

We Are Entering a New Totalitarian Era

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In this interview for Pacifica Radio's "[Covid, Race and Democracy](#)," Ajamu Baraka warned of a new era of totalitarian neoliberalism.

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Ann Garrison: On January 20, we saw Joe Biden carry on about “unity” behind seven-foot fences topped with razor wire and 25,000 plus National Guard troops [deployed](#). One friend of mine said that this pointed to an irony deficiency. Is there anything you’d like to say about it?

Ajamu Baraka: Well, I think it is ironic, but it’s quite understandable that the kinds of activities that the US has been involved in promoting and supporting globally—undermining democracies, subverting states, undermining and destroying any semblance of the rule of law—have basically come back to haunt them. You have a militant movement in the US partially inspired by the inability of the state and the system to address their material interests and to look at their concerns regarding their own understanding of democracy and its deficiencies. They feel like they lack space to articulate those views, and they’ve decided to engage in militant actions to make sure that their voices are heard, and they believe that they are upholding democracy.

And their experience with the state made them feel justified in advancing their concerns about democracy in violent forms. The state has demonstrated to them that the way you defend democracy is through state violence. So they were taking their defense into their own hands and bringing it right back to the center of empire. Some of us call that blowback.

AG: For the past four years, liberals on the coasts have excoriated the white working class in the middle of the country, whom they perceive to be deplorable Trump supporters. Do you think that this is helpful?

AB: No. Not only is it not helpful, it is inaccurate and it has helped to create the narrative that many of these forces have embraced; that is the centerpiece of their grievances. They

believe that liberals and the liberal order have not addressed their needs, their interests. They believe that the economic elites are only out for themselves and that therefore they needed to rally behind Trump, a billionaire who claimed that he understood their interests and would fight for them because nobody else was.

So this characterization of them as deplorables, and as either Nazis or Nazi-like, is not only not helpful but also contradictory in the sense that those folks who level those charges still have not been able to explain why the Trump presidency happened.

For example, some nine million people who voted for Trump in 2016 had voted for Barack Obama in 2012. Liberals can't explain why, after four years of constant anti-Trump rhetoric, the Trump forces expanded their ranks by another 11 million voters. So this is something in play that's a little bit more sophisticated than these people just being deplorables or Nazis. And that something has to be interrogated. It has to be extracted. It has to be understood if you're going to have a politics to counter it. And right now the liberals have not understood where these elements are coming from because they have basically painted those 75 million people as a monolith of deplorables.

The neoliberals have constructed a politics that is going to result in a continuation of the same conditions, politically and economically, that created what they pretend to be most opposed to—the Trump movement. So this is the failure of imagination, the failure of critical analysis, the embracing of illusions that has characterized much of the politics in the US for a couple of decades now. And we see the consequences of that with us every day.

AG: In the 48 hours after Biden became president, Israel bombed Syria, killing a family of four, a US convoy of trucks crossed into Syria to steal oil yet again, a double suicide bombing in Baghdad killed 32 people and *Foreign Affairs*, the journal of the US Council on Foreign Relations, published a piece with the headline "[The Myth of a Responsible Withdrawal from Afghanistan](#)," which said, "the Biden administration should accept that there is no feasible middle way for a responsible withdrawal." What do you think is next?

AB: The continuation of policies that have resulted in the US being bogged down in Afghanistan for two decades, policies that will ensure that the wars that the US is involved in will continue. There will be a continuation of the commitment to US global full-spectrum dominance. In other words, violence is still at the center of the neoliberal project. And they intend to reintroduce that instrument under the Biden administration.

There were reports leading up to the election that Democratic Party-associated elements were secretly suggesting to the Afghan authorities that they would not have to worry about a peace process being executed once Joe Biden came to power. And they made the argument using some of the same terms and framework that we saw in that article in *Foreign Affairs*, that the US had a responsibility to remain in Afghanistan. And so they will fully prepare to undermine whatever progress was made for extracting US forces from that territory.

"There will be a continuation of the commitment to US global full-spectrum dominance."

