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## *Bad Faith Liberalism and the Politics of False Equivalency*



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“The past one would like to evade is very much alive.”

– Theodor Adorno

### **The Liberal Mantra of False Equivalency**

Right-wing violence, racial cleansing, and the repression of dissent in the United States are deeply embedded in a history that is being erased by far-right politicians such as Governor Ron DeSantis of Florida, various propaganda outlets such as Fox News (the Pravda of America), and anti-public pundits such as Tucker Carlson. There is also a refusal by many liberals such as Jonathan Chait, Mark Lilla, Ross Douthat, David Urban, Scott Jennings, Andrew Sullivan, and others to work through the past in order to recognize that “the spirit of the old fascism had never been truly vanquished” and that the enduring threat of

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fascism in the current historical moment poses a dangerous threat to democracy both at home and abroad.[1]

Regardless of how visible the fascist presence is in American society, there is a strong tendency among liberals to either look away or to suggest it has its counterpart in leftist politics, mostly defined as dogmatic. One consequence is that fascism's link to capitalism is buried, while liberals insist that the market still holds the key to freedom and prosperity. This position appears in its most well-known form in the work of Francis Fukuyama.[2] Yet liberal discourse, though coded in the language of moderation, amounts to a form of denial and diversion regarding the re-emergence fascist politics in American society—a politics whose dangerous threat is too often downplayed, misinterpreted. In this liberal appeal to a “both/sides,” politics with its crude balancing acts, the danger of a resurgent American fascism is divorced from what Theodor Adorno once termed a “species of regression” situated in a “shadow of the past that stretches into the present.”[3]

Many liberals adhere to a false-equivalency discourse in which they endlessly suggest that violence, extremism, demagoguery, and cult-like behavior at work in American society are committed by both the right and the left, as if one balances off the other. This conveniently leaves the center and liberals as the only voices of reason and moderation, willing and eager to offer the only acceptable political position in dealing with far-right authoritarianism. This “both sides” politics or politics of equivalency is characterized by a self-sustaining smugness that normalizes the idea that it is acceptable to give “equal weight to unsupported or even discredited claims for the sake of appearing impartial.”[4] This position has become a liberal mantra, increasingly used to argue that reactionary fascist political and populist traditions on the right, which embrace bigotry, rabid nationalism, militarized borders, unconditional domination, and white supremacy, are offset and equal to leftist positions that incorporate socialist ideals and critiques of neoliberal capitalism. As Nathan J. Robinson observes,

But this idea is fundamentally wrong, because it fails to acknowledge the massive difference between the Left and the Right, namely that the Right's brand of populism is a complete and utter swindle that involves scapegoating foreigners for social problems, while left “populism” is generally anti-racist and egalitarian.[5]

This “both sides” politics of equivalency turns a blind eye to the perils of neoliberal gangster capitalism and its fascist upgrade, populated by far right, neo-Nazis, and white supremacist groups who have pushed their ideas, values, and policies into mainstream

politics, culminating in the January 6 attack on the Capitol.[6] It also refuses to examine with any degree of clarity and moral urgency fascist politics as an outgrowth of capitalism's inability to fulfill its promises, exacerbated by its cruel, repressive, exploitative, and death-dealing policies. Claims that the fascist right is balanced off as a danger to democracy by an authoritarian left simply diverts attention from the ravages of neoliberal fascism and how its far-right authoritarians shape and use violence in the interest of consolidating power in the hands of the financial elite.

Within this comfortable binary, there is an ideological certainty, which conveniently ignores the massive violence, and poverty in "world globalized by capital and consumption." [7] At the same time, the claim also diverts attention from the full-scale attack on the ideals and promises of a socialist democracy. Lost from the alleged equal evils of both fascism and left politics is a thorough analysis of how neoliberalism in the current historical moment has failed to deliver on its promises of individual mobility and a better quality of life. Equally ignored are the disastrous economic and political consequences of neoliberalism's irrational belief that the market can solve all problems and is the template for structuring all values and social relations.

