

Michael G. Hanchard

Racial Regimes, Here and Now

Our next reflection is written by Michael G. Hanchard. Michael and I first met at the University of Texas at Austin where we both held our first academic post-Ph.D. positions, Michael in Political Science, and I in German and Comparative Literature. We bonded quickly over the fact that we both hailed from Westchester County, New York, and that while doing his graduate work at Princeton, this Michael had known Michael Jimenez, someone I had met and hugely admired during my undergraduate days at Harvard while he was in a graduate program in History. Both Michaels were scholars of Latin America, Jimenez specializing in Colombia and Hanchard in Brazil. Michael Hanchard and I participated in an interdisciplinary reading group for several years in Austin where we read books that I'm not sure I would have been exposed to otherwise. I loved the different questions and perspectives the participants brought to bear on our discussions. Mike and I stayed in touch after he left for Northwestern and I, a year later, for Dartmouth. We have been able to share thoughts about the academy itself as well as about what makes for a good university work environment or not. I think Mike has taught me more about the reality of racism and the failures of U.S. democracy than anyone else. Some of what he knows about it and what he's taught me is in the piece he contributes to this volume.

But first, here's what he shares with us about himself:

My path to academia was a circuitous one, with several false starts and detours before finding myself on a secure track to the Ph.D. program in Politics at Princeton University. Before arriving at Princeton in the last years of the previous century, I worked for a while as a journalist and would-be writer, a pre-school teacher, security guard for a then well-known rock promoter, among other jobs which I knew were not my chosen path, but kept some income in my wallet and meager bank account. At some point during college, I decided that I wanted to make a living out of reading, thinking, and writing, a vocation and aspiration that distinguished me from most of my classmates at Tufts, who seemed more interested in corporate America. I was a 1981 graduate of Tufts with a degree in International Relations. But for most of my time there I was an indifferent student, often juggling a part-time job off campus, along with other responsibilities. I only made the honor roll during my senior year, and on a whim, in my last semester, I took a course with Professor Sol Gittleman on German Abstract Expressionism. In

the mist of time, I cannot remember the exact requirements for the course, but I do remember completing an examination and turning it in, only to have the assignment returned to me the following week without a grade, and with a handwritten note from Prof. Gittleman that had two words “See me.” Puzzled, nervous, I went to his office hours the following week. Did he think I cheated? Was my paper that bad? I walked into his office, not sure what to expect. He greeted me, and asked how I was doing. “Okay,” I responded with a lump in my throat. “I have asked you in because I wanted to see who you are and get to know a little bit about you.” He then looked down on his desk, and as I followed his gaze, I realized he was reviewing my student transcript. He then looked away from the transcript and asked me to pull out my exam. I gave him the two blue booklets. He paused, took a deep breath, and then said the following, “I wanted to get to know you because the person who wrote this exam can’t be the same person with these grades on your transcript. This exam is simply brilliant. I think you are capable of doing what I do. Whatever else you do with the next few years of your life, remember that.” I was stunned. Me? a professor, a scholar? After leaving his office, I told several of my friends. They could hardly believe it themselves. It took me a few years which included some of life’s detours before I arrived on the path that led me to an M.A. degree at the New School for Social Research and then a Ph.D. from Princeton. That moment in Prof. Gittleman’s office, in some fortuitous way, led me here . . . I am forever grateful to him and to many other superb scholars who took the time to mentor and teach me.

And these are the thoughts on racial regimes and democracy that Michael Hanchard shares with us.

My contribution here is a postscript of sorts to the argument I made in *The Spectre of Race: How Discrimination Haunts Western Democracy* (2018), as part of the conversation with historian Dagmar Herzog convened by Irene Kacandes at 1014. Space for Ideas in September 2022. Since my book’s publication, the axial shift to authoritarian, even neo-fascist politics has occurred in many polities, some democratic, some not. What follows are more recent examples of racial regimes (aspirant and actualized) analyzed in my book and highlighted in my conversation with Prof. Herzog and the “Humanities for Humans” audience.

