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TRUMP, THE ALT-RIGHT AND PUBLIC PEDAGOGIES OF HATE AND FOR FASCISM

What Is To Be Done?

Mike Cole

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Trump, the Alt-Right and Public Pedagogies of Hate and for Fascism

Trump, the Alt-Right and Public Pedagogies of Hate and for Fascism: What Is To Be Done? uses public pedagogy as a theoretical lens through which to view discourses of hate and for fascism in the era of Trump and to promote an anti-fascist and pro-socialist public pedagogy. It makes the case for re-igniting a rhetoric that goes beyond the undermining of neoliberal capitalism and the promotion of social justice, and re-aligns the left against fascism and for a socialism of the twenty-first century.

Beginning with an examination of the history of traditional fascism in the twentieth century, the book looks at the similarities and differences between the Trump regime and traditional Western post-war fascism. Cole goes on to consider the alt-right movement, the reasons for its rise, and the significance of the internet being harnessed as a tool with which to promote a fascist public pedagogy. Finally, the book examines the resistance against these discourses and addresses the question of: what is to be done?

This topical book will be of great interest to scholars, to postgraduate students and to researchers, as well as to advanced undergraduate students in the fields of education studies, pedagogy, politics, and sociology, as well as readers in general who are interested in the phenomenon of Trumpism.

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This is an excellent book – it’s a highly engaging read that will be of interest to people who don’t already know a great deal about Trump and the alt-right and the various movements who oppose them, as well as those who are already well-versed in the horrors of Trumpism. The book makes good use of public pedagogy as a framing device, and it will be an important contribution to our further understanding of how dominant ideologies are enacted and perpetuated, and also how they are resisted.

Jennifer Sandlin

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Introduction

Public pedagogy

Trump becomes president

In the early hours of the morning on November 9, 2016, the unthinkable became reality – a ruthless, sociopathic, racist, misogynist, disablist, climate-change denying¹ real estate mogul and reality TV star became the first billionaire president of the United States of America.² His predecessor, the country's first black president (whose US citizenship Trump has questioned), whatever his public pedagogy – most notably 'yes we can'³ – and his real intentions or beliefs, had done little to curb capitalism's excesses. Instead, in part on account of the structural constraints of the office of president (Friedman, 2017), he found himself reinforcing neoliberal capitalism's aggressive and destructive policies, while continuing to bolster US imperialist hegemony. The election of Donald J. Trump, however, denoted a quantum leap in the degeneracy of (especially American) capitalism and, even more frighteningly, represented a massive lurch in the direction of fascism, as argued throughout this book. As the truth sank in, and as the revelations of his support base emerged gradually over the coming days and weeks, it became clear that the far-right forces surrounding Trump had an academic core accompanying the allegiance of sections of the ruling class and the dispossessed that is always a primary feature of fascist and fascistic movements: hence the need for an academic response, of which this book forms a part. Reading a large amount of material on Trump, and on the alternative right – the alt-right – revealed how and the ways in which *public pedagogy* facilitates the spread of hate and of far right ideology.

Public pedagogy

I first encountered the concept of public pedagogy when I joined the International Centre for Public Pedagogy (ICPUP, 2018) at the University of

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East London on May 1, 2013. This discovery was a revelation to me because after decades of involvement in using and writing about traditional institutional pedagogy to promote equality (e.g. Cole, 1989, 2009, 2011a, 2018) (I did use public pedagogy at the same time, but was not aware that I was using it) I was always of the opinion that pedagogy could and should play a wider role than its institutional one. Given the forcefulness, the incessant regularity, the rage, fervor, and high degree of fanaticism of Trump's attempts to communicate his views, he is self-evidently engaged in a form of public pedagogy. This serves not only as an attempt to 'educate' the public at large, often to promote racism, sexism, and climate change misinformation, and, on one occasion, to mock disability, but also to embolden and legitimize the views of individuals and groups with core fascist beliefs. One such group, the alt-right, also heavily involved in public pedagogy, is the subject of chapters 3 and 4 of this book.

