

# **US Election 2020 Alerts! Democracy under Threat; Coronavirus Catastrophe; Climate Change Destruction; War**

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## **Abstract**

*This article is about the lead-up to the 2020 US General Election and appears in the last edition of this journal before the vote takes place in that momentous event on November 3. In the article, four specific and inter-related existential threats and dangers are identified that would arise from the re-election of Donald J. Trump: the destruction of democracy in the US; a continuation of the ongoing coronavirus catastrophe in the United States and Trump's callous attempts to promote US capitalism and his own capitalist interests by refuting and/or ignoring the dangers from this or future viruses; a worsening of world-threatening climate change destruction in the light of its denial by Trump; and the increased possibility of (nuclear) war. First, however, some brief comments are made about the Trump persona. The article uses the concept of public pedagogy to explore Trump's rhetoric, pronouncements and associated policies and practices that threaten and promote hatred and fear, increasingly enable fascism, exacerbate both the coronavirus crisis and climate change destruction, and up the likelihood of (nuclear) war.*

**Keywords:** *the Trump persona, US election 2020, democracy under threat, coronavirus, climate change, war.*

## **The Trump persona**

According to Lance Dodes, a retired professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, Donald Trump is a sociopath. Sociopaths have only one goal, to enhance themselves (cited in Ganeva, 2019), a view backed up by Trump's niece, Mary Trump, a trained clinical psychologist, in her book *Too Much and Never Enough: How My Family Created the World's Most Dangerous Man*, a pre-publication copy of which was obtained by *The Guardian* (Pengelly, 2020). While 'pro-lifer' Trump's sexism and misogyny are well-known (e.g. Lange, 2018; Forrest, 2020), Marxist philosopher Peter Hudis has further described him as a misanthropist, someone who hates not just women but humankind in general (cited in Dogan, 2020; see also McLaren, 2020).

Absence of feelings for others, the hallmark of a sociopath; misogyny and misanthropy, along with his overt trademark racism and disablism (e.g. Cole, 2020a), are reasons enough to deny Trump a second term (why he ever got there in the first place is explored in Cole, 2020b). However, there are other real and concrete ongoing threats and dangers, all inter-related and associated with Trump. Peter McLaren (2020, 1) views Trump as the 'most heinous incarnation of the capitalist id', someone who 'loves profit and capital – dead labor – over living labor – people' (McLaren, 2020, 4, following Hudis, cited in Dogan, 2020). Arguing in a similar vein, August H. Nimtz Jr. (2019) has observed 'that Trump is a capitalist, the most authentic — certainly the most experienced — who has ever been in the White House' (Nimtz Jr. 2019). Nimtz Jr. elaborates, pointing out that nothing is more essential to capitalism 'than what its cheerleaders politely call self-interest', self-centeredness being Trump's most salient characteristic, with Trump treating his presidency as his personal business from which to profit. A hereditary capitalist, his unprecedented behaviour in the presidency is not an accident, it is shameless 'naked capitalism' (Nimtz Jr., 2019). Indeed, Trump epitomizes a 'system that

treats *everything* as a commodity for profitable deal-making’, and this makes contemporary US politics ‘so uniquely contentious and polarizing — not seen since its last major crisis, the Great Depression’ (Nimtz Jr., 2019). Being re-elected would facilitate the further promotion of US capitalism along with Trump’s ongoing parasitic existence as a luxury real estate capitalist (see Trump: The Trump Organization, 2020) in a unified endeavour.

### **The End of American Democracy?**

Mary Trump also stated in her book, not yet published as I write this, that as a result of his general persona, Trump’s re-election would spell ‘the end of American democracy’ (cited in Collman, 2020). To put flesh on the statement in her book, it is clear that Trump has already eroded democracy by attacking the principle of a ‘balance of powers’ by undermining the judicial system and the Congress, attempting to centralise power around himself and to destroy the ‘free press’ by declaring all criticism of him as ‘fake news’. On February 6, 2017, Trump tweeted: ‘*Any negative polls are fake news, just like the CNN, ABC, NBC polls in the election*’ (emphasis added) (cited in Stelter, 2017) and on January 7, 2019: ‘The Fake News Media in our Country is the real Opposition Party. It is truly the Enemy of the People! We must bring honesty back to journalism and reporting!’ (cited in Wagner, 2019). Not only is criticism of Trump designated as false, so indeed is anything with which he disagrees or that does not promote his self-interest (for an analysis of the nature of ‘truth’ in the era of Trump, see Agostinone-Wilson (ed.) 2020).

### **Promoting racism and enabling fascism**

Perhaps the greatest threat to capitalist democracy, however, is Trump’s promotion of racism and his associated enabling of fascist ideology, both accompanied by very real and dangerous developments in terms of ongoing political processes. I discuss all this in great detail in Cole, 2020a (reviewed,

along with Cole, 2020c in the 'Review Symposium' in this edition of this journal). In Cole, 2020a, as here, I use public pedagogy (put simply educational activity and learning that occurs outside of formal educational institutions in the sense of schools, colleges and universities)<sup>1</sup> as a theoretical lens through which to analyse discourses and associated policies and other practices by which promoting racism and enabling fascism is enacted.

A pivotal moment occurred on May 25, 2020: the police murder of African American George Floyd. Floyd died after a white police officer Derek Chauvin knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes as he lay handcuffed to the ground. His tragic death pushed Black Lives Matter (BLM) to centre stage and led to its exponential growth, both in the US and worldwide. This expansion has generated a backlash in the form of an escalation of both racism and fascism from Trump and the far right, unprecedented in contemporary US history.

After months of protest, when asked on July 14 by CBS reporter Catherine Herridge why he thought Black Americans were being shot by police officers, Trump replied: 'So are white people. So are white people. What a terrible question to ask. So are white people. More white people, by the way. More white people' (cited in Moye, 2020a).

David Smith, The Guardian's Washington DC bureau chief begins an article entitled, "'Words of a dictator": Trump's threat to deploy military raises spectre of fascism': "'When fascism comes to America, it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying a cross" goes an oft-quoted line of uncertain origin'. Smith (2020) goes on to describe how on June 1, with four US flags behind him, Trump threatened to send in the military against the American people, before crossing the road 'to pose for a photo outside a historic church while clutching a Bible'. As David Smith (2020) points out, he was only able to get there after heavily

armed police and the National Guard, mounted on horseback, fired teargas and rubber bullets to disperse peaceful BLM protesters and journalists. This provided a shocking split-screen moment on mainstream news outlets. Ron Wyden, a Democratic senator for Oregon, tweeted, ‘The fascist speech Donald Trump just delivered verged on a declaration of war against American citizens. I fear for our country tonight and will not stop defending America against Trump’s assault’, while Kamala Harris, a Democratic senator for California, told the MSNBC network, ‘These are not the words of a president. They are the words of a dictator’ (cited in Smith, 2020).

For Trump, the bad people are not racists and fascists but the ‘Black Lives Matter’ protestors themselves. Thus, the president who routinely peddles public pedagogies of hate (Cole, 2020a), in order to excite and energise his base, cynically and totally falsely projected hatred on to Black Lives Matter, describing the movement and its acronym as a ‘symbol of hate’ (Liptak and Holmes, 2020) – a description he has consistently refused to use for Confederate emblems<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, as Kevin Liptak and Kristen Holmes (2020) put it, as Trump ‘distributes wanted posters of suspected vandals on his Twitter feed and warns those who splashed red paint on statues of George Washington to turn themselves in’, he is ‘also stoking racial tensions using language and tropes that harken to the days of segregationist politics and fears of ruined neighborhoods’. In addition to ‘vandals’, Trump has denounced protesters against police brutality as ‘thugs’, ‘terrorists’ and ‘agitators’, threatening to mobilize the military to put down the ongoing demonstrations. Trump also made dictatorial threats towards an occupation of a small section of downtown Seattle by protesters, declaring, ‘[I] could stop it quickly. And at some point in the not too distant future, I’m going to do it. And if they don’t do something with Seattle, we’re going to do that. We’re going to go in there’ (cited in Crosse, 2020a).

In late June, 2020 Trump retweeted a video depicting supporters driving golf carts decked out in American flags and Trump election paraphernalia through a Florida retirement complex, while some residents denounced them as fascists and racists. The video included one Trump supporter pumping his fist and shouting, ‘White Power!’ Trump wrote in the tweet, ‘Thank you to the great people of The Villages. The Radical Left Do Nothing Democrats will Fall in the Fall. Corrupt Joe is shot. See you soon!!!’ (cited in Crosse, 2020a). It was left on Trump’s timeline, viewable by his 82.5 million followers, for over three hours before it was deleted (Crosse, 2020a). The Villages is a sprawling community covering three counties. It comprises over 100 restaurants, golf courses, tennis courts and other amenities for the more than 110,000 residents. Most of the residents live in small Sumter County, where Trump won nearly 69 percent of the vote in 2016 (Crosse, 2020a). When removing the white power video, he left up a video of two white homeowners protecting their stone mansion with firearms as a Black Lives Matter march went past (Liptak and Holmes, 2020).