On December 7, 2022, the Special Forces of the German government announced the arrest of 25 people suspected of involvement in a plot to overthrow the German government in order to form, with constituents and collaborators, their own state. Those arrested included a judge in Berlin who was both a member of the far-right political party, Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD) and a former member of the German Parliament. Among the

assorted coup plotters were a self-proclaimed prince and descendant of a former German royal family; members of elite police units, and former members of the German and East German armed forces; adherents to QAnon, fervent believers in the existence of a deep state and the necessity of its overthrow; and a far-right organization, the Reichsbürger (Citizens of the Reich). This last group believes that the post-World War II republic of Germany is not a sovereign state but rather a corporation created and administered by the victorious Allied Powers.

The group, which contained more members than the arrest of the first 25 people would indicate, had already formed a shadow government prepared to assume power after their hoped-for coup d'état. From surveillance, statements, and analysis of documents, the German government concluded that this group was prepared for armed struggle, which included the assassination of government representatives. According to *The New York Times*, *The Economist*, and several other international news sources, German intelligence services have concluded for years that the greatest threat to national security comes from domestic, far right extremist groups within Germany. A second, far-right plot to overthrow the German government was announced by the German government on January 16, 2023. The second plot was planned by five people, who were charged with treason. Their objective was to incite a civil war, abduct then public health minister Karl Lauterbach because of his anti-COVID health measures, and overthrow the government. Political assassinations were also part of their plan. According to news reports at the time, the second group was separate from the group uncovered one year earlier.¹

Nearly two years earlier, on January 6, 2021, an insurrection that generated far more attention occurred in Washington, D.C.: the assault on the U.S. Capitol building, physical attacks upon members of several police departments, all part of a failed attempt to overturn the results of the U.S. 2020 presidential election.² This insurrection congealed before the entire world a range of political tendencies and incidents that had often been viewed in isolation from one another and seemingly, at a remove from mainstream U.S. politics: Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017; Kyle Rittenhouse in Kenosha, Wisconsin; and the plot to kidnap Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, the latter two both in 2020, to give three examples.

1 "Five Charged over second alleged far-right plot against German government," AFP Berlin, Monday, January 23, 2023.

2 For an insider account of the coordinated attack in the Capitol on January 6, 2021, and of the planning and strategizing leading up to the event, see embedded journalist and documentarian Nick Quested's film "Big Dose of Reality: 64 Days: The Insurrection Playbook" (2024), which focuses on Proud Boy leader Enrique Tarrio.

At his January 20, 2021 inauguration, president elect Joseph Biden declared, referring to the insurrection and the citizenry of the United States, “This is not who we are!” Well, Biden’s comment begs the question, who is the *we* that President Biden was referring to?

Up until the insurrection, many citizens of the U.S. considered the Ku Klux Klan, the Proud and Boogaloo Bois, and similar contemporary organizations relics of a distant past or at best, extremist fringe political movements. What many students of U.S. politics failed to recognize was that these so-called fringe organizations were not anomalies in U.S. democracy, but occupants of U.S. democracy.

The emergence of exclusionary tendencies within democratic polities forces us to confront a seeming paradox: How could anti-democratic movements not only exist, but thrive in a democracy? Yet democracies, all the way back to classical Athens, have always tolerated some degree of inequality. For the Greeks, enslavement was considered a necessary institution, providing freedom for citizens to participate in the polis. In *The Promise of Politics* (essays mainly from the 1950s republished in 2005), Hannah Arendt suggests that freedom, the ability of citizens to participate in the Athenian polis, was made possible by the domination of slaves by members of the polis; “man could not be subject as a slave to someone else’s domination, or as a worker to the necessity of earning his daily bread.”³ The “normal” functioning of the first democratic polis presupposed coerced labor.

Only if we understand how democracies function under “normal” conditions can we accurately assess whether democracies in the current epoch are under extraordinary or unusual strain. Actual democracies have never functioned in isolation from other political and economic orders – neither in the ancient world nor in our contemporary one. Oligarchy, which has a longer history than democracy, was defined as the politics of the rich. Democracy was defined by Athenians as the politics of the poor. Given this historical backdrop, we should especially view calls for a “return” to democratic political culture in popular and elite discourse with skepticism. They are misguided attempts to project democracy into the present and future based on false assumptions about democracy’s past.

Karl Marx clearly understood the implications of the conjuncture of democracy and enslavement in the modern world when he declared in *Capital* that “to be free at home, (Britain) must enslave abroad.” So did eighteenth-century commentators Edmund Burke and Adam Ferguson understand the implications. They warned that overseas empire would accelerate political and moral corruption in the liberal, democratic but no less imperial metropolises of Europe.