At this point, it is necessary to briefly consider the precise meaning of the concept of 'public pedagogy'. As social justice educator Roger Simon (1995, 109) has argued, pedagogy as a concept lends itself to a multiplicity of sites for education to take place, which are 'multiple, shifting and overlapping'. The concept of *public* pedagogy has been defined by Jennifer Sandlin and her colleagues simply as 'educational activity and learning in extrainstitutional spaces and discourses' (Sandlin et al., 2011, 338).⁴ Public pedagogy, they go on:

has been largely constructed as a concept focusing on various forms, processes, and sites of education and learning occurring beyond formal schooling and is distinct from hidden and explicit curricula operating within and through school sites.⁵

(Sandlin et al., 2011, 338–339)

'Public pedagogy' has appeared in academic literature since 1894, but its presence has only been significant since the end of the twentieth century, having greatly increased since 2006 (Sandlin et al., 2011, Figure 1, p. 341). One of its foremost advocates, Henry Giroux, commends the work of David Trend (1992), Roger Simon (e.g. 1992, 1995) and others for extending pedagogy's 'application far beyond the classroom while also attempting to combine the cultural and the pedagogical as part of a broader vision of political education and cultural studies' (Giroux, 2004, 61).⁶ As Sandlin et al. (2010) explain, public pedagogy involves learning in educational sites such as popular culture, media, commercial spaces and the internet; and through figures and sites of activism, including public intellectuals and grassroots social movements. In addition, Donna Kerr (1999) locates pedagogy within the act of public speech itself. Public pedagogy scholars thus

pose a multidimensional understanding of public education in democratic societies and relate it to ‘the development of the ideological social-political nation within the consciousness and lived practices of that nation’s citizenry’ (Sandlin et al., 2011, 342).

As we shall see in this chapter and in chapters 2, 3, and 4, Trump and the alt-right make full use of the various public pedagogy sites. Unlike the public pedagogy of Trump and the alt-right, the overwhelming focus of the majority of historical and contemporary public pedagogy theorists is on the promotion of social justice for all. To this end, as Sandlin et al. (2011) point out, many have been involved in a counter-hegemonic project against neoliberal capitalism and its multiple manifestations *per se*, and/or against the oppression of multiple identities, such as gender, ‘race’, age, sexual orientation, and social class that it upholds. Moreover, although ‘the context and meaning of [public pedagogy] differ[s] in early sources from current parlance, in some ways the general axiological import remains consistent – the term in its earliest usage [dating back to 1894] implied a form of educational discourse in the service of the *public good*’ (Sandlin et al., 2011, 341–342). A central contribution to public pedagogy has been from feminist scholars, who have argued that the teaching and learning inherent in everyday life can be both oppressive and resistant (Sandlin et al., 2011, 344). As I will demonstrate, the public pedagogies and actions of Donald Trump and the alt-right reinforce the very forms of oppression that public pedagogy has traditionally challenged and aim to undermine gains made by promoters of social justice over decades, if not centuries of struggle.

Given the historical emphasis of public pedagogy on social justice and the common good, it might at first appear difficult to transpose such progressive efforts of critical educators within public pedagogy on to the deeply reactionary project of Trump and the alt-right, whose joint aims are less equality and less social justice. However, given that Trump and the alt-right are also clearly and manifestly engaged in public pedagogy *against* the perceived liberalism of the Democratic Party and, openly with respect to the alt-right, *for* ‘white supremacy’ and a white ethno-state, then there is an urgent need to attempt this theoretical transition. Sandlin et al. (2011, 363) make the case for ‘increased efforts by researchers, activists, artists, and practitioners to take up questions around educations that exist outside of institutional purview’, stressing the need to address ‘decentred sites of resistance . . . and . . . the species of pedagogy occurring in public spaces that might still elude our vision’ (Sandlin et al., 2011, 364). The public pedagogies of Trump and the alt-right are two such sites and two such public spaces that have not been comprehensively analyzed within public pedagogy literature. Just as Giroux (1998, 2000), in Sandlin et al.’s (2011, 344) words, is ‘collectively subverting dominant ideologies’, so are Trump and

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the alt-right, but from the perspective of the radical right rather than from the left. Whereas public pedagogy has traditionally been *for* more social justice and more equality, that of Trump and the alt-right is, to repeat, from a progressive perspective, for less justice and equality.⁷

How then to begin a public pedagogy analysis of Trump and the alt-right? Public pedagogy analysis has been deployed to look at ways in which oppressive discourses are permeated. Pertinent to the concerns of this book, Giroux (2010, 7) refers to a ‘public pedagogy of hate’ emitted out by a ‘right-wing spin machine’, influenced by the US right-wing media, in particular conservative radio talk show hosts, that ‘endlessly spews out a toxic rhetoric’ against Muslims, African Americans and other people of color, immigrants, and many other groups (Giroux, 2010, 8). In the chapters of this book, I draw on, extend, and develop Giroux’s concept in an attempt to understand the public pedagogies of both Trump and the alt-right, and also introduce new public pedagogy formulations.