All this represents an obvious continuity with previous features of Trump’s public pedagogy, although now perhaps becoming more overt, frequent and consistent. An earlier example is a retweet of a quote attributed to Mussolini and his response to his retweet in a TV interview. Trump retweeted from a parody account: @ilduce2016 feed that has a profile picture that is a composite of Mr. Trump’s hair and Mussolini’s face (Haberman, 2016). Here is the retweet from @ilduce2016: ‘It is better to live one day as a lion than 100 years as a sheep’ – ‘@realDonaldTrump #MakeAmericaGreatAgain’ 11:13 AM - Feb 28, 2016 (cited in Haberman, 2016). In the subsequent interview on NBC, Trump said he was unaware that it had been a quote from Mussolini. But, as Maggie Haberman (2016) points out, he didn’t seem to care: ‘It’s a very good quote. I didn’t know who said it, but what difference does it make if it was

Mussolini or somebody else — it's a very good quote' (cited in Haberman, 2016). When asked if he wanted to be associated with Mussolini, Trump replied flippantly, 'No, I want to be associated with interesting quotes. Hey, it got your attention, didn't it?' (cited in Haberman, 2016).

On another occasion, Trump decided to give a platform to British fascist group 'Britain First.' Late in 2017, Trump retweeted to his then 43.6 million followers three anti-Muslim videos, originally tweeted by Jayda Fransen, then Britain First's deputy leader. Fransen was disposed to carrying a large wooden cross, organizing 'Christian patrols' and 'Mosque invasions' in areas with large Muslim populations.

Fransen was delighted with the attention and unexpected boost to global fascism and tweeted in upper case:

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, DONALD TRUMP, HAS  
RETWEETED THREE OF DEPUTY LEADER JAYDA FRANSEN'S  
TWITTER VIDEOS! DONALD TRUMP HIMSELF HAS RETWEETED  
THESE VIDEOS AND HAS AROUND 44 MILLION FOLLOWERS! GOD  
BLESS YOU TRUMP! GOD BLESS AMERICA! OCS<sup>3</sup>  
@JaydaBF@realDonaldTrump 12:05 PM - Nov 29, 2017

In a direct appeal for help from Trump for the cause, Fransen stated, 'Thanks for the retweets @realDonaldTrump I'm facing prison for criticising Islam. Britain is now Sharia compliant, I need your help!' (cited in Weaver *et al*, 2017). As Matthew Weaver *et al*. (2017) point out, Trump did not retweet on the spur of the moment or without due consideration:

The Islamophobic videos were originally tweeted by Fransen on Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday morning before being picked up by Trump. They were

not sequentially posted, meaning the president would have had to scroll through her timeline before picking out which videos to retweet.

In the US, former Ku Klux Klan leader, David Duke, obviously equally impressed, wrote on Twitter, ‘Thank God for Trump! That’s why we love him!’ (cited in Mazelis, 2017). On July 10, 2020, it was revealed that Duke, as in 2016, is once again supporting Trump in 2020, suggesting that he should replace his current vice president Mike Pence with Fox News host Tucker Carlson. In a series of tweets neo-Nazi antisemite, Duke wrote, ‘Trump & Tucker is the only way to stop the commie Bolsheviks! It is the only path to beat them! #TrumpTucker2020’ (cited in Naughtie, 2020). Carlson’s show lost lucrative deals with major advertisers after he said that the ‘Black Lives Matter’ movement ‘certainly isn’t about Black lives, and remember that when they come for you. And at this rate, they will’ (cited in Naughtie, 2020). According to Andrew Naughtie (2020), Duke has expressed his admiration for Carlson on Twitter before, calling him a ‘hero’ for supposedly ‘exposing white ethnic cleansing in America’.

Here is Carlson in full flow:

Democrats want to abolish the suburbs, they are too clean and nice, and therefore by definition they are racist. The Biden campaign has highly specific plans on how to do this. It's called affirmatively furthering fair housing ... written during the Obama administration ... Towns will be ordered to abolish zoning for single-family housing because single-family homes, needless to say, are racist. Low-income federally subsidized apartments will go up in the suburbs. It's a good bet you won't see any of this, you won't see projects being built in Aspen or Martha's Vineyard or anywhere else Eric Holder vacations, but in your neighborhood? Oh, yeah (cited in Media Matters Staff, 2020)<sup>4</sup>

Trump is clearly on the same page as Duke and Carlson. On July 16, he warned that Democrats wanted to ‘obliterate’ suburbs. Harkening back to the old



arguments against integrating neighborhoods, Trump stated: ‘Your home will go down in value and crime rates will rapidly rise. Joe Biden and his bosses from the radical left want to significantly multiply what they're doing now and what will be the end result is you will totally destroy the beautiful suburbs. Suburbia will be no longer as we know it’ (cited in Liptak, 2020). For good measure, he also through in some attacks on the environment – against new homes having to preserve water and to reduce emissions (Liptak, 2020) (climate change destruction is discussed later in this chapter). Trump followed up his pedagogy of fear directed at those who live in the suburbs, in typical sexist fashion by appealing to the ‘Suburban Housewives of America’, prompting one Twitter user to joke that the anachronistic tweet would help the president ‘win the 1956 presidential election’ (cited in Moye, 2020b).

Attending the infamous Unite the Right march in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017, about which Trump said of the fascists and anti-fascists, there are ‘very fine’ people on both sides (Coaston, 2020), Duke told an interviewer at the time that that march was a celebration of what Mr Trump intended to do for the US:

We’re going to fulfil the promises of Donald Trump. That’s what we believed in. That’s why we voted for Donald Trump, because he said he’s going to take our country back, and that’s what we got to do (cited in Thorleifsson, 2018)

In endorsing Trump again, Duke clearly believes that his neo-Nazi dream is about to be fulfilled in a second term of Donald J. Trump.

There are signs that fascistic elements have responded to Trump’s incitements by showing up at anti-police brutality demonstrations to threaten and, in some cases, attack and shoot protesters. According to Jacob Crosse (2020a), on June 27, 2020 in Boston, a small ‘pro-police’ group, ‘Super Happy Fun America’

gathered about one hundred people near the State House for a ‘Restore Sanity’ rally (in 2019, the same group organized a ‘Straight Pride’ parade). Crosse (2020a) points out that joining the pro-police protesters were a dozen members of a group called the ‘National Social Club’. Identifying themselves to reporters from the *Boston Herald* as a ‘pro-white street fraternity’, one member ‘had a swastika tattoo, while another wore a shirt featuring Nazi iconography and the word “Liftwaffe.”’ (Crosse, 2020a), apparently a David Duke podcast.

On July 1, 2020, it was revealed that Donald Trump’s election campaign is promoting a t-shirt that features an eagle clutching a shield displaying the American flag with a ribbon proclaiming ‘Trump 2020’. According to Sarah Burris (2020), writer on *Raw Story*, while eagles have been used since the Roman Empire to depict power, the only eagles clutching a shield in their feet appear on Trump’s campaign shirt and on the Nazi Reichsadler (coat of arms) where the shield depicts a swastika.

Two days later Trump swooped into America’s heartland to stoke fears at the foot of Mount Rushmore, South Dakota with the message that there is a ‘merciless campaign to wipe out our history, defame our heroes, erase our values, and indoctrinate our children’ (D’Antonio, 2020; The White House, 2020). He countered the public pedagogy that advocates reconsidering the value in memorializing major historical figures who supported slavery or white supremacy as follows:

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. Many of these people have no idea why they are doing this, but some know exactly what they are doing. 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 (The White House, 2020).

Trump declared that federal officers would be dispatched to protect monuments and statues wherever they were threatened, ‘to protect our monuments, arrest the rioters, and prosecute offenders to the fullest extent of the law’ (cited in D’Antonio, 2020).

The following day Trump vowed to defeat the ‘radical left’ in his July 4 Independence Day speech: ‘We are now in the process of defeating the radical left, the anarchists, the agitators, the looters, and the people who, in many instances, have absolutely no clue what they are doing’ (cited in BBC News, 2020a). Striking his trademark combative public pedagogy, he vowed he would fight to preserve the American way of life, at the same time railing at ‘mobs’ targeting historical monuments (cited in BBC News, 2020a).

