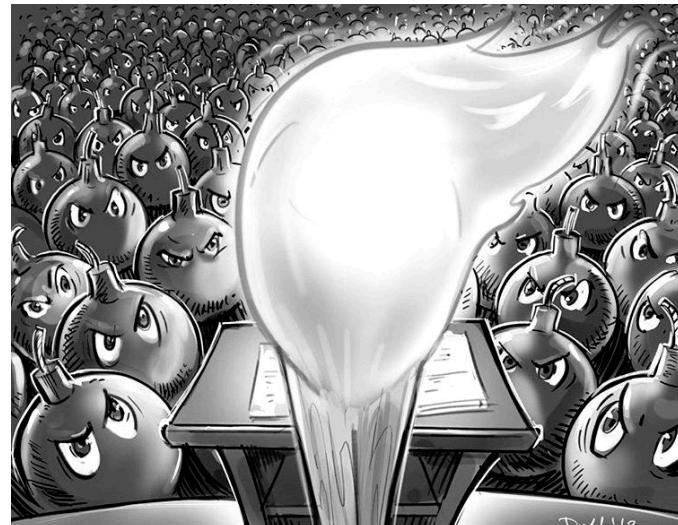


# TRUMP'S RALLIES PROVE IT: HE'S A FASCIST

It is both strange and disconcerting that almost none of the mainstream reporting on Trump's rallies examined their clear similarities with staged rallies in Nazi Germany and fascist Italy. **Much like Nazi rallies, Trump's rallies seek to turn politics into a grandiose theater of nativism, while presenting the head of state as a kind of demigod.** In addition, there is the preaching of hate, which functions as a kind of quasi-religious experience used to trade off and amplify mass anger largely directed at those considered enemies of the state - including women of color (the Squad) who are criminalized by virtue of their political beliefs, race and ethnicity. Seizing upon the potentially violent energy of his followers, Trump transforms their heightened anxieties and collective fears into a mass disdain for Muslims, immigrants, Black people, women and others.

The fascist spectacle is used to unleash the collective passions of abhorrence, loathing and cruelty. The most sinister elements of the fascist spectacle are at work in Trump's mobilization of a toxic populism. As politics scholar John Keane points out on The Conversation ([theconversation.com](http://theconversation.com)), this is a populism that in the name of an imagined people necessitates "demagogic leadership" and "encourages attacks on independent media, expertise, rule-of-law judiciaries" and other institutions designed to hold power accountable. Trump's manipulation of his followers feeds upon a right-wing populism that uses the logic of disposability as a driving force of social abandonment and the machinery of social death. This populism thrives on the energies of the dead.

Trump's racism, his demonizing of others and his call to suppress dissent makes the appeal to violence a legitimizing tool of state terrorism. **Trump's rallies pathologize politics by promoting a culture of fear that reverses the process of identification from compassion for the other to a feral hatred and contempt.** At the same time, Trump's spectacles -



while appealing to his base - could not succeed without the presence of the conservative media ecosystem and a mainstream press that serves largely to heighten the effects of the Trump media show. Moreover, a number of commentators and almost no Republicans have condemned Trump's overt racism. In this scenario, there are few moments of profane illumination or self-reflection, except for the way such events are taken up in the alternative media.

We have arrived at a historical moment when the interface of violence, fear, racism and new technologies are strengthening and mobilizing a political formation steeped in a species of white nationalism. This formation turns fear and the pleasure of humiliation into the immediacy of a spectacle that delivers the fantasy of collective revenge as a central part of presidential power and electioneering. Let's be clear. **At the heart of Trump's rallies is a manufactured pageant that trades in violence, cruelty, humiliation and domination as part of his campaign of terror that makes the elemental structures of democracy and**

**the social sphere dysfunctional.** Trump's spectacle operates off fear rather than persuasion and, in doing so, reinforces the ominous anti-intellectual forces that drive his presidency.

Trump unapologetically operates on the assumption that only white people can be citizens, a cornerstone of white nationalism. By politicizing racial taunts and reinforcing the assumption that citizenship is the exclusive terrain of whites, Trump turns politics into part of a culture of war that trades in divisiveness and friend/enemy divides. What is clear is that Trump's rallies echo a fascist past that uses racism and nativist narratives of racial purity as a form of mass entertainment. Trump's rallies thus make clear that politics has degenerated into a war on justice and any vestige of democracy. Moreover, Trump has given further legitimacy to what has become a global phenomenon of right-wing populism, "the transformation of class to a mass society." That is, class is no longer defined in terms of inequalities in wealth, power and resources, but as a generalized mass defined by the need to transfer power to a leader who speaks and acts on behalf of the multitude.