Outline of the book

Before I outline the chapters, it should be pointed out that the focus of this book is the effect of Trump and the alt-right on the American people, and the threat they pose to (working class) people of color by the promotion and escalation of racism via public pedagogy and policy initiatives, and to the working class *per se* by the (attempted) move of fascism towards the mainstream, a shift that all progressive people ignore at our peril. The book should not be seen as diminishing or undermining the significance of pre-Trump and non-Trump related conditions of working class people, of the poor, and of the institutional racism that is endemic in US society. I deal with inequality and (racialized and gendered) poverty in the first section, ‘Reality’ of chapter 5 of this book, and with racialized capitalism in the US historically and contemporaneously at length elsewhere (e.g. Cole, 2011b, chapter 3, 2016, chapter 2, 2017a, chapter 6).

The subject matter of chapter 1 is Trump himself. In order to assess claims that Trump is a fascist, I begin the chapter with a brief consideration of Trump and traditional fascism as it existed in the first four decades of the twentieth century, after which it ceased to be a hegemonic force following World War II. I then attempt to identify some key features of fascism, based primarily on the works of Michael Mann and Dave Renton (the latter’s preferred formulation having been derived from the writings and activism of Leon Trotsky). In the light of this analysis of fascism, I move on to my own particular response to a question consistently and constantly posed since the ascendancy of Trump: ‘is Trump a (neo-) fascist’? In the course of the discussion, in addition to Trump’s relationship to pre-war fascism, I also consider his sexism and his disablism. Given the crisis of climate change

and Trump's denial of it, I conclude with a discussion of the implications of such a rebuttal with respect to the inter-relationship between fascism and the very survival of our planet – in Carl Beijer's words, fascism's pincer: on the one side, looming ecological catastrophe and economic pathology coupled with scapegoating immigrants and, on the other, ethnonationalism, the alt-right and fascism.

In the first part of chapter 2, I begin with a consideration of Trump's racist and fascistic rhetoric in his speeches, a key feature of his public pedagogy platform, and the accompanying agenda, targeted at Mexicans and others living in the US or wanting to cross the US border; and at Muslims. I go on to document his condescending and racist references to Native Americans. In this section of the chapter, I also address Trump's alleged derogatory remarks about African Americans and people from Africa and Haiti. I then consider in some detail Trump and the DACA program. In the second part of chapter 2, I concentrate on the president's use of Twitter, his use of tweets and retweets to bring political public pedagogy directly to the public in order to promote a public pedagogy of hate and to add legitimacy to fascism. I argue, following Brian Ott, that Twitter is defined by three key features: simplicity, impulsivity, and incivility, and that these coincide with Trump's persona.

The alt-right is the subject matter of chapters 3 and 4. In chapter 3, I first of all consider the political and economic backdrop that has led to the ascendancy of Trump and the growth of fascism. I move on to analyze the rhetoric and agenda of the alt-right, focusing on some key alt-right figures, including Richard Spencer and Andrew Anglin. With respect to the latter, I pay particular emphasis on that neo-Nazi's history of the alt-right movement and his interpretation of what the alt-right is all about. I conclude the chapter with a brief look at alt-right activist Christopher Cantwell, and his public pedagogy for fascism, which, as is the case for some other key alt-right figures, takes place on the streets and via the internet.

Chapter 4's purpose is a specific examination of the internet as used by the alt-right to promote a public pedagogy for fascism. I look at three major alt-right organs of public pedagogy, a Reddit (an American social news aggregation) known as *The_Donald*, used by five groups with various key interests, but composed of disaffected white men who share a common hatred of social justice and an admiration for Trump; the National Policy Institute, which is calling for policy initiatives in preparation for its goal of a fascist America; and a key article that appears on the US alt-right website, also a call for action for a fascist future. Hopefully, chapters 3 and 4 will serve as a wake-up call. The most disturbing aspect of preparing this book was that, despite all the alleged 'jokes' and the so-called self-styled macabre and sickening 'humor' – 'only joking' – that characterizes the alt-right, the

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movement is serious about creating fascism and is working on ways to try to achieve it. Here I would like to stress that I have tried to get the balance right between warning of the real dangers of fascism becoming more mainstream, while at the same time not underestimating the importance, and indeed successes of movements, forces, and the various groupings that oppose fascism and have different visions of the future of America. Hopefully, I have not overestimated the significance of the alt-right. With this in mind, the book should be considered as a whole, with the two remaining chapters given equal weight to the preceding four.