### **A Resurgent Fascism**

The American public does not live in the shadow of left authoritarianism. Rather everyday life is being shaped by the nightmare of a resurgent fascism. What the "both sides" argument ignores is that freedom in the service of democracy is dangerous because it demands not balance but informed judgments, truth, justice and what James Baldwin called "a daring certain independence of mind." [8] The appeal to balance falls prey to refusing to give due measure to a growing neoliberal fascism while failing to confront what Martin Luther King Jr. once called "the fierce urgency of now" and a "righteous fury." In doing so, the endless liberal appeals to balance run the risk of capitulating to what King Jr. warned was "an unfolding conundrum of life and history [in which] there is such a thing as being too late." [9]

Fascism in its upgraded version gets covered over in a variety of ways that the false equivalency arguments miss. Fascist violence is often ripped from its history of racial capitalism and blamed on rogue individuals; white supremacists in power are labeled as either exceptions to the rule or the focus is on their personal failings. Mass violence is disconnected from the extraordinary rise of far-right wing extremism in the U.S. a pervasive gun culture, and cult of violence that permeates every aspect of society—a

political and cultural fascist social formation that the FBI and other intelligence agencies call the greatest threats to the United States.[10]

Yet, in spite of the overwhelming presence of dark money from right-wing billionaires and corporations driving politics in the U.S., the growing number of fascist individuals, groups, policies, and an overt turn to align GOP with dictators all over the globe, fascist politics is treated as if it is a movement that shares its anti-democratic practices with an alleged populist left. The notion that left politics is as dangerous as fascism is beyond preposterous, it is dangerous. To the contrary, it is the far-right with its unlimited financial assets and political power that is passing legislation that bans books, forces academics to sign loyalty oaths and excludes teachers from talking about slavery, racism, and other anti-democratic issue in their classrooms. It is the right-wing populist/authoritarian movements, rather than left-wing intellectuals and social formations, that engage in voter suppression. It is the far-right that echoes Nazi ideology with its claim that whiteness and Christian nationalism are the lifeblood of citizenship, and that politics begins by making inclusive citizenship the enemy of the state. As G. M. Tamas has noted fascism has always exhibited a hostility to universal citizenship.[11] This fascist notion was recently echoed by Hungary's leader Viktor Orbán, a favorite of the GOP, who claimed he was against race mixing.[12] The spread of manufactured ignorance, the collapse of the line between the truth and falsehoods, the rise of toxic hate-spreading disimagination machines, and the attack on social provisions are not being waged by a left-wing movement, however diverse and fractured it may be.

### **Strange Voices and the Astonishing Vacancy of “both sides” Politics**

The politics of false equivalency is spreading like wildfire among liberals, functioning as a pedagogy of deflection and bad faith. A number of liberals and cultural apparatuses that extend from George Packer, Margaret Atwood, Jonathan Chait and the *New York Times* editorial board are claiming that the left is just as responsible as the right for the current attacks on public education, the truth, and democracy itself. Packer in an article on the role of education in a democracy quotes right-winger David Steiner for support when stating that “the pedagogy of social justice, [has] become a form of indoctrination.”[13] An astounding statement, given that the attack on public education is being waged by right-wing politicians and individuals against any issue that addresses social justice. It is not the left calling for the privatization, censorship, and defunding of public education. Also, it is progressive educators and not right-wing educators who are

now being muzzled or fired for talking about slavery and racial justice in their classrooms. [14]

I was at a Nexus conference in Amsterdam a few years ago that David Steiner attended. In response to a question I asked, he suggested that advocates of social justice were terrorists—an astounding piece of ideological nonsense that baffled a number of intellectuals at the conference.[15] It was not the left who waged a bloody attack on the Capitol a few years ago. It was not the left but many members of the American far right such as Steve Bannon who supported a recent attack on government buildings in Brasilia, the capital of Brazil's government—engineered and justified by Bolsonaro's false claim of election fraud.

