of *The Purge* reveals a willingness to use governmental power as a tool of extermination, targeting those he deems undesirable—immigrants, Black people, journalists, educators, and anyone daring to challenge his white Christian nationalist, neoliberal, and white supremacist agenda. Trump's language is more than rhetoric—it is an incitement to harm, a prelude to atrocities.

Trump's reference to *The Purge* signals a deeper embrace of militarized, fascist rhetoric that frames politics as war, with no limits on legality, morality, or humanity. It is a language soaked in the blood of history, recalling genocidal campaigns against Native Americans, Blacks, Jews, and countless others deemed disposable by authoritarian regimes. It is a dead language, a violent lexicon that gives birth to politicians with blood in their mouths, who weaponize fear, bigotry, and hatred, cloaking their destruction in the false promises of patriotism and security. Trump's words are crafted to shatter the civic contract, arm citizens against one another, create the conditions for a civil war, and pave the way for a society ruled by fear, enforced by a police state. This language does more than shelter fascists; it silences dissent, normalizes torture, and echoes the horrors of death camps and crematoriums. It is the language of the unspeakable and the unimaginable, a terror that blinds us to the terrors of the unforeseen.

For the far right politicians like Trump, J.D. Vance, and others, fascist rhetoric and politics are now displayed and enacted as a badge of honor. There is more at work here than an echo of former authoritarian regimes. The ensuing threats from Trump and his warrior-soldier types lead directly to the Gulags and camps in a former age of authoritarianism. The

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spirit of the Confederacy along with an upgraded and Americanized version of fascism is back. The corpse-like orthodoxies of militarism, racial cleansing, and neoliberal fascism point to the bankruptcy of conscience, an instance in which language fails and morality collapses into barbarism, and a politics where any vestige of democracy is both mocked and attacked.

What is clear is that there is a massive rebellion against democracy taking place in the United States and across the globe. And it is not simply being imposed from above through military dictatorships or the morbid charisma of alleged circus performers. People now vote for fascist politics and politicians such as Trump, Ron DeSantis, Greg Abbot, and others of their anti-democratic ilk. MAGA Republicans openly celebrate politicians who not only proudly dismiss democracy but also make racist remarks. CNN reported that Mark Robinson, the Republican nominee for Governor of North Carolina, once referred to himself as a "black Nazi" and "expressed support for reinstating slavery" on a pornography website's message board over a decade ago.[1] Hannah Knowles writing in *The Washinton Post* offered the following deluge of offensive comments Robinson made before winning the GOP nomination for governor. She provides the following summary:

> There was the time he called school shooting survivors "media prosti-tots" for advocating for gun-control policies. The meme mocking a Harvey Weinstein accuser, and the other meme mocking actresses for wearing "whore dresses to protest sexual harassment." The prediction that rising acceptance of homosexuality would lead to pedophilia and "the END of civilization as we know it"; the talk of arresting transgender people for their bathroom choice; the use of antisemitic tropes; the Facebook posts calling Hillary Clinton a "heifer" and Michelle Obama a man.[2]

Despite the fact that Robinson has a long history of making misogynist, racist and anti-transgender comments, Trump has enthusiastically endorsed him, absurdly calling Robinson "Martin Luther King on steroids."[3] The latter comment made in spite of the fact that Robinson once accused King Jr. "of being a white supremacist."[4] This shocking alignment with unapologetic racists and would-be fascists underscores how far the party has strayed

[1] Andrew Kaczynski and Em Steck, "'I'm a black NAZI!': NC GOP nominee for governor made dozens of disturbing comments on porn forum," CNN Politics (September 19, 2024). Online: https://www.cnn.com/2024/09/19/politics/kfile-mark-robinson-black-nazi-pro-slavery-porn-forum/index.html

[2] Hannah Knowles, "Offensive comments by N.C. Republican stand out even in Trump's party," *The Washington Post* (March 2, 2024). Online: https://www.washingtonpost.com/elections/2024/03/02/mark-robinson-governor-candidate-north-carolina-offensive-comments/

[3] Eric Bradner, "Harris campaign highlights Trump's past praise for Mark Robinson as CNN report roils battleground North Carolina," CNN Politics (September 19, 2024). Online: https://www.cnn.com/2024/09/19/politics/north-carolina-governor-mark-robinson/index.html

[4] Ibid. [4] Andrew Kaczynski and Em Steck.

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from democratic and moral principles. This is a party for whom *The Purge* is less a dystopian film than a model for how American society should be organized.