Thus, having concentrated on the public pedagogy and policies of Trump and the alt-right in the first four chapters, in chapters 5 and 6, I address the issue of what is to be done. In chapter 5, I turn my attention to resistance to both Trump and the alt-right, but first I consider the reality of capitalism in the US in 2018, with respect to both inequality and poverty. I then examine the actuality, as opposed to the rhetoric, of Donald Trump in a self-explanatory section of the chapter entitled ‘Trump against the US working class’. Moving on to resistance, I sketch the multiple protests against Trump that have taken place since the announcement of his candidacy up to the time of writing this book. In the following section of chapter 5, I assess the success of Antifa (the main US anti-fascist movement) in seriously undermining the project of the alt-right, before concluding with a consideration of public pedagogy against fascism, including the issue of ‘no platform for fascists’.

In the final chapter of the book, chapter 6, the main focus is a public pedagogy for socialism as an antidote to Trump and the alt-right, and as a positive vision for the future. I begin the chapter with a look at some socialistic movements prominent in the US, followed by two women’s movements; Black Lives Matter; and the ANSWER Coalition (**A**ct **N**ow to **S**top **W**ar and **E**nd **R**acism). Next I consider two socialist groupings and some socialist parties. I conclude the chapter and the book with some suggestions, based on previous analysis, as to what a United Socialist States of America might look like and, given the hegemony of (neoliberal) capitalism, whether such a vision is possible. As well as epitomizing the essential features of non-Stalinist socialism, a socialism for and of the twenty-first century must be fully inclusive, embracing all social justice issues and it must centralize ecological imperatives.

Notes

- 1 That Trump is a sociopath is also the view of Dr Lance Dodes, a former assistant professor of clinical psychiatry at Harvard Medical School who now works for the Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute (Kentish, 2017a). Trump’s racism, misogyny, disablism, and climate change denial are all dealt with in this book.

- 2 Trump's rise in real estate in the 1970s; his casino-fuelled stardom in the 1980s; his near financial ruin in the 1990s; and his political ambitions and reality show stardom in the two decades leading up to his presidency (Michel, 2018) are dealt with in an excellent insightful four-part series, *Trump: An American Dream* (Netflix) that paints a picture of Trump that coincides with many of the observations in this book of the Trump persona.
- 3 For the full text of Obama's victory speech, see *The Independent* (2008).
- 4 It is outside my scope in this book to discuss pedagogy in its traditional institutional usage. For analyses of the history and application of the concept of pedagogy in this sense, see, for example, Smith (2012); Brühlmeier (2010); Smith and Smith (2008); Hamilton (1999).
- 5 Sandlin et al. are using 'school' and 'schooling' in their US sense to encompass all institutional education, not just pre-college, pre-university schools, as in the UK convention.
- 6 For a comprehensive edited collection on public pedagogy, comprising some 65 chapters, see Sandlin et al., (eds) 2010 and for an exhaustive overview of 420 sources, see Sandlin et al. (2011).
- 7 Trump and the alt right argue, as we shall see, that their agenda is social justice for (working class) white men and for the rich who have lived and been successful in the American Dream that they believe rewards hard work.

1 ‘One glorious destiny in one shared home that belongs to us’

The ominous rise of Donald J. Trump

Introduction

In this first chapter, I begin my making some brief comments about Donald Trump and fascism, before going to identify some of fascism’s key features, both as a set of significant ideas and as a dialectic of reactionary ideology and mass movement. Having analyzed fascism, I go on to assess the extent to which Trump himself may be considered a fascist. In the course of this discussion, I address not just the far-right and Trump’s relation to it, but also the issues of sexism and disability. After this, I turn my attention to Trump’s position on climate change in late capitalism, and Carl Beijer’s concept of fascism’s pincer.

President Donald J. Trump and fascism

John Broich (2016) poses the following questions:

How to cover the rise of a political leader who’s left a paper trail of anti-constitutionalism, racism and the encouragement of violence? Does the press take the position that its subject acts outside the norms of society? Or does it take the position that someone who wins a fair election is by definition ‘normal’, because his leadership reflects the will of the people?

Broich is not referring to the election of Donald J. Trump. These are, in fact, the questions that confronted the US press after the ascendance of fascist leaders in Italy and Germany in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1939, in a speech to the Reichstag, Adolph Hitler stated:

If the international Jewish financiers . . . succeed in plunging the nations once more into a world war, then the results will . . . be . . . the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe.

(US Government Print Office,
1949–1953, Vol X111, 131)