In response to receiving the sixth annual Hitchens Prize, Margaret Atwood wrote an article in which she describes a political middle ground as a space of “Open democracy” and claims that the “moderate center is a preferable place to live.”[16] The implication being that both the right and the left occupy the space of totalitarianism. If I am not mistaken, it was the moderate center in the United States that waged war against the Vietnamese people, destroyed Iraq with its nonsense about the country harboring weapons of mass destruction, and in doing so triggered the deaths and displacements of millions of people; it was the moderate centrists who supported needlessly bombed Cambodia almost out of existence, and set the stage militarily for the ruthless Taliban to eventually govern Afghanistan. Atwood believes that on one side of the “Open democracy” position is the left and other side is the right. This is fundamentally wrong. Atwood's fear of “robotic followers” applies to the right not the left. The 43 million who voted for Trump are not from the left. It was conservatives and diverse members of the right who voted for Trump, the modern-day cult leader who loves the unintelligent and embraces pathological lying and violence as legitimate political strategies. There are many sides to any story but equating the right and the left in the age of impending fascism is just a cover for the false claim of “balance,” which is tantamount to an enervating silence, if not complicity, with the reality of a dangerous form of tyranny that constitutes a rebranded form of fascist politics.

This liberal appeal to balance is a strange and false argument suggesting that left politics bear as much responsibility, not to mention even has the power, for passing voter suppression laws and waging an attack on a bundle of social rights “linked to reproduction, childcare, and health [as well as] economic rights to ensure adequate economic and financial resources for a citizen's autonomy.”[17] It is not the left who are

engaged in censoring books, repressing often forgotten histories in classrooms, embracing conspiracy theories and the big lie about the presidential election, advocating for white supremacy, supporting white replacement theory, militarizing the planet, promoting ecological devastation, supporting crippling inequality, and prioritizing profits over human needs. The left often attacks these issues and connects them with the fascist turn that American politics has taken, especially with Trump's election in 2016.

### **Jonathan Chait's Crusade for "both sides" Politics**

One appalling example of this type of distortion present in so many false equivalency arguments was recently published by Jonathan Chait who has repeatedly attacked the left as code for defending centrist liberals—who seem to stand for very little other than the ethics of Goldman Saks, a destructive neoliberal capitalist economy, and a deep belief in the spirit of unchecked individualism.[18] Chait tends to constantly place people he identifies as left critics as “left authoritarians.”[19] He relishes painting liberals as unfortunate victims of left-wing slurs and unfounded, if not harsh, epithets. Delighting in the friend/enemy binarism, he has argued in *New York Magazine* that left critics have wrongly and disingenuously resorted to excessive rhetorical insults to dismiss liberal critics such as himself. In this case he develops this argument by analyzing the term “reactionary centrism.”[20] He bolsters this argument with the empty assertion that the left's use malicious language is a form of violence because “their arguments leave no room for forceful criticism, at least not in any terms that might be used by conservatives.”[21] In a 2015 attack on Naomi Klein, he argued that she committed the unthinkable crime of suggesting that corporate capitalism was destroying the environment.[22] Unthinkable? Of course, it may be that the left's critiques of systemic racism, book burning, ecological devastation, fascism, the end of women's reproductive rights, massive inequality, and the rise of the carceral state leave little room for those liberals and conservatives who support directly or indirectly such positions. Has Chait read David Harvey, Robin D. G. Kelly, Angela Davis, Stanley Aronowitz, Michal D. Yates, Cornel West, Noam Chomsky, Jeffrey St. Clair, and Thomas Piketty, all of whom have offered serious critiques of liberalism and neoliberalism? Why not mention serious left intellectuals rather than what he refers to nebulously as “left-wing commentators.”