In late July, it came to light that in Portland, Oregon, at the behest of the Trump administration, armed Federal agents of Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and other federal agencies ‘with CS tear gas, rubber bullets and sonic weapons that can do permanent physical damage’ have fired on crowds (Martin, 2020). They have also been driving up to groups of protesters, snatching them, bundling them into unmarked vans, and hauling them off to undisclosed locations for interrogation. Many agents wear generic camouflage rather than the uniforms that normally identify their names or agencies (Martin, 2020). Two senators and two congressmen from Oregon issued a letter calling the federal intervention ‘unacceptable under our Constitution’, adding ‘snatching people off the street with no apparent reason’ was an action ‘more reflective of tactics of a government led by a dictator’, while one protester, who said he did not

know whether they were actually police or ultra-right extremists working with the police, stated ‘It feels like fascism’ (cited in Martin, 2020).

With polls showing a collapse in support both for the Republican Party and for Trump personally, in an interview with Fox News on July 19, Trump again refused to say whether he would accept the results of the November 3 Election. As Patrick Martin (2020) concludes, ‘The resort to brutal force in Portland is a warning of the methods which Trump is preparing to maintain his grip on power and to strike back at his main enemy: the American working class’.

Speaking to reporters Trump praised the kidnapping of protesters by unidentified federal agents in Portland as a ‘fantastic job’; they ‘grab a lot of people and jail the leaders’ (cited in Reed, 2020). He vowed to send similar law enforcement groups into New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit, Baltimore and Oakland. Responding to questions about reports that the White House was sending 175 federal troops to multiple cities, Trump replied:

Well, it depends on what your definition of ‘troops’ is. I mean, we’re sending law enforcement. I’m going to do something—that, I can tell you. Because we’re not going to let New York and Chicago and Philadelphia and Detroit and Baltimore and all of these—Oakland is a mess. We’re not going to let this happen in our country. All run by liberal Democrats (cited in Reed, 2020).

Without providing evidence, Trump described the protestors as ‘anarchists’, but this is beside the point. As Colleen Connell, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Illinois, explained, what happened was ‘an assault on the people of this country, and the specific protections of protest and press in the First Amendment’. ‘As our colleagues have seen in Portland’, Connell said, ‘Trump’s secret forces will terrorise communities and create

chaos'. As the author of this piece, World Socialist Web Site writer Kevin Reed (2020) concludes, this is 'an unprecedented further step toward presidential dictatorship in the US'.

## **Coronavirus catastrophe**

### **Profit before people**

In late May 2020 Trump's public pedagogy around the pandemic blatantly placed capitalist profit and capitalists' interests before the health and welfare of the rest of the population. As he pushed to reopen the country despite warnings from doctors about the consequences of moving too quickly, he lashed out at scientists whose conclusions he did not like by dismissing their findings, suggesting without evidence that they were motivated by politics and out to undermine his efforts to roll back coronavirus restrictions (Colvin, 2020). He used rhetoric such as 'It was a Trump enemy statement' and 'political hit job' (cited in Colvin, 2020). Moreover, according to Colvin, 'Republican political operatives ... [recruited] pro-Trump doctors to go on television to advocate for reviving the U.S. economy as quickly as possible, without waiting to meet federal safety benchmarks'.

While likening 'Operation Warp Speed' — the objective to develop a vaccine by the end of 2020 and doubted by many experts — to the 'Manhattan Project', the World War Two effort to produce the world's first nuclear weapons (BBC News, 2020b), Trump insisted that even without a vaccine, the US must begin to return to 'normality'. As Patrick Martin (2020) puts it, 'The White House ... [sought] to whip up a fascistic movement to bolster the demands of big business to "reopen" the US economy, regardless of the cost in the health and lives of working people'. Martin concludes:

The billionaires and their political representatives, both Democratic and Republican, having received their massive financial bailout from Congress and the Federal Reserve, care nothing for the fate of the workers who they are now seeking to force back to work, in order to resume the extraction of surplus value from their labor (Martin, 2020).

Accordingly, the trading floor of the New York Stock Exchange reopened on May 26 2020 after two months of closure. In March the Dow Jones Industrial Average had been down to 18,000. In May, it rose approximately 40 percent. Flush with trillions of dollars of bail-out money provided by the CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act), the Dow Jones Industrial Average rose yet another 530 points, an increase of 2.2 percent over its close four days earlier (North, 2020). Within a quarter of an hour of the opening bell on May 26, Trump tweeted enthusiastically:

Stock market up BIG, DOW crosses 25,000. S&P 500 over 3000. States should open up ASAP. The Transition to Greatness has started, ahead of schedule. There will be ups and downs, but next year will be one of the best ever! (cited in North, 2020).

For capitalism and capitalists like Trump, this truly is great news. For the vast majority of the population of the US, and indeed of the world, this represents anything but ‘greatness’. The pro-Trump media, however has been successful in convincing some workers otherwise. David North (2020) makes reference to a paper (Burszteyn *et al.*, 2020) that singles out statements by right-wing commentator Sean Hannity on pro-Trump Fox News and makes a link between those who watch him and hostility to shelter-in-place policies. Hannity’s role as a pivot in this ‘right-wing spin machine’ Giroux (2010, 7) resonates with sections of the population that have been hard hit by loss of jobs and income. While this constituency undoubtedly forms a significant section of Trump’s

popular base, North (2020) argues that there is nothing genuinely popular about Trump's programme. His real constituency, North maintains, 'is the socially parasitic corporate-financial elite', whose deepest sentiments, Trump expresses without embarrassment or restraint. This is because the Dow at 25,000 is far more important to him than coronavirus deaths at 100,000 (North, 2020). Indeed, on May 28, 2020 when the US death toll passed 100,000, Trump remained silent, preferring to attack tech companies for trying to 'censor' him, following Twitter's placing of a fact-check warning on one of his tweets (Rourke, 2020).

In his Mount Rushmore speech, as Michael D'Antonio (2020) explains, always 'eager to be seen as a fighter and a champion, Trump left out the real battle he is losing -- to the coronavirus-- and invented another so that he could pose as a valiant defender of this country'. Moreover, to 'satisfy Trump's selfish vanity, he had brought together more than 7,000 people, packed in tight to hear the speech', flouting the government's public health guidance and resulting in a Trump campaign official and Donald Trump Jr.'s partner testing positive for the virus.

In his July 4 Independence Day speech, Trump made no reference to the nearly 130,000 US deaths at the time linked to the pandemic. Instead, he said the US had tested almost 40 million people, adding that 99% of coronavirus cases were 'totally harmless' - a claim for which he gave no evidence (BBC News, 2020a), and which prompted Dr Anthony Fauci, who has served as the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases since 1984, to respond that this was 'obviously not the case' and to draw a connection between his own insistence on 'speaking the truth at all times' to his noticeably diminished television appearances (cited in Holmes, 2020) because of a lack of permission from the White House. According to Kristen Holmes (2020) the White House

‘is making a concerted effort to discredit Dr. Anthony Fauci as he becomes increasingly vocal about his concerns over reopening the country amid a national surge in coronavirus cases’.

CNN reported that on July 12 that US President Donald Trump had finally worn a face mask the day before to visit wounded troops after months of refusal. Many commentators pointed out that this bad example must have increased the infection and death rate from the virus. As of the evening of July 10, 2020, there were over 12.4 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 worldwide and 559,622 deaths, according to Johns Hopkins University, with the trend of new cases at record highs, averaging more than 200,000 daily over the previous week. The United States is leading the global toll of new cases and deaths, with nearly 3.2 million cases and 133,885 deaths as of the evening of July 10, about a quarter of the global total of both metrics. (Randall, 2020). As Kate Randall (2020) reports, the US reached a record single-day spike of 60,021 cases on July 8, setting a single-day record for the sixth time in 10 days, with the surge largely driven by the states in the South and West who were the first to loosen restrictions. These states have witnessed a dramatic rise in cases and deaths. On July 12, the Florida Department of Health reported 15,299 new Covid-19 cases Sunday, the highest number of new cases reported in a single day by any state since the coronavirus pandemic began (Maxouris and Yan, 2020).

Trump’s and his administration’s public pedagogy and policies or the lack of them exemplify the obscenities of Trump’s naked capitalism. This comes through in numerous ways, his response to Covid-19 being one illuminating example, where he either downplays it or ignores it; in Randall’s (2020) words, underlining the comment from Fauci that I cited earlier about his ridiculous ‘99% comment’:



Despite this burgeoning catastrophe, Donald Trump maintains that his administration is ‘handling it’ and that ‘99 percent’ of coronavirus cases are ‘totally harmless’. The basis of this contemptible attitude toward the suffering of the America people is the drive to force workers back on the job, no matter the cost to life.