So we're not surprised to see the kind of elements that Biden has brought to his administration. These people were part of the Obama Administration, and they are committed to the US national security strategy, which is attempting to maintain US global

hegemony using the instrument that they believe they are dependent on now, which is in fact global violence.

AG: Yesterday, I signed a petition to Twitter to restore [@real Donald Trump](#), the Twitter account of the 45th president of the United States. I didn't share the petition on my social media pages because I didn't want to have to fend off a lot of cancel culture, but I had enough faith in Pacifica to think I wouldn't get kicked off the air for sharing it in the broadcast version of this conversation. What do you think of Twitter's suspension of Trump and [70,000](#) more accounts that they said were linked to the QAnon conspiracy theory?

AB: I think it was quite troubling. I understand the disgust, the revulsion people have to Donald Trump. We know who Donald Trump is. He's a sociopath, he's a white supremacist. He's despicable, but Donald Trump is, in fact, America. Donald Trump represents the kind of attitude and the kinds of values that made the US settler state what it is today.

So, this notion on the part of the liberals that he is some kind of aberration is completely ridiculous. In fact, it's ahistorical, but because of the disgust and because of the very serious legitimization crisis the US is facing, and the concern that neoliberal politicians have with the possibility of a return of Donald Trump, they have used the incident on January 6th as their opportunity to not only target Donald Trump as a person, but to target his "movement," to undermine an above ground, legal political tendency, a tendency that generated 75 million votes.

If they can move against Donald Trump and make a connection between his speech and what occurred on January 6 in order to justify a permanent ban on someone who was the President of the United States with 88 million followers, then arbitrarily take down these other accounts that they say are "conspiratorial," and if people then cheer because they hate Donald Trump, we are seeing a monumental mistake being made by liberals who think that this state is their friend, and that this state will get rid of Donald Trump, but somehow be able to maintain a commitment to civil liberties.

"Donald Trump represents the kind of attitude and the kinds of values that made the US settler state what it is today."

No, they are in fact conditioning the public to accept the constraints of civil liberties, or to have faith in private capitalist entities to determine what is acceptable speech and information that can be disseminated.

I believe they are, in essence, setting up the kind of dystopia that we see in science fiction movies, where you have corporate interests that have a complete and total control over every aspect of our lives. And of course, complete and total control over the ideals that are disseminated in those kinds of totalitarian society.

So, this is a quite troubling and even more troubling because so many people don't recognize that it's dangerous. But it's quite slick because, like you said, you don't want to share your petition because you know people would go crazy if you said in public that you believe that Donald Trump's rights have been violated. So, this is a quite dangerous moment because what we see, in my opinion, is the hegemony of irrationality.

AG: Neoliberal militarists are comparing the Capital Riot to 9/11 and using it to justify the further militarization of Washington DC and [Biden's domestic terrorism bill](#). At the same

time, he has appointed infamous militarist Susan Rice to a new position, Director of Domestic Policy. Who do you think will become domestic targets during the Biden-Harris years?

AB: Anyone who is involved in oppositional politics, including those elements that are part of the Black Lives Matter movement, and anyone else who questions US colonial policies. Anyone who will advance sharp analysis of the capitalist state, who will question some of its dominant ideals, who might even suggest that police forces should be withdrawn from certain neighborhoods. And anyone who would advocate better relations with the so-called adversaries of the US, like the Chinese and the Russians.

There's no telling what is going to be seen as acceptable speech and political practice because we are entering a new totalitarian era. So I think anybody who is in opposition to the hegemony of the neoliberal project is at some point over the next few years going to experience the heavy hand of the state.

Let me just say this about the state that we've been talking about. People say that these Big Tech entities—Twitter, Facebook, Google, YouTube, etcetera—are private corporations, and that therefore they have no obligation to protect free speech rights: We need to make a correction. These entities are of course private, but the essence of neoliberalism is the spinning off of elements of the state that are public to private entities. So what we have with these Big Tech companies is, in fact, the spinning off of the function of speech monitoring and massive surveillance to these private companies.

These companies are in fact, from my point of view, part of the ideological state apparatus. They are part of the state, just like the private corporate media is part of the state. So we have to expand our understanding of what we refer to as the state.