3 Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, Schocken Books, 2005, 116.

For those who have not read my study *The Spectre of Race*, what follows is a brief description of its contents. My book explores how the practice of democracy produces – and is affected by – political inequality. To take the first key theme, what I have called racial and ethno-national regimes are a combination of formal and informal institutions, laws and norms, combined with administrative and coercive practices implemented by governments and economies to systematically disadvantage certain groups, while providing advantages to members of dominant groups. Racial and ethno-national regimes have persisted in the world's most continuous democracies: France, Britain, and the United States, and in other nation-states both democratic and non-democratic.

The second key theme of the book is a recurrent tendency among some political actors and everyday folk in many national societies to assume that nation-states have – or should have – homogeneous populations. This has been a long-standing assumption, myth, and policy aspiration among nationalists in much of the nation-state system, according to which there should be symmetry between state and citizenry, whether in religious, ethno-national, or presumed racial terms. For example, Woodrow Wilson, the 28th president of the United States, details what he describes as “several all-important conditions” for the successful operation of democratic institutions.⁴ Number one on his list is the:

homogeneity of race and community of thought and purpose among the people. There is no amalgam of democracy which can harmoniously unite races of diverse habits and instincts or unequal acquirements in thought and action . . . A nation once come into maturity and habituated to self-government may absorb alien elements, as our own nation has done and is still doing . . . Homogeneity is the first requisite for a nation that would be democratic.⁵

At various points in the text, Wilson makes clear that even though U.S. Negroes, the brighter and more ambitious among them, have the capacity for self-government, they should never, under any circumstances, rule over the Saxon race, as was the case during Reconstruction.⁶ In this same section Wilson does acknowledge that the United States had a history of absorbing “alien” populations into its society, mainly ethno-nationalities from central and southern Europe. Racial categorization provided Wilson and other adherents of Euro-Aryanism with a homogenizing device to render the diversity of European populations in the

⁴ Woodrow Wilson, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson Vol. 2*, ed. Arthur Stanley Link, Princeton University Press, 1967, 74.

⁵ Wilson, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson Vol. 2*, 74–75.

⁶ “Stray Thoughts from the South (22 February, 1881),” *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson Vol. 2*, ed. Arthur Stanley Link, Princeton University Press, 1967, 27. On this topic, see also Thulani Davis, *The Emancipation Circuit*, Duke University Press, 2022.

United States under a single, unifying chromatic rubric – whiteness—and to formulate a hierarchy of so-called races in a global order.

Let's pause to juxtapose Wilson's language just cited with the following excerpt from Adolf Hitler's speech in the *Reichstag* on January 30, 1937:

. . . there is one error which cannot be remedied once men have made it, namely the failure to recognize the importance of conserving the blood and the race free from intermixture and thereby the racial aspect and character which are God's gift and God's handiwork. It is not for men to discuss the question of why Providence created different races, but rather to recognize the fact that it punishes those who disregard its work of creation.⁷

The conclusions of Wilson and Hitler, along with many contemporary politicians across the world, however, are based on faulty assumptions. The overwhelming majority of nation-states are constituted by a hodge podge of religious, ethno-national, linguistic, or presumed racial distinctions (please note the “presumed” in this sentence). This includes Germany which, in 1871, the year of its birth, consolidated an assortment of peoples that included Slavs, Franks, Saxons, Frisians among other nationalities and ethnicities. The idea of population homogeneity, just like classifications such as foreigner and citizen, is a political artifact, not something we find ready made in the world.

So many parts of the origin tales told by various ultra-nationalist and xenophobic movements in nation-states rely upon dangerous fictions, such as the need to create and maintain a pure, homogeneous population. But these fictions also help generate basic questions that involve questions of citizenship, the nation-state, and national belonging. Shall we let any of these outsiders in, and if so, which ones? By what criteria shall we include some people and exclude others? Once allowed in, who should be encouraged to leave, and who should be encouraged to stay?