Chait's line of argument is purely performative and politically disingenuous. Not only is it code for defending the toxic policies of neoliberalism, but it also devalues the very real war against democracy being waged by the far-right by suggesting the left engages in the same struggle. While there are always individuals on the left whose actions may be

disreputable, the left is far from the threat posed by the far-right in America. This type of balancing act by Chait legitimates an utterly bankrupt notion of theoretical analysis, journalistic inquiry, and public intervention. There is a hidden violence in the “both sides” argument. It dissolves any understanding of how diverse forms of economic, political, educational, and religious fundamentalism in the United States have evolved into an upgraded form of fascism and in doing so refuses to acknowledge that capitalism and democracy may be antithetical. In this argument, historical memory becomes historical amnesia, and politics is emptied out of any substance.

Moreover, Chait’s appeal to balance fails to recognize that there is no middle ground between fascism and democracy and in doing so upholds a broken political system incapable of making hard choices about the future of American society. There are important differences between white supremacists and racial justice advocates, climate devastation critics and flat-earth theorists, and election deniers and those who support legitimate and fair elections. Claiming the right and the left share the same space and inhabit the same immoral equivalence amid fascist tyranny is more than a dishonest intellectual and political cop out; it is form of ethical self-sabotage that makes real power invisible and contributes, however indirectly, to the normalization of a destructive ideology and political movement that produces misery, dehumanization, violence, and hate. Moreover, it is an argument that in its sweeping generalities provides red meat for what Jeet Heer calls “reactionary mobs.” One of Heer’s Twitter responses to Chait captures this notion perfectly. Heer writes: “There are enemies on the left, but you should criticize them in cogent & accurate terms rather than riling up reactionary mobs that can just as easily be turned against liberals.”[23]

I focus on a recent piece by Jonathan Chait because it is symptomatic of his use of the false equivalency argument to smear left critics. Moreover, it is important to note that Chait is a much-quoted writer and prides himself on being a balanced and compassionate liberal. He also writes for a much-read publication, *New York*. In his article, ““Ron DeSantis’s Florida Is Where Free Speech Goes to Die,” Chait criticizes DeSantis’s “woke” policies, his ties to far-right organizations such a Turning Point, his endorsement of conspiracy theories, alignment with Christian nationalists, bullying of Disney, and his attack on education.[24] All well and good, except throughout the article he finds room to attack the left and its alleged illiberalism, which he suggests drives people into supporting far-right policies pushed by DeSantis. All of this is done rhetorically through a sleight of hand in which the left pops up as demagogic, though not as bad as DeSantis and his merry

band of Christian nationalist and white supremacists. Of course, there is no mention by Chait of his own support in 2002 and 2003 of the War in Iraq, which may have been one of the worse foreign policy mistakes in American history.[25] Liberal centrists should focus on the substance of attacks made against their policies rather than resort to allegedly excessive rhetorical discourse used by alleged left critics.

Chait's rhetoric with its lack of scale and nuance is symptomatic of how left positions and politics are often used by liberals to offset, if not deny, the seriousness of a rising fascist politics. I would argue that this appeal to moderation is a self-serving boon for fascist politics and is emblematic of a liberal version of McCarthyism. That is, it censors left politics while being immune to the notion that a critique of capitalism and its destruction of a democratic social order is not only a legitimate position but goes further in connecting neoliberalism to a fascist politics. The defense of capitalism in Chait's "both sides" argument is hard to miss given his endless crusade against any viable form of leftist or socialist rhetoric, which makes it difficult to take this brand and defense of liberalism seriously, especially considering the rise of authoritarianism and white supremacist politics in the US. In his equation of what might be called right and left populism, he displays a conceit that tips over into a form of political complicity with far-right politics, in spite of his criticisms of the most egregious anti-democratic policies by politicians such as Governor Ron DeSantis, former President Trump, and other political extremists. He fails to acknowledge that it is the far-right, not the left, who exhibit an extreme fear of living with difference and reproduce and celebrate the biopolitical blight, misery, and suffering caused by gangster capitalism, which as Alain Badiou once noted "dissolves everything in the frozen waters of selfish calculation." [26] It is the far-right rather than the left that is cancelling out the future and threatening the very life of the planet.