### ***Open the schools at any cost***

There is a battle raging between the Trump administration and public (i.e. non-private) schools, with Trump the naked capitalist so desperate to get teachers back in classrooms and parents/carers back to work in August that he has threatened to use the power of the federal government to strong-arm officials into reopening classrooms (Stratford *et al.*, 2020). The American Academy of Pediatrics, whose prominent study on the importance of reopening schools is repeatedly touted by administration officials, criticized Trump’s threats to withhold money from schools and issued a statement with teachers unions and school superintendents against Trump’s insistence on opening schools, seemingly without regard to the intensity of the pandemic in a community. Schools in areas with high levels of Covid-19 community spread, they wrote, ‘should not be compelled to reopen’ against local experts’ judgment (Stratford *et al.* 2020). Meanwhile, Trump has slammed guidelines for reopening schools issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (Segers. 2020). In a threatening tweet on July 8, he wrote:

I disagree with @CDCgov on their very tough & expensive guidelines for opening schools. While they want them open, they are asking schools to do very impractical things. I will be meeting with them!!! (cited in Segers, 2020).

When pressed in an interview on CNN on July 12, Education Secretary, Betsy DeVos refused to say whether schools should follow these guidelines (desks six feet apart, cloth face coverings; closing communal areas like dining rooms and

playgrounds and installing physical barriers such as sneeze guards), stating they are meant to be ‘flexible’ (Devan Cole, 2020). Pushed repeatedly on whether schools should implement remote learning in the event of a flare-up of coronavirus cases in their district, DeVos replied: ‘I think the go-to needs to be kids in school, in person, in the classroom’. ‘Where there are little flare-ups or hotspots, that can be dealt with on a school-by-school or a case-by-case basis’, she said, without providing any recommendations for what schools should do if outbreaks occur. (cited in Devan Cole, 2020).

On July 10, Trump had visited Florida that has seen a 1200 per cent plus rise in cases since opening up businesses, not to talk about Covid-19, but for a fund-raising event, focused on fighting drug trafficking (Randall, 2020). On the same day as Trump’s election stunt in Florida, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, setting aside the glaring statistics on coronavirus cases and death in the US, told reporters: ‘Of course the US remains the world leader in the pandemic’, adding that the ‘world turns its eyes’ to American scientists and researchers to develop treatments and to US aid to assist other countries in fighting the COVID-19 outbreaks (Randall, 2020). Kate Randall (2020) concludes: he neglected to say that the Trump administration ignores the same scientific guidance.

### **Dimensions of class and ‘race’<sup>5</sup>**

If all the distress and carnage caused directly by the virus were not enough, Oxfam has warned that Covid-19 could kill more people from hunger than the disease itself (Giuliani-Hoffman, 2020), due to the worldwide recession that has been created. Hunger is rising globally and the US is no exception. According to Feeding America (America’s largest hunger relief organisation) 17 million more people could become food insecure in 2020 as a result of Covid-19, bringing the total number of hungry people to about 54 million. As Emily Engelhard, a managing director at Feeding America, noted that is a 46%

increase over the 37 million people who were food insecure prior to the COVID-19 crisis, with 83% of the organization's food banks reporting an increase in the number of people served compared to this time in 2019, the average increase being 50%.

Associate professor Miguel Gómez at Cornell's School of Applied Economics underlined the way in which the system works not for need but for profit 'It is clear that our food distribution system has huge inequalities. A long term concern is how can we shift emphasis from just focusing on efficiencies and maximizing profits to a more resilient, fair food production and distribution system', while Oxfam's Interim Executive Director Chema Vera echoed the same concern at an international level by advocating the interests of food producers and workers globally before the profits of 'big food and agribusiness' (both cited in Giuliani-Hoffman, 2020).

Lynnette Grey Bull (2020), in an article dissecting Trump's July 4 assertion that the Mount Rushmore 'monument will never be desecrated' by pointing out that Mount Rushmore *is* a desecration, in that the Black Hills or Paha Sapa, where Rushmore is located, is the Holy Land of the Lakota and Cheyenne, and thus a constant reminder of colonialism, argues that indigenous Americans 'facing centuries of poverty, health disparity, and systemic oppression, the continent's first people – my people – are in the highest risk category for coronavirus vulnerability' (Grey Bull, 2020). She goes on to explain that Tribes endure extreme levels of poverty, with some reservations having lower life expectations than the world's poorest in the global south. The Indian Health Service hospitals, she points out, that serve Indian reservations have a total of 33 ICU beds nationwide, but Trump has responded with a total lack of concern (Grey Bull, 2020) (for examples of Trump's racist/fascistic public pedagogies of hate and associated practices and policies directed at

Native Americans, see Cole, 2020a, pp. 28-30, 81). Grey Bull (2020) points out:

Like the Black communities we have seen disproportionately impacted during the pandemic, tribal members are ravaged by diabetes and other chronic health conditions caused by enduring environmental injustice and decades of American apartheid. From housing shortages and non-existent hospitals to reservation districts entirely without electricity, internet, or running water: ... a 'perfect storm for a pandemic' (Brady and Bahr, 2014).

She continues, 'Trump's failure to act on Coronavirus has led to an immeasurable loss on the nation's reservations, a disaster that only continues to worsen and claim indigenous lives as he swears to protect a monument which embodies this country's broken promises to those same people' (Grey Bull, 2020). Grey Bull (2020) adds further:

By hosting his rally at the 'Shrine of Hypocrisy,' Trump made a mockery of the pain and struggles of the indigenous people who consider the Black Hills sacred. When he tells his base that he will protect Mount Rushmore, he is telling them that he will protect them from the Americans who are tired of the mythology of American exceptionalism which allows the erasure and reinvention of history; the erasure of the inequality that diseases the heart of this nation and allows the continued oppression of Indigenous, Black and Brown people in this country.

On July 8, CNN News, watched live by the author, reported on the staggering rates at which Covid-19 hits Black, Latinx and Native American communities. In Arizona, Mississippi and Florida, these communities are 'disproportionately infected, hospitalised and killed by the virus and the problem is likely to get worse'. Citing the Kaiser Family Foundation, the twenty-three states in the south and west with growing coronavirus outbreaks, the reporter Abby Phillip points out, are home to 71% of all Latinx people and 62% of all people of colour in the United States. Yet most of these are red states (states that vote

predominantly Republican), in some cases the states that were issued ‘stay at home’ ordinances and ‘mask wearing’, moving quickly to reopen with the support of the Trump administration, and people of colour are paying the price. According to CDC data where ‘race’ is known, People of Colour represent 63.7% of Coronavirus cases and White (Non-Hispanic) 36.3% and about half of deaths. Moreover, according to CDC, ‘Hispanic and Native Americans’ are three times more likely than ‘Non-Hispanic White people’ to be uninsured, and ‘Non-Hispanic Black Americans’ are nearly two times more likely to be uninsured than ‘Non-Hispanic White Americans’. Also people of colour get less testing opportunities. Finally when a vaccine eventually arrives, a lack of trust in health care institutions means less people of colour will get the vaccine. Phillip concludes that in the south and west, there may not be the political will to combat these trends. Giving further credence to Phillip’s concerns of a lack of political will, Trump’s Health and Human Services Secretary, Alex Azar has blamed the USA’s world-leading death toll on the ‘unfortunate’ diversity of US society (cited in Crosse, 2020b).

Grey Bull (2020) concludes:

Trump will protect his faithful’s God-given-right to be racist. Farcically, Trump declared below Mount Rushmore that he ‘will never allow an angry mob to erase our history.’ Whose history is really being erased, though? And who is the angry mob destroying our country?

## **Blame China**

Consistent with his child-like paranoia and need to refuse to take any responsibility for his actions, Trump has found someone to blame for Covid-19. Speaking on Fox Business News, he said China ‘should have never let this happen’. He went on: ‘So, I make a great trade deal and now I say this doesn’t feel the same to me. The ink was barely dry and the plague came over’. Having

previously hailed his personal relationship with Chinese President Xi Jinping, Trump declared that ‘right now I don’t want to speak to him’ (cited in Symonds, 2020).

As Peter Symonds (2020) explains, facing re-election in November, 2020, Trump is ‘attempting to make China the scapegoat and deflect attention from his own administration’s criminal negligence, which has resulted in the United States having the world’s largest number of COVID-19 cases and the highest death toll’. This has integrated into and escalated Washington’s trade war measures that pre-dated the coronavirus and are aimed at undermining China economically and militarily. The Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi has said that some political forces in the US are pushing China-US relations to ‘the brink of a new Cold War’ over coronavirus, Hong Kong's status and other issues, adding, ‘Aside from the devastation caused by the novel coronavirus, there is also a political virus spreading through the US’ (cited in Agence France-Presse, 2020).