As democratic institutions maintain barriers to civic membership, they must always justify their exclusions. Moments of geo-political crisis, such as that experienced by the Greeks during the Greco-Persian Wars, the era of the Red Scare in the United States, or the contemporary debate in the European Union regarding immigration and migration reveal popular and governmental anxieties about being overrun by certain – not all – foreigners. Citizenship becomes associated with particular types of people, and not the actual exercise of citizenship rights, duties, and responsibilities (*jus soli* versus *jus sanguinis*). This tendency is clearly in evidence in then President Donald Trump's January 2018 evocations of caravans ambling over the southern border of the United States filled with “danger-

7 Adolph Hitler, speech at the Reichstag, January 30, 1937.

ous criminals,” principally from what he had referred to earlier as “shithole” countries.

There are many examples of authoritarian, populist movements and governments in the contemporary world who utilize the following chain of associations in their rhetoric: homogeneity produces national/state unity, political stability, and prosperity: Germany, Greece, Portugal, Austria, the Dominican Republic, Hungary, India, among others. Certain foreigners, people with distinct cultures, religions, sexual orientations, threaten this chain of associations.

The takeaway

So, what does all of this tell us about the practice of democracy in the current moment?

There is an ever-proliferating industry of books and articles on democracy’s decline in the contemporary moment, much of which considers contemporary democracies as never in a more precarious state than they are in now. Yet democracies in practice have always contained what I am referring to as privileging design. Privileging design, through law, custom and the use of force, structures certain political, economic and social advantages to some groups and not others. The active presence of privileging design within democracies complicates our understanding of how democracies have actually functioned in the past, and as a consequence, our understanding of how they function in the present.

In his book, *The New Faces of Fascism*, historian Enzo Traverso notes a disquieting fact: the principal threats to the short-lived democracies of Spain, Italy, and Germany in the interwar period came not from exogenous movements but from within.⁸ Democracies harbor their own precarities. In the 1920s and 1930s, opponents of democracy corroded its institutions and civic cultures, using notions of difference as a wedge to divide national populations. The same process is occurring now. The examination of racial and ethno-national regimes in democratic polities can serve as barometers of the health of plural societies. In order to do so, however, we must ask the following question: what price do democracies pay when they target and deny membership to certain groups based on criteria of ethno-national and presumed racial distinction?

I believe this question is important because racial and ethno-national regimes within democratic polities often rely upon democratic modes of deliberation, tactics, and strategy to maintain dominance by one group over one or more groups. Such

8 Enzo Traverso, *The New Faces of Fascism: Populism and the Far Right*, Verso, 2017, 4–5.

regimes require bureaucracy, intelligence (information gathering), and surveillance, often occult and hidden from the general population, to maintain a very particular public order. Abu Ghraib provides a contemporary example. Earlier examples include Japanese American Nisei internment during World War II, the Trail of Tears, and the expulsion of Chinese from the Pacific Northwest and California.

Historical coordinates and context

I want to offer some suggestions on how to think about our current moment in historical and comparative perspective, a pastiche of peoples, conflicts and circumstances across time and space: 1) white backlash in response to Reconstruction in the U.S. South; 2) the interwar years in Europe (1919–1929) and the rise of fascist states; 3) the relative inattention by the U.S. government to the proliferation of violent white supremacist groups. White supremacist reactions to the presence of Black people as political inhabitants of the state apparatus of the United States were evident in the visceral, negative reaction to Barack Obama's period in office. According to data compiled by the Southern Poverty Law Center, Obama's victory over John McCain triggered an increased proliferation of white supremacist, paramilitary groups across the United States. The Trump administration, along with Mitch McConnell and other members of the Republican party, sought no less than to erase the Obama presidency from the political history of the United States, as many Southerners did with Reconstruction.

In *The Anatomy of Fascism*, Robert Paxton has suggested that a U.S. version of fascism is not going to be an exact replica of what occurred during the interwar period in Europe, but it will share certain characteristics of earlier European fascisms as well as characteristics that are distinct to U.S. political culture. Paxton's observation is a provocation of sorts, and it has the advantage of forcing us to think comparatively about the similarities between fascism and what I am characterizing as racial rule. Paxton has suggested that the prototype for state fascism can be identified in the emergence of paramilitary forces in the U.S. South in response to Reconstruction to undermine federal authority, preceding Italian state fascism by over 60 years.⁹

⁹ Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, Knopf, 2005. One of the advantages of Paxton's account is its analytic distinctions between fascist regimes, fascist movements, and fascist states, allowing for nuanced comparison across cases and the disentangling of fascisms as political phenomena from the spaces and moments in which they operated. Ironically, Paxton suggests that

How does the U.S. government's reaction to Reconstruction and the targeting of Blacks for specific forms of terrorist violence at the end of the Civil War relate to the current moment? When Trump first took office, one of the earliest acts to signal the normalization of white supremacy in national politics was his removal of several white supremacist groups from the domestic terrorist watch list; in their stead, he had ANTIFA added to the list.