### **Neo-Nazi Hysteria and the Spectacle of Violence**

Since Trump's election in 2016, the incidence and acceptance of violence have soared. This is especially true of far-right individuals and groups along with extremist members of the Republican Party who have downplayed down the extremists calls for civil war and violence as merely a political tactic. A number of studies have made clear that it is disingenuous to use 'both sides' rhetoric when discussing violence in the United States.[27] Most of the violence is coming from the far right rather than the alleged left (which seems to include anyone left of Donald Trump).

The repeated calls for civil war, the belief that violence is necessary to reinstate Trump as the rightful president of the United States, and the theory of white replacement theory and



the strategy of accelerationism is part of the far-right playbook of politics. The notion of accelerationism is especially crucial to understand in terms of the role that violence plays as an element of far-right politics. As Clarke and Wilson state:

What unites the disparate elements of the far-right today is the concept of accelerationism, a violent extremist strategy aimed at triggering the downfall of current systems of government through repeated acts of extreme violence. Accelerationism is essentially a tactical doctrine elevated to an end goal: rocking the ship of state until it capsizes. The aim is to provoke a general crisis that must magically unlock all future possibilities. Civil wars thus function as fantasies of grand catharsis. But what comes after this satisfying showdown is unclear: or, rather, is left open to individual taste, of which there are many along the far-right extremist spectrum.[28]

Moreover, it is far right policies that have been used to attack trans youth, demand loyalty oaths from teachers, reclaim the language of the Confederacy, deny women's reproductive rights, and engage in migrant bashing. It is the right-wing election deniers and anti-intellectuals who are waging attacks on election workers, school board members, and librarians. This violence comes out of a mindset of ignorance, cult-like thinking, and a willingness to use violence to promote political opportunism and concentrate power in the hands of the GOP. It comes from the right not the left. Yet, many liberals in the mainstream media and other outlets endlessly equate falsely the violence and ideological dogmatism of the far right with the actions of the left. But who exactly are the people on the left comparable to Marjorie Taylor Greene, Matt Gaetz, Paul Gosar, Ron DeSantis (the post popular right-wing demagogue) and other neo-Nazis and conspiracy theorists who support the January 6th siege? The Republican National committee officially declared that the January 6<sup>th</sup> bloody attack on the Capitol was an expression of "legitimate political discourse." [29] Even worse, as reported in *The Guardian*, far-right congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene has bragged that had she and the former Donald Trump White House strategist Steve Bannon been in charge of organizing the insurrection at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, the violent crowd would have won, and everyone in it "would've been armed." [30] This is not to suggest that violence on the part of the left has not taken place in the United States in the last decade, but it is minuscule and quite minor in scope and magnitude compared to right wing violence—any equivalency falsely emphasizes similarities while overlooking crucial differences between the right and left. As William Braniff, START director of the Homeland Security and Government Affairs

Committee, testified before the Congressional Homeland Security and government Affairs committee in 2019:

Among domestic terrorists, violent far-right terrorists are by far the most numerous, lethal and criminally active. Over the last several decades, they are responsible for more: failed plots; successful plots; pursuits of chemical or biological weapons; homicide events; and illicit financial schemes than international terrorists.[31]

### **The Right-Wing Attack on Education and the Crimes of the Alleged Illiberal Left**

Chait's rhetoric mimics Trump's response to the Nazi violence during the Unite the Right event in which he claimed that there were good people on both sides. Good people among Nazis? Really? Chait's fear of the left's criticism of fascism, mass inequality, the attack on women's rights, hatred of public education, suppression of history, censorship, the GOP claims that the press is the enemy of democracy, and other issues make him complicit with the very right-wing groups his empty rhetoric is criticizing. It is interesting that he uses the term "illiberal left" when chastising left critics. The term bears an uncanny resemblance to Orbán, Hungary's demagogic president, who bashes democracy with the term "illiberal democracy." For instance, in criticizing DeSantis's "anti-woke" policies in the schools, he adds: "DeSantis is one of many right-wing politicians who have noticed that the spread of a strain of reductive, hypermoralized left-wing discourse on race and gender affords them an opportunity to posture as champions of universalism and simple common sense."

