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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

BY PAUL STREET

20.12.2020

On Capitalism, Racism, Trump, and Pandemo-Fascism



Photograph by Nathaniel St. Clair

The Covid-19 pandemic as it has played out in its favorite country the United States (home to a fifth of the world's Covid-19 deaths but just over a twentieth of the world's population) is a tragedy that will soon have claimed the lives of 1 in every 1000 Americans. It is also a fascism-tinged crime rooted in this nation's multiple, overlapping, and mutually reinforcing structures, institutions, policies, and ideologies of inequality and oppression. It reflects the failed state spiritual death and fascism that Dr. Martin Luther King, J. said would befall this nation if it did not move off what King called "the triple evils that are interrelated": capitalism, racism, and imperialism.

It is a crime of capitalism, the rapacious and parasitic system that digs up zoonotic viruses on its ever-expanding geographic frontier and then spreads those infections around the world in the flash of an historical eye.

Capitalism in its extreme U.S. form compels millions of vulnerable Americans to spend most of their waking hours renting out their commodified (and exploited) labor power in inadequately protected workplaces – or else go without the money income required to purchase basic life necessities distributed in commodity form.

It is a system that denies tens of millions of Americans adequate health care.

It is a system that dis-incentivized and otherwise prevented the provision of the medical supplies and personnel required to properly meet a pandemic that medical science and public health experts had been warning about for many years. A system obsessed with, and addicted to, short term investor class profit does not produce sufficient reserves of public health capacity for addressing a crisis on the scale of COVID-19.

Capitalism is an anarchic and competitive system that absurdly complicates medical production and distribution.

Capitalism saddles masses Americans with deadly co-morbidities, making them vulnerable to terrible COVID-19 outcomes by poisoning their environment and bodies with toxic food and chemicals.

Capitalism can't hit pause to meet a public health crisis without causing panic for investors and mass poverty and trauma for millions thrown out of work and off health insurance.

And that's just for starters.

COVID-19 19's U.S. rampage is also a crime of American racism, which forces tens of millions of non-white Americans to live in over-crowded residences without decent access to healthy food, medical care, and green space. Virulent American racism (as old as the republic's colonial origins) concentrates masses of Black, LatinX, and Indigenous people in jails, prisons, detention centers, reservations, and concentration camps that have proved to be COVID-19 breeding grounds.

Racism concentrates non-white employees in poorly paid production positions (e.g., the killing floors and processing departments of Midwestern meatpacking plants) and "essential worker" service jobs (nurses' assistants and retail clerks) that are especially vulnerable to infection. It also makes non-white urban residents especially dependent on public transportation, where infection risks are higher than in personal automobiles.

COVID-19's American storm is also a crime of American imperialism, the armed force behind the globalization that churns up and disseminates pandemics. The giant U.S. Pentagon System steals from existing and potential public health systems. Like a vast suction tube of death, it takes money, skills, personnel, and technology that should be invested in healing and social uplift at home and abroad and pours it all instead into a massive war-industrial complex that accounts for 40% of the world's military spending.

And COVID-19 American-style is also and at the same time a senseless outcome of Trumpism-fascism. Here I'm not going to go into the many ways in which the Trump regime thwarted a decent and humane response to the pandemic. The WHAT of that scandalous history is well known and [documented](#). I'm concerned mainly with the WHY of that criminal, mass-murderous "incompetence," which turned the U.S. into a Sanctuary Country for the worst pandemic in more than a century.

The mainstream common-sense explanation is that Trump didn't want to do or say anything that might undercut the economic growth he expected to ride to re-election. That's the main storyline I expected to go into the liberal American History textbooks that roll off the printing presses next year.

The problem with the convention explanation isn't that it's wrong. It isn't. But my sense is that the real story is much worse. When the full history is written, those of us willing to look are going to see that Trump's criminal COVID-19 conduct wasn't only about his malignant narcissism, selfishness, and electoral calculations but was also about Trump and Trumpism's malignant fascism. We'll learn that his epic public health "mismanagement" was bound up with the following 13 fascistic characteristics of the Trump regime and its Republifascist allies within and beyond Washington DC:

- +1. An eliminationist anti-urban/anti-cosmopolitan "heartland" allegiance that was content to let majority nonwhite and liberal cities (above all the early Covid-19 hot spot New York City) experience mass sickness and fatalities.
- +2. An eliminationist and neo-McCarthyite desire to paint out the other major capitalist party's efforts to control the spread of the disease as proof that the Democrat are a totalitarian socialist enemy of personal freedom and of America's supposedly glorious capitalism.
- +3. White-supremacist and eliminationist satisfaction with a virus that was disproportionately killing off people of color.
- +4. A Social Darwinian and eliminationist comfort with COVID-19's devastating impact on the aged and infirm – on old and sick "useless eaters" fascists have long wished to exterminate.
- +5 An initial politically eliminationist calculation that the virus would mainly target parts of the country controlled by the other major party.
- +6. A sexist, hyper-masculinist sense that masks and social distancing are unmanly signs of effeminate weakness and fear.
- +7. Hostility to science and expertise, seen on the climate issue as well, particularly pronounced in American fascism because of the special strength of evangelical Christianity and anti-intellectualism on the American right.
- +8. Extreme conspiratorialism, seen in such absurd claims as the charges that the virus was a Chinese hoax, that it was manufactured and released from a Chinese lab (to cripple America),

and that doctors inflated the number of COVID-19 deaths to garner higher insurance company payments.

+9. The bad science recommendation of herd immunity, accepted by Trump and his top coronavirus adviser Scott Atlas, a right-wing radiologist, according which the way forward was to actively advance the infection of “infants, kids, teens, young people, young adults, middle aged with no conditions” (to use the recently exposed words of former Trump administration science adviser Paul Alexander).

+9. Extreme nationalism, seen in the pretense that Trump was mounting a reasonable response with travel bans and border walls.

+10. A personality cult built up around Dear Leader Trump and a related sense that the “Stable Genius’s” special and powerful instincts and Will trumped any competing claims to authority on the part of mere scientists and public health professionals.

+11. An unshakable attachment to large-scale in-person hate rallies and other mass gatherings (e.g., the infamous White House gathering celebrating the confirmation of the evangelical Christian cult Supreme Court justice Amy Coney-Barrett).

+12. A drive to *purge the disloyal*, a category that included public health officials who dared to privilege their commitment to medical science and public health requirements over allegiance to the “Chosen One.”

+13. A continuing, fascism-intensified war not on the state per se but on what Pierre Bourdieu called “the left hand of the state” – the parts of government that serve the poor, the working-class majority and common good.

Let us never forget the top five pandemo-fascist Trump moments of 2020 beyond his mask-less campaign rallies and his Handmaid ceremony:

+1. The ordering of predominantly LatinX workers back into COVID-19-infected meatpacking plants out of trumped-up claim that the nation would run out of food if the nation’s bloody animal killing floors weren’t running at full capacity.

#2. The frothing July 4th speech he gave before unmasked white “heartland” fans not practicing social distancing amid openly fascist esthetics in the holy Fatherland setting of South Dakota’s Mount Rushmore. (In badly delivered prose penned by the his top political adviser, the fascist Stephen Miller, with the righteous George Floyd rebellion in mind, Trump proclaimed that “Our nation is witnessing a merciless campaign to wipe out our history, defame our heroes, erase our values, and indoctrinate our children... Angry mobs are trying to tear down statues of our Founders, deface our most sacred memorials, and unleash a wave of violent crime in our cities...They think the American people are weak and soft and submissive. But no, the American people are strong and proud, and they will not allow our country, and all of its values, history, and culture, to be taken from them.”)

+3. Trump refusing to wear a mask while his team loudly and tellingly played the song “Live and Let Die” as he visited a mask factory.

+4. Trump's insanely bright-orange-brushed and unmasked face as he posed like Mussolini, looking like a bad comic book villain while trying to seem strong and manly in the wake of his brief stay in a special presidential COVID-19 suite at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. (Trump then used his own recovery, enabled by his access to treatments and drugs not available to most COVID-19 patients, to downplay the virus's deadly impact).

+5. The Twitter encouragement he offered to far-right militia members opposing common sense public health measures in Michigan: "[Liberate Michigan](#)" (an inspiration for fascists who were found to have been plotting Michigan governor Gretchen Whitmer's kidnapping and murder).

It is true that, as I have heard many fellow activists and writers say, Trump might well have won a second term, his fascistic record aside, "but for COVID-19." It's chilling realization, supported by exit-polling data. But COVID-19 did not hit Trump's re-election like some chance contingency out of the sky. He and his administration blew American infection and death rates through the roof. Properly handled, the pandemic should not have killed more than 35,000 Americans by now. Trump owns the remaining 270,000 fatalities. He killed them. And this mass murder he perpetrated was all about the fascism and of course the capitalism, the racism, and the imperialism and the sexism, none of which are (to say the least) inconsistent with the fascism.

DECEMBER 18, 2020

This essay is based on my recent presentation on the [Revolution Nothing Less Show](#)

Paul Street's new book is [The Hollow Resistance: Obama, Trump, and Politics of Appeasement](#).