Despite the U.S.'s longstanding history of white supremacist violence, and white supremacist organizational increase during the Obama years, there has been very little data of public record provided by the intelligence community (IC) tracking violent white supremacist organizations and individuals since the Oklahoma City bombing committed by Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols in 1987. Between 1987 and the events of January 6, 2021, one unclassified document has been distributed by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. The Office of the Director of National Intelligence released "(U) Domestic Violent Extremism Poses Heightened Threat in 2021" on March 1, 2021. The release into the public record of this document is significant for substantive and temporal reasons. Published three months after the aborted uprising at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, the document provides the following: "The IC assesses that domestic violent extremists (DVEs) who are motivated by a range of ideologies and galvanized by recent events in the United States pose an elevated threat to the Homeland in 2021. Enduring DVE motivations pertaining to biases against minority populations and perceived government overreach will almost certainly continue to drive DVE radicalization and mobilization to violence. (U) Executive Summary point 1)". Point 3 declares that in the assessment of the IC community, "racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists (RMVEs) and militia violent extremists (MVEs) present the most lethal DVE threats, with RMVEs most likely to conduct mass-casualty attacks against civilians . . ." Assessment 4: "US RMVEs who promote the superiority of the white race are the DVE actors with the most persistent and concerning transnational connections because individuals with similar ideological beliefs exist outside of the United States and these RMVEs frequently communicate with and seek to influence each other."¹⁰ Thus, organizations and individuals motivated by white supremacist ideologies posed the most lethal threat to the do-

perhaps the earliest example of fascist forms of parallel regimes was the rise of the Ku Klux Klan and other racist, anti-Black organizations in response to Reconstruction.

For a discussion of the authoritarian policies of the Confederate government, Stephanie McCurry and Robert Mickey have provided historical evidence to suggest that the Confederate government was essentially an authoritarian regime during the Civil War.

¹⁰ "(U) Domestic Violent Extremism Poses Heightened Threat in 2021," Office of the Director of National Intelligence, United States of America, 2–3.

mestic security of the United States in 2021, with transnational linkages that trouble the distinction between domestic and foreign threats, and in turn, domestic and foreign policy.

At stake in the here and now, however, is not the mere sharing and dissemination of ideologies, but also of tactics, strategy, application, and deployment of techniques of violence surveillance, mass casualties, destruction, and crippling of infrastructure. The stakes are a rejoinder of sorts to President Biden's declaration cited at the beginning of this paper: unfortunately, in the United States and elsewhere, this is where WE are.

Several years ago, in a series of articles and lectures for the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, I wrote of the distinct possibility of racist violence, and, in turn, of popular resistance to that violence enacted in multiple, disparate skirmishes involving paramilitary groups, citizens who oppose them, and segments of the armed forces who would ostensibly show up to keep the peace by restoring "order." Barbara Walter's timely, sobering account *How Civil Wars Start* captures this possible scenario encroaching upon the political horizon of the United States.

Other possible sources of mobilization in the military and civil society warrant consideration. There are Black, Latino, Indigenous members of the armed forces who support Movement for Black Lives and allied groups, as well as soldiers who are opposed to such groups. Will this lead to dissension among the armed forces? As during the U.S. civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, portions of the U.S. armed forces may be called upon to protect United States citizens from vigilante groups, and in so doing help salvage what is left of an already limited U.S. democracy. My concern here is not whether the label "fascist" in any form applies to the United States, or any other nominally democratic nation-state. Instead, I am demonstrating just one of several ways in which liberal democracies can be corroded from within, by ignoring the rot of racism within core nominally democratic institutions.