AG: A lot of people are frightened, particularly Black, Brown, and Jewish people, and most likely Asians now given all the bipartisan China-bashing underway. People, especially in these communities, have good reason to be frightened. And a lot of people are using the word fascist as they have for the past four years. But you've warned that neoliberal fascism will also get worse. Could you tell us what you mean by neoliberal fascism?

AB: Well, first let me say that it's quite understandable, and we should be quite concerned about some of the more hardcore elements that we associate with the traditional right, who are quite capable and seem to be committed to using various methods to advance their political project. We saw some of those elements in the Capitol on January 6. So it's understandable that we be concerned with that, but I've been warning people also that we should be more concerned with the neoliberal elements that control the state and did even during the time that Donald Trump was occupying the executive branch. We have to remind ourselves, or at least come to the understanding, that neoliberalism is a right-wing ideology. It is a right-wing set of policies, including privatization, deregulation, globalization, so-called free trade, austerity, and reductions in government spending, all to empower the private sector and diminish the public sector. Neoliberalism has to be connected to its essence, which is neoliberal capitalism.

The turn to neoliberalism was born out of an act of violence. A neoliberal capitalist project was imposed on the people of Chile after the assault and the overthrow of Salvador Allende in 1973. So this is a right-wing, violent phenomenon. Okay? Now it's been able to dress itself up in the garb of state respectability, but it is a rightist tendency. And so that right-wing,

neoliberal, totalitarian element is the element that is now constricting the range of acceptable political activity. They are the ones that re-introduced McCarthyism, McCarthyism 2.0. They are the ones that are now moving to smash this political opposition in the form of the Trump movement. They are the ones that have allowed the FBI to create first, the Black identity extremist category to target us and to modify that with another term but the same objective—to target and undermine Black radical political opposition. So I've been making the argument that while we have been watching the theatrics of Donald Trump, the neoliberal state has been systematically conditioning the people to accept a new kind of totalitarianism. We've always had totalitarianism, but this is a new kind that will, they believe, ensure the continuation of their dominance.

"That right-wing, neoliberal, totalitarian element is the element that is now constricting the range of acceptable political activity."

And I'm suggesting to people that, even though we hate Donald Trump and the traditional right, we are in a position now where we have to defend their traditional bourgeois rights as well as our own, and not allow the acceptable space of political, ideological opposition to be reduced.

We know that the state will reconcile with the right. Their real opposition and the basis for a potential cross class united front is opposition to socialists and communists, those of us on the left. And we on the left we are the real targets of this settler political state. So we've been trying to warn people to be vigilant and not allow themselves to be manipulated by these very powerful forces. And it's very difficult because they control all of the major means of communications and thought dissemination. But we've got to, to the extent that we can, present an alternative perspective so that we can build the kind of opposition we have to build if we're going to survive this critical period.

AG: So it sounds like you think there's more we can do than duck and cover.

AB: We have to. Those of us who have been part of the Black Liberation Movement, we have survived because we have resisted, and we also have survived because we know that we have been through the worst. You see, this thing referred to as fascism is nothing new for us, a colonized people, people who have been enslaved. It has typically been called fascism only when white people do certain things to other white people.

When the Nazis were studying, how they were going to construct laws in Germany, they were studying the apartheid system in the US. The Germans practiced building concentration camps in their murderous assault on the territory today referred to as Namibia. So it's when these policies of brutality, of systematic violence, of rape, when they are moved from the periphery, from the colonial periphery to the Global North, that's when they become Hitlerist, the ultimate expression of violence.

King Leopold II in the Congo? That's written off. It's not something that's important, even though 10 million African people lost their lives. And we don't quantify the level of irrational violence, but we do say that we have an experience with this kind of irrational violence. And so we know we have to resist. And so we know that Donald Trump is not the worst US president. We know that things can in fact get worse. And what we do and have done is to prepare our forces, to resist, and to try to provide leadership to other resisters. Because we know even though it will get more difficult, we know that we are still on the right side of history. And there are enough people of conscience in this country who believe that we can

build a new, better world. We believe that once we can organize ourselves, even though it may be difficult for a while, we have a real possibility of not only surviving, but also transforming this backward society.

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