Symonds (2020) concludes:

In the midst of the worst global economic crisis since the 1930s, US imperialism is engaged in a desperate attempt to maintain its global hegemony through all means, including military confrontation, and regards China as the chief obstacle to its interests. As in 1941, the rapidly intensifying US diplomatic and economic attacks on China are lurching toward to a military conflict between nuclear-armed powers with incalculable consequences for humanity.

I return to the dangers of war under Trump and were he to be re-elected in the last section of this article.

## **Trump withdraws from the World Trade Organization**

In early July, the US formally notified the United Nations that it is withdrawing from the World Health Organization, following through on an announcement Trump made in late May. Suspending the US funding to the most important global institution in the fight against COVID-19 and other communicable diseases is ‘a transparent effort to deflect attention from his own administration’s failures to contain the COVID-19 pandemic by blaming external enemies: China and the United Nations’ health care arm’ (Dyne, 2020ba). As Bryan Dyne (2020a) argues, while Trump’s decision is based on crude and backward political calculations, it will have a real and devastating impact: as the COVID-19 pandemic spreads throughout the world, it will mean the deaths of countless people in the global south, those whose health care systems are supported by WHO equipment, personnel and expertise. As Richard Horton, the editor-in-chief of *The Lancet* puts it: ‘President Trump’s decision to defund WHO is simply this—a crime against humanity. Every scientist, every health worker, every citizen must resist and rebel against this appalling betrayal of global solidarity’ (cited in Dyne, 2020a). As WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus explained, the WHO is not just the front line against coronavirus, but also against many other diseases and conditions mainly absent from the US and western Europe, including polio, measles, malaria, Ebola, HIV and TB. These programmes now face a collapse of funding (Dyne, 2020a).

To conclude this section of the chapter, it should be pointed out that Trump continues to make the ridiculous claim more testing leads to more coronavirus cases. In an interview in late July, he underlined his attacks on mass testing in the US. Claiming falsely that countries in Europe ‘don’t test’ in an effort to explain that continent’s lower case count, Trump decried testing in the US for

‘really skew[ing] the numbers. In a way we’re creating trouble’ (cited in Dyne, 2020b).

### **Climate change destruction**

Given that the focus of the media in 2020 in the US (and indeed much of the world) has thus far totally understandably been on Black Lives Matter and backlashes to it from Trump and the far right, and on Covid-19, there has been less attention paid to the disaster that is climate change destruction. Some, however (e.g. Zambrano-Monserrate *et al.* 2020) have highlighted the virus’s positive and negative effects on the environment.

### **US hits tenth billion dollar weather disaster early**

The US hit its tenth billion-dollar weather disaster of the year, earlier than any other year, making 2020 the sixth consecutive year with at least 10 extreme weather events (Claypool and Jones, 2020). As Max Claypool and Judson Jones (2020) explain, ten storms plagued the country with tornadoes, damaging winds and hail, seven of which occurred in the south or southeast, with one on April 12 witnessing 190 tornadoes tear across the region, killing 36 people. According to Adam Smith, a climatologist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) there might be more severe storms in 2020 than ever before (Claypool and Jones, 2020). As Smith explains, ‘The big story is the fact that we haven’t even gotten to the hyperactive hurricane season, which is widely predicted in the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf Ocean states’. Nor, he goes on, have we ‘gotten to the wildfire season out West. For California, particularly Northern California, Oregon and Washington, the wildfire season could be another strong season’ (cited in Claypool and Jones, 2020).



## **Trump's climate change denial and capitalism<sup>6</sup>**

As Jill Colvin points out, and as we have seen with respect to his responses to Covid-19, Trump has long been sceptical of mainstream science as whole, also suggesting that noise from wind turbines causes cancer and that exercise can deplete the body's finite amount of energy – all part of a larger skepticism of expertise and a backlash against 'elites' that has become increasingly popular among Trump's working class supporters (Colvin, 2020).

Expressing disbelief about climate change is also an attempt, of course, to absolve the capitalist system from any culpability. Trump needs to let capitalism off the hook. From a Marxist perspective a critique of the role of the world capitalist system in fermenting climate change extinction is not only necessary, but essential. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (2018) declared that preventing runaway global warming will require 'far-reaching transitions in energy, land ... and industrial systems'. To even contemplate solving the unprecedented problems that we all face, as Ashley Dawson (2019) argues, 'we need a carefully planned and democratically administered emergency program for ecological reconstruction'. However, 'such a program is not remotely reconcilable with capitalism's imperatives of profit maximization and growth, not to mention private ownership of the means of production' (Dawson, 2019). In other words, as Dawson (2019) asserts: 'We need system change to beat climate change', a slogan that encouragingly for ecosocialists often appears at climate change demonstrations.

As Dawson (2019) explains, following Marxist geographer David Harvey (2010), under capitalism economies must grow at a minimum compound rate of 3 percent to remain healthy. In Harvey's words: 'Any slowdown or blockage in capital flow will produce a crisis. If our blood flow stops, then we die. If capital

flow stops, then the body politic of capitalist society dies'. Harvey gives the example of 9/11:

This simple rule was most dramatically demonstrated in the wake of the events of 9/11. Normal processes of circulation were stopped dead in and around New York City with huge ramifications for the global economy. Within five days, then Mayor Guiliani was pleading with everyone to get out their credit cards and go shopping, go to the restaurants and the Broadway shows (seats are now available!) and shortly thereafter the President of the United States [George W. Bush] did an unprecedented thing: he appeared in a collective commercial for the airlines pleading with people to start flying again (Harvey, 2010).

Given the finite planetary resource, capitalism's incessant and unrelenting growth is literally killing us. A recent major report (Waheed *et al.* 2019) surveying hundreds of scientific studies shows a direct link over the last 50 years between economic growth, energy use and carbon emissions. Waheed *et al.* (2019) conclude that it is clear that 'higher energy consumption helps to boost ... economic growth but at the cost of environmental degradation'. Citing think tank Carbon Tracker (2013), Dawson (2019) points out that 80 percent of known fossil fuel reserves need to be kept in the ground if we are to avert temperature rise above 2C. But many of these reserves are controlled by fossil fuel corporations accountable only to investors, and to maintain their value and market share, these companies must continue to extract and sell these reserves and discover new reserves to replace them, since contraction is inimical to growth (Dawson, 2019). Free market solutions and incentives such as carbon taxes, Dawson (2019) concludes, have failed to significantly diminish fossil fuel consumption.

Writing for *Inside Climate News*, a non-profit, non-partisan news organization dedicated to covering climate change, energy and the environment, Stacey

Feldman and Marianne Lavelle (2020) argue that Trump's time as president has been 'a relentless drive for unfettered fossil energy development.' When Trump, as presidential candidate delivered his first major energy speech in the fracking fields of North Dakota in May 2016, he called for US domination of global energy supplies and an end to all of Barack Obama's executive actions involving greenhouse gas emissions (Feldman and Lavelle, 2020). The following year, US government scientists released the Fourth National Climate Assessment (Wuebbles *et al.* 2017) whose findings were that emissions of carbon dioxide caused by human activities were already causing lasting economic damage and had to be brought to zero. Trump's reaction to the report that was based on thousands of climate studies and involving 13 federal agencies was: 'I don't believe it. No, no, I don't believe it' (cited in Feldman and Lavelle, 2020). As president, Trump has rapidly rolled back regulations on energy suppliers and auctioned off millions of acres of new drilling leases on public land, with 2019 witnessing a record high for domestic oil production (Feldman and Lavelle, 2020), resulting in the reversal of three consecutive years of declining carbon emissions (Energy and Climate Staff, Rhodium Group, 2019; for full details, see Feldman and Lavelle, 2020).

In July, 2020, it was revealed that Trump plans to overhaul a federal law (the National Environment Policy Act (NEPA) of 1970) that had been used by poor and minority communities to for generations to 'delay or stop projects that threaten to pollute their neighborhoods'. His plan will make it easier 'to build highways, pipelines, chemical plants and other projects that pose environmental risks', by forcing agencies to complete even the most major environmental reviews within two years (Eilperin and Dennis, 2020). In the words of Angelo Logan, campaign director for 'Moving Forward Network', a national network of over 50 organizations that centres grassroots, frontline-community knowledge, expertise and engagement from communities across the US that bear the

negative impacts of the global freight transportation system, ‘This is the epitome of environmental racism. The working class, communities of color, will have to suffer the brunt so corporations can make money hand over fist’ (cited in Eilperin and Dennis, 2020).