That such shocking comments are left largely uncriticized by the American public is largely the result of disimagination machines such as the mainstream media and far-right online platforms, many of which have become platforms for billionaires spreading conspiracy theories, that have become powerful ideological fictions—pedagogical machineries of political illiteracy inflicting upon the American people an astonishing vacancy that amounts to a moral and political coma. As one writer for New York Magazine succinctly summarized, powerful social media platforms are now home to dangerous, illiterate fictions. He writes:

> Bill Ackman, a wealthy hedge fund manager turned Trump supporter began posting uncontrollably about a right-wing theory that there is (or was) a whistleblower at ABC News, claims the network gave its questions to Harris in advance of the presidential debate, and then perished in a car crash. [He adds that] Elon Musk, one of the world's wealthiest people and a large financial supporter of Trump's ground operation, predicted on his social media platform that Harris's first act if elected will be to ban X and arrest Musk.[1]

The rapid spread of such unfounded conspiracies highlights the dangerous intersection of wealth, political influence, and misinformation. Stacked atop the ever-growing mountain of lies and relentless conspiracy theories are the ceaseless media stories peddling the absurd and grotesque falsehoods that sacrifice the truth and social responsibility for mindless and often cruel political theater. Trump and his supine backers have ushered in an age of fabricated narratives that become clickbait for an ethically spineless media landscape, where both centrist and right-wing outlets spectacularize eye-popping stories for profit. Let's be clear, this ploy goes beyond a politics of mere distraction.

The merging of lies, ignorance, and violence was on full display when Trump in a presidential debate with Vice-President Kamala Harris falsely claimed that Haitian immigrants were stealing and eating pets in Springfield, Ohio. These racist lies did more than spurn endless memes and jokes on social media and late night comedy shows, they also produced a familiar pattern in which the city was subject "to bomb threats that shut down the elementary schools…swatting attacks meant to intimidate community members, [and a series] of high-speed-networked harassment[s] that over the last few years has largely focused on community events for queer and trans people."[2] Such lies give Trump's merry band of white supremacists and proto-Nazis the opportunity to smear immigrants, people of color, and anyone else considered disposable. In this instance, such language is more than

[1] Jonathan Chait, "Mark Robinson and the Republican Wackjob Problem What happens when you stop trying to keep out the kooks," New York (September 19, 2024). Online: https://nymag.com/intelligencer/article/mark-robinson-and-the-republican-whackjob-problem.html

[2] Melissa Gira Grant, "How Lies About Pet Eating Turned Into Bomb Threats," The New Republic (September 18, 2024). Online: https://newrepublic.com/article/186149/trump-springfield-haitian-immigrants-pets-origin

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a vehicle for spreading lies and misinformation. As Toni Morrison reminds us, "this systemic looting of language…does more than represent violence; it is violence."[1]

What is often overlooked in mainstream media discussions of attacks on immigrants, Black people, and other marginalized groups is the driving force behind these assaults: white nationalism. Trump's attacks on Haitian immigrants, for example, are frequently dismissed as mere racism when, in reality, they are part of a larger, insidious white nationalist agenda. These attacks are about more than just racism; they are a key aspect of white nationalism, which targets anyone who is not a white, wealthy, straight, Christian male. Under the guise of white replacement theory, a wide range of people—beyond just people of color—are "othered."

This same white nationalist logic underpins the far-right assault on women's reproductive rights, which seeks to control women's bodies in the name of preserving white dominance. This exclusionary agenda extends beyond moral failings within the corporate-controlled media, representing a broader and more dangerous convergence of power, technology, and language that defends the unthinkable, unforgivable, and indefensible. A stark example of this cruelty is Israel's use of booby-trapped pagers and walkie-talkies, which detonated in grocery stores, houses, and crowded squares inflicting horrific injuries on civilians, including children who suffered severe, penetrating, traumatic wounds to their heads, bodies, and limbs.[2] Such indiscriminate violence seeps into the fabric of daily life, marking the rise of a new era of "pedestrian warfare," where Palestinians are reduced to mere subjects in a macabre experiment of oppression and destruction. This type of cruel and indiscriminate destruction invades daily life without restraint, ushering in a new era of "pedestrian warfare" where Palestinians are reduced to subjects in a morbid experiment.[3] Joelle M. Abi-Rached, Associate Professor of Medicine at the American University of Beirut, describes this devastation as the "literal weaponization of electronic devices," underscoring the immense suffering and death inflicted by this strategy.[4]