Many commentators have noted the rightward shift in global politics: the Alternative for Germany Party cited at the beginning of this essay, the Sons of Italy Party led by Prime Minister Georgia Meloni, the rightward shift in Sweden (Sweden Democrats) and Finland (Finns Party, and the National Coalition Party) respectively, and Modi's Hindu Nationalism in India.¹¹ As part of the right wing shift, each country has what on first glance would seem to be a highly restrictive, anti-immigration policy. But in many cases, policies of racialization are masquerading as immigration policy. In the Americas and the EU, racialized immigration policy

¹¹ See Arjun Appadurai, "Modi's India Has Now Entered Genocidalism: The Most Advanced Stage of Nationalism," *The Wire*, January 10, 2022.

targets migrants from Africa, the Caribbean, and the Americas as unfit and unwelcome for entry, let alone citizenship and assimilation.

The rise of right-wing populism in many countries, with attendant attacks on “woke” culture and diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives in several countries, has brought forth a sobering truth. What insurgent right-wing movements aspire to most is state power, authority, legitimacy, and majoritarian group dominance. Neither empathy, reconciliation, a politics of recognition nor mutual understanding are their goals. No less than the anti-colonial and nationalist struggles of the period after World War II, the process of desegregation in the United States required support from the U.S. armed forces, local and state police, and the National Guard. Remember the images of the National Guard and U.S. Army escorting the group of Black students known as the Little Rock Nine, in 1957? Let’s be clear: the instantiation of full democracy in the United States required armed struggle or at a minimum, formal military supports. Kellie Carter Jackson’s scholarship on the history of violence in the United States details how central the role of violence was to the Black freedom struggle as a form of collective defense against white domination.

Much media commentary and scholarship advocating anti-racist curriculum, education and political culture remains based on Enlightenment assumptions about defeating racism through education and socialization, fostering mutual understanding and empathy. Many of these pronouncements are based on wishful thinking, often citing a phrase by Martin Luther King that “the arc of history bends toward justice.”¹²

If recent events in Germany, Brazil, the United States, Italy, India, and Israel are any indication, however, the bend in the arc of history needs structural support, or a nudge if you will, toward democratic deepening and repair. If we take a close look at how democracies have actually functioned, more often than not, barriers to political and civic membership of the formerly excluded have not fallen “due to some telos intrinsic to democratic politics; they fell, more often than not, because of the challenges made by those who were excluded.”¹³ Civil rights movements, feminist, abolitionist, suffrage movements demanded the incorporation of the formerly excluded into democratic polities. The dynamic relationships between movements seeking radical change and those who want to preserve the status quo in the current moment remind us, that democracy, not just electoral, but also social and economic democracy, is something that has to be fought over, often literally.

¹² See Michael G. Hanchard, “A Larger Pattern of Institutional Racism,” *IAS, The Institute Letter*, Summer 2015, 1,17; “Democracy’s Big Secret,” *IAS The Institute Letter*, Fall 2020.

¹³ Michael G. Hanchard, *The Spectre of Race: How Discrimination Haunts Western Democracy*, Princeton University Press, 2018, 107.

The wrong targets, or not guilty

As in the past, members of marginalized groups who have resorted to civil disobedience, marches, boycotts, sit-ins, even self-defense, are often identified as agents of terror, disorder, and mayhem. Abolitionists and suffragists in the United States, anarchists and trade unionists in Spain, Italy, Chile, and Germany are prime examples. Each group within their country and epoch was criminalized and, in some cases, jailed or murdered for their contestation of the limits placed on individual freedoms and popular participation in the polis, namely, the right to dissent. In the months leading up to the coordinated attack on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, some of the highest-ranking generals of the U.S. armed forces as well as intelligence personnel, stated publicly that the biggest threat to national security in the United States was what the CIA referred to as “Black Identity Extremists,” with the Movement for Black Lives (formerly known as Black Lives Matter) as the allegedly primary example. What became immediately evident on January 6, however, was that the threat posed by white racist, neo-Nazi, and fascist organizations, encouraged by the former president of the United States, Donald Trump, was far more significant a threat to public order than the Movement for Black Lives. When compared to U.S. intelligence, German state intelligence more accurately identified the most immediate threat to its national security.