According to James Ellsmoor (2019), the US Department of Energy, under the climate-denying President of the United States, has started referring to fossil fuels as ‘molecules of freedom’ and specifically natural gas as ‘freedom gas.’ The term may have originated during a visit by U.S. Energy Secretary Rick Perry to the European Union in April, 2019, who stated:

Seventy-five years after liberating Europe from Nazi Germany occupation, the United States is again delivering a form of freedom to the European continent. And rather than in the form of young American soldiers, it’s in the form of liquefied natural gas (cited in Ellsmoor, 2019).

Tellingly, fossil fuel firms linked to Trump have received coronavirus aid of at least \$50m in taxpayer money that they probably will not have to pay back according to the *Guardian* (Holden, 2020). As Melinda Pierce of the Sierra Club, a grassroots environmental organization in the United States that defends everyone’s right to a healthy world, states, ‘The federal money Congress appropriated should be going to help small businesses and frontline workers struggling as a result of the pandemic, not the corporate polluters’ (cited in Holden, 2020). According to Emily Holden (2020), while only a small fraction of the \$2.1tn made available in the CARES Act, the total assistance to the industry is likely much larger than can currently be tallied and will continue to grow.

## **Removing ‘climate change’ from government websites**

In November, 2019, the Trump administration formally began withdrawing from the Paris climate change agreement, the only country not signed up to it. Trump has repeatedly dismissed the existence of human-caused climate change, branding it as a ‘hoax’ (Baynes, 2019a). Moreover, most disturbingly, researchers found that between 2016 and 2019 a quarter of all references to ‘climate change’ were removed from federal government websites. The Environmental Data and Governance Initiative (EDGI) analysed more than 5,300 pages on the websites of 23 federal agencies and found usage of the terms ‘climate change,’ ‘clean energy,’ and ‘adaptation’ had dropped 25 per cent since Trump’s inauguration (Baynes, 2019b). EDGI explains the overall strategy:

Rather than cultivating the informational resources necessary to confront climate change, the Trump administration has attempted to remove the topic from federal agency websites, a clear policy indicator in line with withdrawing from the Paris Agreement and revoking the Clean Power Plan (cited in Baynes, 2019b)<sup>7</sup>.

‘While prominent political, journalistic, and scientific entities are sharpening the language they use to describe the climate crisis,’ EDGI goes on, ‘we see precisely the opposite from this administration: removal of the term “climate change” and its replacement with less clear language’ (cited in Baynes, 2019b). Chris Baynes (2019a) concludes that Trump’s position puts him at odds ‘with the overwhelming majority of scientists and his own government agencies, which have warned human-caused global warming is on course to have catastrophic consequences for life on Earth’.

## **Trump confronts Greta Thunberg**

Towards the end of 2019, Greta Thunberg was named Time magazine’s Person of the Year, prompting Trump (who was hoping to get the award himself) to tell

her to ‘chill out’ and ‘work on her anger management problem’, adding that she should ‘go to a good old fashioned movie with a friend’ (cited in Wood, 2019). He had previously responded sarcastically to her September 2019 UN speech, where she stated that her and other young people’s dreams and childhood had been stolen in the pursuit of money and ‘fairy tales of economic growth’ in the face of mass extinction. Trump stated, ‘She seems like a very happy young girl looking forward to a bright and wonderful future. So nice to see’ (cited in Wood, 2019). Thunberg once replied to those whose public pedagogies of hate are directed at her: ‘When haters go after your looks and differences, it means they have nowhere left to go. And then you know you’re winning’. She went on, ‘I have Aspergers and that means I’m sometimes a bit different from the norm. And - given the right circumstances - being different is a superpower’ (cited in Wood, 2019)<sup>8</sup>.

In January, 2020, Trump attended the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, and was involved in what Tim Cohen (2020) describes as ‘surely one of the most bizarre non-confrontational confrontations in history’, with a president of the United States and a young Swedish woman going:

toe-to-toe, without mentioning each other’s names, without a meeting, and without any overt acknowledgement of each others’ argument. Together they symbolise the distance between climate activists and the bastions of political power (Cohen, 2020).

In an audience that included Thunberg, Trump declared, ‘We must reject the perennial prophets of doom and their predictions of the apocalypse’, dismissing climate activists as fearmongering ‘prophets of doom’ who will cripple global economies and strip away individual liberties in what he described as a misguided mission to save the planet. He compared them to people who

predicted an overpopulation crisis in the 1960s, mass starvation in the '70s, and an end of oil in the '90s:

These alarmists always demand the same thing: absolute power to dominate, transform and control every aspect of our lives. We will never let radical socialists destroy our economy, wreck our country or eradicate our liberty (cited in Cohen, 2020).

It is significant here that Trump, the epitome of naked capitalism, is equating climate activists with radical socialism. As capitalism personified, Trump needs not only to stave off criticism of capitalism, he also feels it necessary to equate climate change activism with 'radical socialism' (Trump has often warned of the dangers of socialism). In a different panel, Thunberg (a radical activist, but *not* a 'radical socialist') responded: 'The facts are clear, but they are still too uncomfortable. You just leave it because you think it's too depressing and they will give up. But people will not give up. You are the ones who are giving up' (cited in Cohen, 2020). She argued that planting trees is good (Trump had promised to plant one trillion trees) but not enough; we need zero emissions (Cohen, 2020). Just after Trump left Davos, it was revealed that BP had successfully lobbied in favour of Trump's decision to dilute a landmark environmental law, making it easier for new major infrastructure projects, such as oil pipelines and power plants, to bypass checks (Ambrose, 2020).

Thunberg was right to point out at Davos that from a 'sustainability perspective, the right, the left and the centre have all failed' and that no 'political ideology or economic structure has been able to tackle the environmental and climate emergency and create a cohesive and sustainable world,' but, as will be argued in the last section of this article, wrong to claim that 'it's not about politics' (cited in Cohen, 2020). That no political ideology or economic structure *has been able* to solve climate change does not mean that it cannot.

## **Naked capitalism and class war**

Given the almost exclusive focus in this article on the forty-fifth president of the United States, it is important to stress, before moving on to a consideration of the alternative political and economic structure that is ecosocialism, that from a Marxist perspective, Nimitz Jr.'s (2019) equation of Trump with 'naked capitalism' serves as a corrective to the temptation to solely blame Trump's personal self-interest, narcissism and capitalist triumphalism rather than capitalism itself for the dire state of US economics and politics. In the context of Covid-19, Writing for the World Socialist Web Site, Barry Grey (2020) argues, 'within the ruling class and the media there is an acceptance of the basic framework--that workers' lives must be balanced against the "economy."' However, adding an essential corollary, he rightly points out that 'the "economy" is an abstraction, which cloaks definite class interests' (Grey, 2020). The 'economy', Grey goes on, 'that is being reopened over the bodies of workers and retirees is exclusively the economy of the corporations and the rich'. Underlining that it is capitalism *the system* not just Trump its authentic spokesperson that is in the driving seat, in another WSWS article, Evan Blake (2020) writes, and I will quote him at length:

This catastrophe is the outcome of the campaign led by the Trump administration ... to force workers back into factories and workplaces without any serious effort to contain the pandemic. The drive to reopen the schools in the fall, under conditions of the explosive spread of COVID-19, is a key element of a conscious, bipartisan policy of class war, in which lives are sacrificed for the sake of corporate profits ... [The] American ruling class is indifferent to human life. It is prepared to sacrifice the lives of countless students and teachers to facilitate its homicidal back-to-work policy, which requires that children be herded into unsafe schools so their parents can generate corporate profits in unsafe factories.



The struggle against the coronavirus pandemic, Grey (2020) concludes, is ‘a struggle against the capitalist ruling class and its economy ... and to establish socialism, in which the preservation of human life and the needs of society as a whole take precedence over the mad drive for profit and the accumulation of wealth (Grey, 2020).

### **The threat of (nuclear) war<sup>9</sup>**

Randall (2020) informs us that the US has been providing \$1.3 billion to more than 120 countries in emergency health, humanitarian and economic assistance during the coronavirus pandemic, which she describes as ‘paltry’. In contrast, she points out:

the CARES Act, passed with the unanimous support of the Democrats and Republicans, authorized the multi-trillion-dollar bailout of Wall Street and the corporate elite, with no restrictions. The US House Armed Services Committee also just approved an \$840 billion budget, to fund the US military’s aggressive wars abroad while the pandemic rages at home (Randall, 2020).