These intertwined projects—rooted in white nationalism, patriarchal control, and the militarization of everyday life—are glaringly evident in the assault on women's reproductive rights, which seeks to control women's bodies, particularly encouraging white women to have more children out of fear that people of color are increasing in number. By focusing on reproductive control, white nationalism seeks to preserve and expand its dominance

[1] Toni Morrison, "Nobel Lecture" Nobel Prize [December 7, 1993]. Online: https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1993/morrison/lecture/

[2] Dan Sabbagh, Lili Bayer and Dan Milmo, "Pager and walkie-talkie attacks on Hezbollah were audacious and carefully planned," The Guardian (September 18, 2024). Online: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/sep/18/pager-and-walkie-talkie-attacks-on-hezbollah-were-audacious-and-carefully-planned

[3] Joelle M. Abi-Rached, "The View from Besieged Beirut," *Boston Review* (October 2, 2024). Online: https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/the-view-from-besieged-beirut

[4] Ibid.

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through the fear of a growing population of people of color. Together, these strategies reflect a broader agenda of racial and gendered control, where domination extends from the battlefield into the most intimate aspects of life. What we are witnessing is a calculated and deliberate assault on the very foundations of democracy, undermining the fabric of society with each repeated lie. This death dealing agenda and the conditions that produce it remain largely invisible in a "21st-century media ecosystem" that spews out language that merged corruption, lies, profits, and clouds of vagueness.

Under such circumstances, the underlying causes of poverty, dispossession, exploitation, misery, and massive suffering disappear in a spectacularized culture of silence, commodification, and cult-like mystifications. As civic culture collapses, the distinction between truth and falsehoods dissolves, and with it a public consciousness able to discern the difference between good and evil. Too many Americans have internalized what Paulo Freire once called the tools of the oppressor. They not only accept the shift in American politics towards authoritarianism, but they also support the idea itself.[1] Trump's enduring public support is a chilling reflection of his overt embrace of fascist politics. He openly calls for revoking the Constitution, boasts of wanting to be a "dictator for a day," and threatens to weaponize the presidency to imprison political opponents like Liz Cheney if he regains power.[2]

Trump's rhetoric of violence and hatred is not mere political theater—it is a calculated assault on the very foundations of democratic life. His words are designed to dismantle all vestiges of social responsibility and the social state, erode democratic institutions, and pave the way for authoritarian rule. Far from alienating his base, this dangerous rhetoric galvanizes it, exposing a deep and unsettling readiness among many to forsake democratic principles in favor of tyranny. In a just society, language is the lifeblood of justice, equality, and democracy. Yet, under Trump, language has become a weapon of division, driven by white nationalism, white supremacy, and fear. His apocalyptic vision is the canary in the coal mine, a stark warning of the perils that lie ahead if we fail to act. As the United States teeters on the brink of fascism, the corruption of language into a tool of violence and exclusion signals an urgent crisis. The stakes are nothing less than the survival of democracy itself.

[1] Philip Bump, "A lot of Americans embrace Trump's authoritarianism," *The Washington Post* (November 10, 2023). Online: https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2023/11/10/lot-americans-embrace-trumps-authoritarianism/

[2] Martin Pengelly, "Donald Trump vows to lock up political enemies if he returns to White House," *The Guardian* (August 30, 2023). Online: https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/aug/30/trump-interview-jail-political-opponents-glenn-beck

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Prof. Henry A. Giroux: An internationally renowned writer and cultural critic, Professor Henry Giroux has authored, or co-authored over 65 books, written several hundred scholarly articles, delivered more than 250 public lectures, been a regular contributor to print, television, and radio news media outlets, and is one of the most cited Canadian academics working in any area of Humanities research. In 2002, he was named as one of the top fifty educational thinkers of the modern period in Fifty Modern Thinkers on Education: From Piaget to the Present as part of Routledge's Key Guides Publication Series. In the same year, he delivered the prestigious Herbert Spencer Lecture at Oxford University. In 2007, he was named by the Toronto Star as one of the "12 Canadians Changing the Way We Think." He has received honorary doctorates from Memorial University in Canada, Chapman University in California, and the University of the West of Scotland. He is on the editorial and advisory boards of numerous national and international scholarly journals, and he has served as the editor or co-editor of four scholarly book series. He co-edited a series on education and cultural studies with Paulo Freire for a decade. He is on the Board of Directors for Truthout. His books have been translated into many languages and his work has appeared in the New York Times and many other prominent news media. He is interviewed regularly on a number of media.

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