In some instances, his attempt to indict left politics as part of a broader critique against right-wing repressive policies borders on the absurd. For instance, Chait in a January 26 article for *New York Magazine* attacks DeSantis's ban on an advanced placement course in African American studies from being taught in Florida high schools. All well and good until he goes off the rails by including an attack on Critical Race Theory, stupidly suggesting that it is the source of many illiberal ideas rather than a powerful academic tradition that focuses on how patterns of racism are ingrained systemically in the law, housing, criminal justice system, and other modern institutions. He writes:

Critical race theory is a framework of legal and social analysis that seeks to understand how racism can be perpetuated through formally race-neutral methods. CRT is explicitly an alternative to liberalism, and it has spawned many radical and (obviously, by definition) illiberal ideas and policies. Actions like speech codes and efforts to deplatform conservative speakers on campus are usually inspired by critical race theory.

The left has a long history of fighting for schools as a public good, increasing funding for public education, smaller classes, giving teachers control over the conditions of their labor,

and supporting teachers who protest book banning, censorship, teaching for the test, and other neoliberal forms of educational repression.[32] Chait's reference to "hypermoralized left-wing discourse on race and gender" in the face of white supremacist attacks on both is disingenuous and erases the historical and contemporary struggles by the left to connect education with the most critical and informed conditions and pedagogical practices crucial to an education that is just, fair, critical, and accessible for all children. He states in the same article that in the face of a vicious anti-democratic attack on higher education, especially in Florida and other right wing governed states "And while I do not think the rise of post-liberal progressivism represents anything close to the biggest problem facing America, I do believe it is a problem that has anathematized dissent at many elite universities, private schools, media and entertainment organizations, nonprofits, and other progressive spaces." Is this a serious critique? Does he have any idea of what the political, economic, and social conditions are that has pushed America to the brink of fascism? Does he really think the left is responsible for this economic, political, and cultural nightmare at work in the U.S, and increasingly throughout the globe.

Does Chait really believe in the call for moderation in the face of a thundering fascist movement in the US? This is not cautious diplomacy or measured rhetoric; it is an astonishing form of political betrayal and moral vacuity. Does he really believe the election deniers, QAnon idiots, and hyper militias with their hyped-up masculinity are less dangerous or pose less of a threat to democracy by the presence of a progressive left? He goes as far as to imply that DeSantis' fascist attack on schooling is, in part, a legitimate but irrational response to "progressive overreach." This position is more than a back hand critique aimed left politics; it also underestimates the dangerous nature of DeSantis's fascist ideology, policies, and authoritarian sympathies.[33] Rather than being a response to the boogeyman notion of "progressive overreach," DeSantis's policies are geared to attack any individual, business, or sports team, for instance, which disagrees with his regressive racist policies and white supremacist ideology. This is evident in his attack on corporations such as Disney, the National Hockey League, both of whom are too "woke" for DeSantis.

### **The Politics of Looking Away in Time of Fascist Tyranny**

Is Chait reacting to progressive overreach or simply to a form of fascist politics that he does not want to confront, especially in light of liberal support for the reactionary ideology and neoliberal economy that gave rise to the Trump, DeSantis, Abbott, and other right-wing politicians. At the end of his essay, Chait once again makes a plea for analytic

balance, which does nothing more than suggests that authoritarianism encompasses in some bizarre equal fashion both the left and right at this historical moment in the United States. This view is as irresponsible as it is dangerous and covers up a fascist threat that is real and should be apparent to any thoughtful thinking citizen. Not only does it display how the liberal imagination in a time of tyranny has collapsed into limited political horizons, it also renders the real threat of fascism less visible while contributing to a “both sides” logic that functions as a form of depoliticization. Such arguments hide in the shadows of fascism and further undermine civic culture, social justice, and the radical imagination. As Katrina Vanden Heuvel has argued, the liberal commitment to an outlandish “ideal of objectivity” often means “forcing balance where there is none.” This both unethical and part of a disingenuous perspective that is not “part of the proud and essential tradition of truth telling and evaluation...At best, it’s lazy. At worst, it is an abdication of ...responsibility.”<sup>[34]</sup>