The focus of attention on the so-called Black threat within certain (not all) departments of the U.S. intelligence community and personnel and not the real threat posed by groups such as the Proud Boys and other populist authoritarian, white supremacist groups hints at the misdirection of certain sectors of the intelligence community and upper echelon military personnel in the United States. In the words of Stephanie LaRue, Chief of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility for the Intelligence Community, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, during a July 27, 2023 interview: “In the intelligence community, lack of diversity leads to bad intelligence.”¹⁴

For example, it was revealed during the trial of Enrique Tarrio and other members of the Proud Boys on charges of sedition, that Mr. Tarrio was on the FBI payroll. His assignment? Provide intelligence on Black Lives Matter. So misdirected was the focus on the purported Black threat within certain sectors of the intelligence community that it led to inattention to documented evidence of plans to attack the Capitol in the weeks and days before January 6.

¹⁴ See also, “Spy Agencies Urged to Fix Open Secret: A Lack of Diversity,” Associated Press online, Nomann Merchant, May 19, 2022.

There is at least one crucial commonality shared by the United States and Germany regarding the resurgence of anti-statist, racist, antisemitic, and xenophobic movements in both countries. Part of the reason why contemporary racist and fascist movements and ideologies resemble their counterparts from the 1930s through the 1940s is that those earlier ideologies, and their philosophical sediment, *never left*. Further, as in the 1920s and 1930s in Italy and Germany, people who sought to uphold democratic practices and to fight for the rule of law against arbitrary domination were – and are – criminalized.

Neither the Civil War in the United States, nor the fall of the Third Reich during World War II, eradicated the urge toward ethno-nationalism and state racism. Many key actors of the Confederate South and in the case of the Third Reich, leading scientists, thinkers and military leadership were incorporated into prominent positions in subsequent national governments, the judiciary and private enterprise. Many had not denounced their ideologies of white and Aryan supremacy. Here is where we can examine the United States and Germany as paradigmatic examples of incomplete consolidation, with implications for the contemporary moment. After the Civil War, state and local governmental authorities in the defeated south, with the help of several U.S. presidents such as Andrew Johnson and Woodrow Wilson, refused to provide material and ultimately military support to guarantee Black civil rights, and in fact encouraged paramilitary organizations such as the Regulators and most infamously, the Ku Klux Klan. Wilson supported the Klan's efforts to secure and maintain white racial rule. U.S. African Americans lived under a condition Hannah Arendt described as “apolarity,” circumstances under which people inhabit a territory without state protection.¹⁵ My point here is that incomplete consolidation creates some of the political pre-conditions for localized sovereignties, and the basis for building larger-scale political orders. In the case of the United States, racial rule provides the embryo for nurturing fascist and authoritarian tendencies within a nominally democratic polity.

Democracy as a dynamic problem

In the chapter “Looking Forward,” in his study *Black Reconstruction: An Essay Toward a History of the Part which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880*, W. E. B. Dubois referred to democracy as a “problem,” because it “expands and touches all races and nations.” Regarding the relationship between enslavement and democracy in the United States, Dubois

15 Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, Schocken Books, 2005, 6.

posed the rhetorical question: “Was the rule of the mass of Americans to be unlimited, and the right to rule extended to all men, regardless of race and color, or if not, what power of dictatorship would rule, and how would property and privilege be protected?”¹⁶

Approaching democracy as a problem requires treating the concept as a stage for dynamic interactions involving institutions, ideas, norms, and people, and not a static ideal type. We can consider democracy as a mode of political community with prospects, rather than guarantees, of political equality.

Will the survival of democratic institutions ultimately rely upon the despotic exercise of state power to rid a polity and society of anti-democratic, anti-republican competitors and aspirants? What anti-democratic forces will be arrayed against contemporary (largely representative) forms of democracy? Will struggles for more egalitarian forms of political community, even more radical forms of democracy, emerge? Over the course of the twentieth and now twenty-first century, successive generations have sought to meld the multiplicity of human community – the fact of human pluralism – with egalitarian political institutions, practices, and culture.

I hope this brief commentary has provided a glimpse, if an uncomfortable one, of democracy’s balancing act of egalitarian and unequal orders simultaneously. It is time for many of us to acknowledge that if democracy is to work at all, it must be made anew.

¹⁶ W. E. B. Dubois, *Black Reconstruction: An Essay Toward a History of the Part which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880*, First Edition, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935, vii.