‘Led by the United States’, Andre Damon (2020) notes, ‘the world’s nuclear powers are massively expanding and modernizing their arsenals’, as part of US preparations for what Defense Secretary Mark Esper called ‘high-intensity conflicts against competitors such as Russia and China’ (cited in Damon, 2020). As Damon concludes, ‘the Trump White House is moving rapidly ahead with a \$1 trillion plan to expand, “modernize” and miniaturize the US nuclear arsenal’, with Elbridge A. Colby, one of the co-leads of the National Defense Strategy (2018) published by the Pentagon in January of 2018, commenting in an article in *Foreign Affairs*, entitled ‘If You Want Peace, Prepare for Nuclear War’ (Colby, 2018):

The risks of nuclear brinkmanship may be enormous, but so is the payoff from gaining a nuclear advantage over an opponent. Any future confrontation with Russia or China could go nuclear. . . . In a harder-fought, more uncertain struggle, each combatant may be tempted to reach for the nuclear saber to up the ante and test the other side's resolve, or even just to keep fighting (cited in Damon, 2020).

'The best way to avoid a nuclear war', Colby continued, 'is to be ready to fight a limited one.' In this dangerous world, he concluded, 'US officials' must demonstrate that 'the United States is prepared to conduct limited, effective nuclear operations' (cited in Damon, 2020).

Such dangerous and criminal public pedagogy is not confined only to the Trump administration. In January 2020, US Democratic Representative Adam Schiff, speaking during the second day of the impeachment trial of Trump, stated, 'the United States aids Ukraine and her people so that we can fight Russia over there and we don't have to fight Russia here' (cited in Damon, 2020). As Andre Damon points out, 'For most of the American population, the assertion that "we" are fighting Russia will come as a surprise', raising such a confrontation 'not just . . . a possibility, but . . . a statement of present fact'. If the US is already at war with Russia, then escalation in whatever form is rendered less of a quantum leap. Damon underlines the potential threat:

The United States and Russia each possesses over 6,000 nuclear weapons. Just a fraction of these is sufficient to kill billions of people and destroy human society. A war between these two countries, in other words, would be a cataclysmic disaster (Damon, 2020).

Ruling class bravado by the likes of Trump, Colby and Schiff is facilitated in large part by the nature of war in the Capitalism 4.0 (or the Fourth Industrial Revolution – see Cole, 2021, chapter 2). David Barno and Nora Bensahel

(2018) refer to ‘a new generation of high tech weapons’, informing us that ‘the United States and some of its potential adversaries are incorporating the technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution into a range of innovative new weapons systems’. These include railguns (they do away with using conventional explosives to fire a projectile, instead using an incredibly powerful electric circuit that can be fired at 2.5 kilometres per second, over distances of up to 200 kilometres – Weedon, 2019); and directed energy weapons (‘electromagnetic systems capable of converting chemical or electrical energy to radiated energy and focusing it on a target, resulting in physical damage that degrades, neutralizes, defeats, or destroys an adversarial capability’ – Office of Naval Research, undated). There are also hyper-velocity projectiles (capable of turning ‘the more than 40-year-old deck gun design into an effective and low-cost weapon against cruise missiles and larger . . . [pilotless] . . . aerial vehicles’ – LaGrone, 2019) and hypersonic missiles. These missiles, according to R. Jeffery Smith (2019) are a revolutionary new type of weapon that has unprecedented ability to manoeuvre, and can strike almost any target in the world within a matter of minutes. Capable of ‘traveling at more than 15 times the speed of sound, hypersonic missiles arrive at their targets in a . . . destructive flash, before any sonic booms or other meaningful warning’ (Smith, 2019). So far, there are no sure-fire defences. ‘Fast, effective, precise and unstoppable – these are rare but highly desired characteristics on the modern battlefield’ and are being developed not only by the United States but by China, Russia and other countries. (Smith, 2019).

These new weapons, Barno and Bensahel (2018) conclude, ‘will dramatically increase the speed, range, and destructive power of conventional weapons beyond anything previously imaginable’. To make matters even worse, on 1 February 2020, we learned that in January, the Pentagon had deployed a new smaller nuclear warhead aboard the ballistic missile submarine USS Tennessee

as it sailed into the Atlantic in the midst of the spiralling crisis with Iran. Known as W76–2, it has an explosive yield of roughly five kilotons, a third of the destructive power of the ‘Little Boy’ bomb that killed some 140,000 people in Hiroshima in 1945. Each missile can be loaded with as many as eight such warheads, capable of hitting multiple targets (Van Auken, 2020).

A report by the Federation of American Scientists (FAS) strongly suggests that it is ‘likely that the new low-yield weapon is intended to facilitate first-use of nuclear weapons against North Korea or Iran’ (cited in Van Auken, 2020). As Bill Van Auken argues, the ‘threat against Iran is part of far broader build-up to global war through which US imperialism is seeking to offset the erosion of its previously hegemonic domination of the global economy by resorting to the criminal use of overwhelming military force’. Trump’s rhetorical threats to wipe out other countries have ceased to be mere rhetoric. Van Auken concludes:

His threats to carry out the ‘obliteration’ of Iran and to rain ‘fire and fury’ upon North Korea are not merely hyperbole. The ‘usable’ nuclear weapons to commit such atrocities have already been placed in his hands (Van Auken, 2020).

In the words of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists (2020), conflating two existential threats to our world:

Civilization-ending nuclear war – whether started by design, blunder, or simple miscommunication – is a genuine possibility. Climate change that could devastate the planet is undeniably happening. And for a variety of reasons that include a corrupted and manipulated media environment, democratic governments and other institutions that should be working to address these threats have failed to rise to the challenge. But given the inaction – and in too many cases counterproductive actions – of international leaders, the members of the Science and Security Board are compelled to declare a state of emergency that requires

the immediate, focused, and unrelenting attention of the entire world. It is 100 seconds to midnight. The Clock continues to tick. Immediate action is required<sup>10</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

What is incontestable about Trump, Nimitz Jr. (2019) concludes, is that he is owed, and ‘he’ll like that as a capitalist — a debt of gratitude for helping to lay bare a system ... in all its grotesque reality’. In this article, I have demonstrated the hideousness of Trump’s ongoing presidency with respect to the dangers it poses to (nuclear) war, to the environment and to the containment of the coronavirus. I began with racism, fascism and the threat to democracy. The re-election of Donald J. Trump would facilitate an unparalleled humanitarian crisis in US society entailing a sustained lurch to the far right in the US (Niemuth, 2020). Trump’s sociopathic lack of concern for the survival of the planet in the face of his shameless self-interested pursuit of ‘naked capitalism’ (Nimitz Jr., 2019) are themselves linked to the spread of coronaviruses, met with Trump’s misanthropic response, and caused by humankind’s abuse of the environment and destruction of ecosystems (Geneva Environment Network, 2020). Also linked to the pursuit of US capitalism and the accompanying unbridled profit for Trump and his cohorts is the escalating threat of war.

As UN Secretary-General António Guterres stated on July 17 in an appeal for multilateralism:

the world is experiencing a deepening calamity. The COVID-19 pandemic has plunged us into an acute health and economic crisis, the severity of which has not been seen in nearly a century. The socioeconomic impacts will likely unfold for years to come. The crisis risks halting and reversing progress on poverty eradication, food security, gender equality and other Sustainable Development Goals. The pandemic has exposed and exacerbated vulnerabilities and inequalities within and among countries. It has reconfirmed that the systems on which we depend — food, trade, health, climate — are not only increasingly

interdependent, but increasingly fragile. Indeed, the pandemic has underscored the world's fragilities not just in the face of a health emergency, but in confronting the climate crisis, lawlessness in cyberspace and the still-very-real risks of nuclear proliferation ... [Multilateralism must be] ... built on trust ... [and] based on international law and ... geared towards the overarching goals of peace and security, human rights and sustainable development ... At this pivotal moment, with COVID-19 still spreading, geopolitical tensions rising and the cry for racial justice, social justice and climate justice ever more urgent, we have a responsibility to respond to the anxieties, fears and hopes of the people we serve (United Nations, 2020).

For these reasons, it is surely imperative for the Left, particularly in the US, to unite *en masse* to stop the re-election of Donald J. Trump. McLaren (2020, 9) concludes his article as follows:

Trump's Disaster Politics has impacted every area of life in the United States. Noam Chomsky has often said that in electoral politics, you don't vote for somebody, you vote against somebody. That means voting intelligently, and that would be for the person most likely to defeat Trump in a general election, assuming that candidate would wreak less havoc on the democratic institutions that in the US are currently on life support. At the same time it means building social movements to demand socialist alternatives ... There is much work to be done, and whether this pandemic will leave the world more prone to fascism or more ripe for a socialist alternative is up to us

Thus the immediate issue, indeed the primary purpose of this article, is to make sure Trump is not re-elected. In early February, it was revealed by Paul Street (2020) that in 2016, in a phone conversation with Hillary Clinton's then-running mate Tim Kaine, Barack Obama opined, 'Tim, remember, this is no time to be a purist. You've got to keep a fascist out of the White House'. As Street (2020) puts it: 'Obama had an accurate read on the orange menace. He

had enough college history and political science and enough vicious targeting by the onetime leading Birther Trump’.