Trump has a predatory instinct for mobilizing hatred and whipping up a regressive release of mass emotions in which a narrow Nazi-style "blood and soil" ethos replaces humanitarian ways of being. This is a discourse that puts the meaning of justice, identity and citizenship on trial and could lead eventually to the imprisoning and killing of those deemed enemies of the people.

Trump's presidency reinforces an unchecked racism and nativism through conservative and mainstream cultural apparatuses and pedagogical practices that further normalize a right-wing populism and enhance the global standing of authoritarianism. The public sphere is now saturated with spectacles of violence, thoughtlessness and a mind-numbing anti-intellectualism. At work here is an ongoing project to transform culture into a theatrical performance, while quickening, without apology, a fascist politics that has now become a central element of governance.

**Rather than kill democracy through a military coup or a show of state force, Trump eviscerates democracy through a cultural politics that hollows out and destroys those institutions that produce critically engaged citizens.** This is a soft form of fascism, a separatist politics rooted in the divisive lens of white supremacy and the hatred of democracy. Under Trump, reality has become a toxic melodrama played out through a relentless display of hyper-masculinity, ultranationalism and a culture of utter cruelty that accelerates the death of the unwanted.

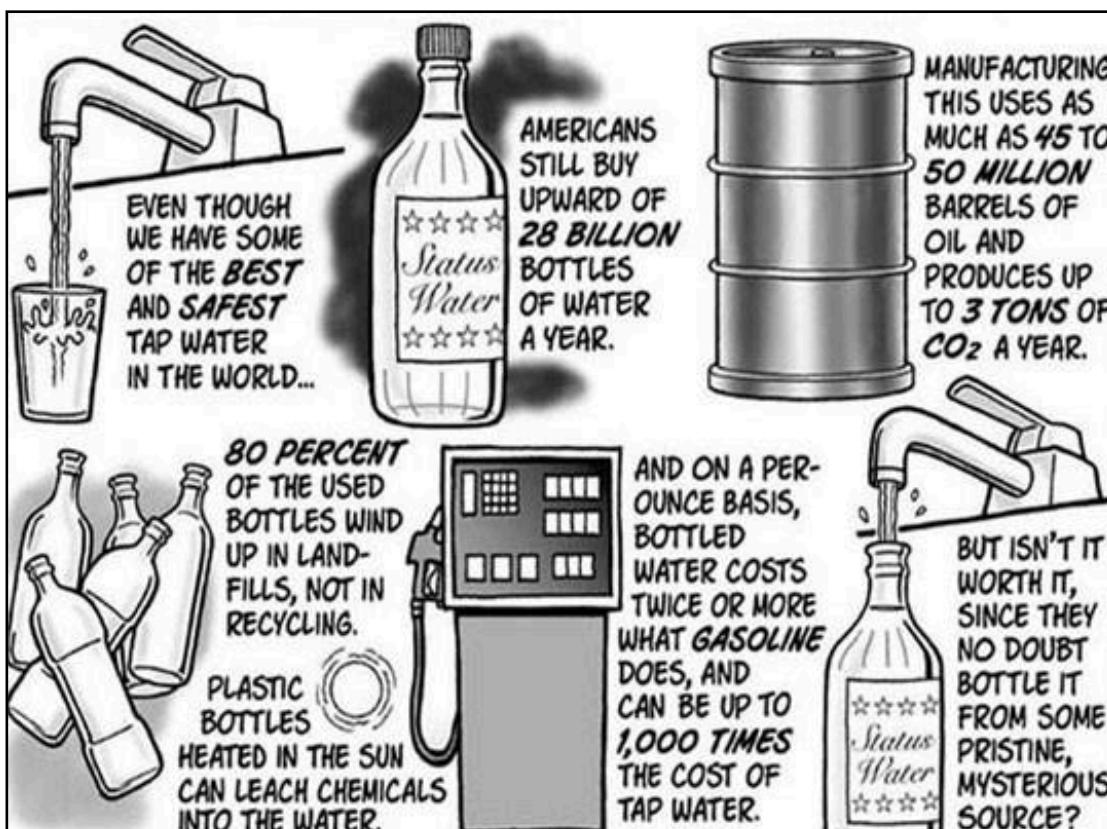
White nationalism is now being delivered nationally via emotional taunts parading as spectacle, entertainment and manufactured drama. The making of politics as theater opens up a new connection between contemporary fascist politics and a fascist past. **Ilhan Omar was right in calling Trump a fascist.**

**Henry A. Giroux**

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