The public’s lack of awareness of the real danger fascism poses in the United States runs the risk of reproducing a form of historical amnesia which translates into a dangerous incapacity to question the world around them. The liberal claim that authoritarian populism bonds the left and the right is more than fundamentally wrong, it also underestimates and downplays the dire necessity to combat the spread of fascist politics. Left and right-wing politics cannot be discussed as part of the same tendencies. To do so, is to ignore the core features that are distinctive to two vastly different political positions. Put simply, the left is defined by its call for social justice, equality, and democratic values whereas the far-right embraces injustice, inequality, violence, hierarchy, and the abolition of civil rights as its core political principles. Chait’s claims represent more than what Martin Luther King Jr. once called “the appalling silence of the good people.”<sup>[35]</sup> On the contrary, they represent an ideological fiction that reduces the truth to a balancing game, one that is as dangerous as it is irresponsible.

The liberal attack on left politics as a way of addressing and criticizing fascism creates a language that makes it easier to look away from the unspeakable forces now shaping American politics. The real threat to the United States comes from right-wing demagogues whose discourse is wrapped in xenophobia, white supremacy, and nativism. Trump’s call to make America great again offers up a history in which racial and economic injustices are the primary organizing principles of society—a time shaped by the historical legacy of the Confederacy, a time in which white men ruled, and racial cleansing offered a rationale for normalizing racism and genocidal crimes. As Bill Fletcher Jr. cogently observes

MAGA is not merely a catchy political slogan infused with a regressive reading of history. It is a visible and unapologetic claim to building a social formation that constitutes what he calls a neo-Confederate bloc. He writes:

The current incarnation of right-wing populism aims to create a future for the US based on a reconfigured US, something akin to the pre-1912 country, if not being a 21st century version of the Confederate States of America. A neoliberal right-wing combined with a far-right semi-fascist tendency has resulted in the development of what can be understood as a “neo-Confederate” political bloc.[36]

Liberalism’s illusionary appeal to balance, unmitigated objectivity, and the rhetoric of “both sides” is not only an assault on the truth and the demands of social responsibility, but also an attack on the civic imagination, moral witnessing, democracy, and the institutions that make them possible. It is a rhetorical ploy which functions as a form of social magic in which the economic, political, educational, and cultural conditions along with the material and racial power relations that give rise to fascist politics in the U.S. disappear. Or worse, are equated with left politics.

### **Conclusion**

The liberal discourse of false equivalencies represents a sleight of hand and an overt strategy for covering up the current depth, reach, and danger of fascism. The challenge of the current moment cannot get lost in a dizzying rhetorical emphasis on the “both sides” argument. What is needed is not a call for balance and objectivity, but a political project, vision, and willingness to challenge and defeat fascism at every level of society. Fighting against fascism as part of a broader politics for economic, personal, and political rights is necessary but not enough. Critique needs to be connected to a discourse of possibility infused with “a positive, forward-looking program for real change—a program that gives people something to fight for, not just something to fight against.”[37] If the left is to build upon the visions and programs being developed by a number of progressive social formations, it needs to embrace and reassert the symbolic and pedagogical dimensions of struggle. It needs to affirm and make clear that changing consciousness and institutions of power are related and “will have to change together, or they will not change at all.”[38]

What is at stake in the current historical moment in which fascism is gaining ground across the globe is for progressives and left individuals and groups to make critical education central to politics in order to build a mass base and united front necessary for creating a multi-racial, working-class movement willing to demolish fascism and build a radical democracy.

Fascism cannot be written off as an historical relic confined to the past, it is with us once again, and its threats of domination and genocidal violence are too urgent to be underplayed or overlooked. The danger of fascism is no longer contained merely in a reading of the past; it is now ready to devour the present. We need to renounce the regressive call for balance and make visible and confront the fascist plague that threatens the planet and the future.

### **Endnotes**

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