After four long years, Trump’s fascism has become more pronounced, and since he presents such an enormous existential threat, his exit from power is now imperative. In Cole, 2020a, I provide a detailed analysis of the relationship between Trump and fascism (pp. 8-16), based primarily on the work of the sociologist Michael Mann (2004) and Marxist Dave Renton (1999). In the run-up to the 2020 presidential election, the barometer of Trump’s fascism has upped, as discussed in this article, with respect to his authoritarianism and totalitarianism; his nationalism and his paramilitarism. He has undermined the ‘balance of powers’ in the judicial system and the congress; and designated all news that is not pro-Trump or pro-Trump interests as ‘fake’. Trump has continued to promote racism by demonising those who support equal rights for Black Americans, describing Black Lives Matter as a ‘symbol of hate’ and promoting ‘white supremacy’. He has enabled fascism, garnering the support once again of the likes the neo-Nazi David Duke. He has infuriated Native Americans with his ignorance and contempt for the First Nations of America. Trump has sent unwanted armed federal agents to attack protesters in US cities. His criminal response and lack of response to Covid-19 adversely affecting poor workers and people of colour, and tens of thousands have died, while his withdrawal from the World Health Organisation has been described as a ‘crime against humanity’. Trump’s exacerbating of climate change catastrophe threatens the entire planet. He has blamed China for the virus and pushed US-China relations to the brink of a new Cold War and more, expanding, modernising and miniaturizing the US nuclear arsenal.

The ‘democratic institutions on life support’ that McLaren refers to and that I discussed in the first section of this article, are of course capitalist structures.

While a Sanders/Squad platform would have been far better, removing Trump from the White House (assuming he goes if he loses, or is successful in delaying the election – both big assumptions) will mean a Biden presidency in early 2021. Earlier in this chapter, I cited Black Lives Matter’s advocacy of collective action for freedom and justice for all. Societies that entail these self-evident fundamental truths, from my perspective must transition to the socialist alternative to capitalism. That alternative, I have argued at length elsewhere (see Cole, 2021 chapter 3; see also Löwy, 2018, 2020; Mellor, 1997, 2018; Brownhill and Turner, 2019, 2020), must be antiracist ecosocialism (the crucial prefix *eco* is, of course, all the more prescient in the light of Trump’s climate change denial), a form of socialism that is also fully informed by ecofeminism and dedicated to the pursuit of equal rights and equality for all identities and subjectivities. Such ecosocialism can harness the technological fruits of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Cole, 2021, chapters 2 and 3) for the many rather than for the small elite that are served by the naked capitalism of the likes of Trump.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Social justice educator Roger Simon (1995, 109) has argued that pedagogy as a concept lends itself to a variety of sites for education to take place, that are ‘multiple, shifting and overlapping’. *Public* pedagogy extends pedagogical analysis beyond schools, colleges and universities to learning in other institutions such as museums, zoos and libraries, as well as informal educational sites like popular culture, commercial spaces and the media, including of course, social media. It also occurs through figures and sites of activism, including public intellectuals and grassroots social movements (Sandlin *et al*, 2010) (for an extensive analysis of the complexities and multifarious varieties of the concept of public pedagogy, see Sandlin *et al*, 2011). Public pedagogy is also a widely used medium in the speeches, tweets and interviews of politicians and other public figures, and in podcasts and video lectures as well as blogs, articles and books. Public pedagogy is an important corrective to any notion that pedagogy takes place only in conventional educational settings. For multiple examples of public pedagogy in the context of modern world politics, see Cole, 2020a, b, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Unlike the sociopathic, misogynist and misanthropic Trump, and in total contrast to fascists and other white supremacists who despise Black people, Jewish people and anyone who is not ‘white’ and ‘aryan’, along with women in general and people with disabilities, with some favouring the creation of a white ethno-state and/or a fascist USA (see Cole, 2020a, chapters 3 and 4) the reality is that Black Lives Matter is a movement that is politically informed and highly principled, in its own words, an



organisation that advocates collective action for freedom and justice for all (Black Lives Matter: what we believe, 2020). As BLM's website explains, what has now become the 'Black Lives Matter Global Network' started out as a chapter-based, member-led organization whose mission 'was to build local power and to intervene when violence was inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes'. It is committed to 'struggling together and to imagining and creating a world free of anti-Blackness, where every Black person has the social, economic, and political power to thrive'. The Black Lives Matter Freedom Ride to Ferguson in 2014, it points out, helped to catalyze the movement and organizers 'have ousted anti-Black politicians, won critical legislation to benefit Black lives, and changed the terms of the debate on Blackness around the world' (Black Lives Matter: what we believe, 2020). These are its guiding principles:

- We acknowledge, respect, and celebrate differences and commonalities.
- *We work vigorously for freedom and justice for Black people and, by extension, all people* (emphasis added)
- We intentionally build and nurture a beloved community that is bonded together through a beautiful struggle that is restorative, not depleting.
- We are unapologetically Black in our positioning. In affirming that Black Lives Matter, we need not qualify our position. To love and desire freedom and justice for ourselves is a prerequisite for wanting the same for others.
- We see ourselves as part of the global Black family, and we are aware of the different ways we are impacted or privileged as Black people who exist in different parts of the world.
- We are guided by the fact that all Black lives matter, regardless of actual or perceived sexual identity, gender identity, gender expression, economic status, ability, disability, religious beliefs or disbeliefs, immigration status, or location.
- We make space for transgender brothers and sisters to participate and lead.
- We are self-reflexive and do the work required to dismantle cisgender privilege and uplift Black trans folk, especially Black trans women who continue to be disproportionately impacted by trans-antagonistic violence.
- We build a space that affirms Black women and is free from sexism, misogyny, and environments in which men are centered.
- We practice empathy. We engage comrades with the intent to learn about and connect with their contexts.
- We make our spaces family-friendly and enable parents to fully participate with their children. We dismantle the patriarchal practice that requires mothers to work "double shifts" so that they can mother in private even as they participate in public justice work.
- We disrupt the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure requirement by supporting each other as extended families and 'villages' that collectively care for one another, especially our children, to the degree that mothers, parents, and children are comfortable.
- We foster a queer-affirming network. When we gather, we do so with the intention of freeing ourselves from the tight grip of heteronormative thinking, or rather, the belief that all in the world are heterosexual (unless s/he or they disclose otherwise).
- We cultivate an intergenerational and communal network free from ageism. We believe that all people, regardless of age, show up with the capacity to lead and learn.
- We embody and practice justice, liberation, and peace in our engagements with one another (Black Lives Matter: what we believe, 2020)

<sup>3</sup> OCS stands for 'Onward Christian Soldiers' (Hartley-Parkinson, 2017).

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<sup>4</sup> Aspen and Martha's vineyard are expensive holiday locations. Eric Holder is the first African American to hold the position of US Attorney General (Johnson, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> There is a broad consensus among geneticists and social scientists that 'race' is not a valid scientific concept and for these reasons I put it in inverted commas. It seems to be used more in everyday discourse in a neutral way in the US than in the UK.

<sup>6</sup> This sub-section and the next two sub-sections of the chapter draw on Cole, 2021, chapter 1.

<sup>7</sup> The aim of the Clean Power Plan, unveiled by Barack Obama on 3 August, 2015 was to cut greenhouse gas emissions from US power stations by nearly a third within 15 years, placing significant emphasis on wind, solar power and other renewable energy sources (BBC News, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> This is not the first example of Trump's disablism (see Cole, 2020a, 18-21). Here the misogyny of the woman-hater-in-chief (Street, 2019) is patronising, with 16 year old Thunberg demeaned as a 'young girl'

<sup>9</sup> This section of the chapter draws heavily on the Postscript to Cole, 2021, that will, in fact, be published in October, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that this statement from the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists was written at the beginning of January, 2020 before the Covid-19 had become recognised as a global threat. Writing more recently for the Bulletin, Saskia Popescu and Gregory Koblenz (2020) characterise the Trump administration's response to the coronavirus as 'Hear, see, speak no COVID'. As they state, at the heart of the Trump administration's bungled response—from its early dismissal of the risks posed by COVID-19 to its failure to acquire sufficient personal protective equipment and diagnostic tests to its haphazard approach to reopening the economy—has been a refusal to properly utilize scientific expertise. As a result, they go on, 'the administration has had an incoherent response to one of the worst pandemics the world has seen since the 1918 Spanish Flu'. The Trump administration's 'hear no COVID, see no COVID, speak no COVID' approach is in large part why the pandemic has already killed so many people in the United States.

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