

Courage My Friends Podcast Series VIII – Episode 5
Rebranded Fascism, Higher Education and the Burden of Conscience

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ANNOUNCER: You're listening to *Needs No Introduction*.

Needs No Introduction is a rabble podcast network show that serves up a series of speeches, interviews and lectures from the finest minds of our time

RESH: How should we understand the current rise of authoritarianism in the United States? Is this a moment of political absurdity or the logical outcome of an absurd system? What are the elements of today's updated fascism and why and how is it targeting cultural institutions, especially higher education? What about in Canada? And why are critical thinking, historical memory and resistant pedagogy so urgently needed in the face of the unspeakable?

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COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: Welcome back to this podcast series by rabble.ca and the Tommy Douglas Institute at George Brown College.

In the words of the great Tommy Douglas...

TOMMY (Actor): Courage my friends, 'tis not too late to build a better world

COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: This is the Courage My Friends Podcast.

RESH: Welcome to the Courage My Friends podcast, episode five, *Rebranded Fascism, Higher Education and the Burden of Conscience*.

I'm your host, Resh Budhu.

In episode 5, we are pleased to welcome back Henry Giroux, scholar, cultural critic and author, most recently of *The Burden of Conscience: Educating Beyond the Veil of Silence*. We discuss the rise of authoritarianism in the United States and around the world as an updated fascism, its attack on democracy and higher education and the urgent need for solidarity, critical pedagogy and resistance in the face of what Giroux calls "the unspeakable".

Henry, welcome back. Thanks for joining us.

HENRY: Oh, it's a pleasure.

RESH: Much of your work has focused on the neoliberal erosion of public and critical education. We last spoke of this in the context of the pandemic. Now in your latest work, *The Burden of Conscience, Educating Beyond the Veil of Silence*, the crisis seems to be evolving.

What is the aim of this book? Give us a bit of an overview. And what is the burden of conscience?

HENRY: Well, I think the burden of conscience is essentially , what that refers to, is to be attentive and aware and historically conscious and critically engaged in what it means to, in many ways, recognize the nature, the threat and the possibility of the forces that are bearing down on our lives.

And I think that we now find ourselves in a particular set of social formations that are very threatening and very dangerous. Dangerous in the sense that what we are seeing is the emergence of an upgraded form of fascism across the globe, not only in the United States, but in Turkey and India and Hungary, of course, in Italy and Argentina.

And I think that we need to be alert to the fact that at the heart of this is the responsibility to not only name it, not only hold people accountable for it, but to take seriously what it means to educate and promote a kind of public awareness in which people can see these problems, not just simply as private troubles, but as basically troubles that demand systemic analysis and collective action.

RESH: You write that fascism is no longer interred in history, but has reemerged as a type of rebranded fascism. So what are the elements of this rebranded fascism? And why are we seeing this emergence now?

HENRY: Well, I think that fascism has a long legacy in the United States. I mean, one could argue in this particular case that it actually begins with the elimination of Indigenous populations and African Americans being brought to the U. S. in terms of slavery and the emergence of the KKK.

But I think the first issue is this. I think the first issue is that fascism basically is present in almost every society, and we see it re emerging. In terms of that speak very powerfully to a number of issues.

One is, of course, white Christian nationalism. The other is white supremacy. I mean, the other is an engaging kind of militarism that now basically is producing a Punishing State that is really rooted in particular forms of extermination.

We see the anti-intellectualism. We see the attack on critical institutions, such as universities. We see a language of absolutism emerging in which, for instance, everything's spoken about in binaries. You know, friend-enemy distinctions. We see a language that is utterly dehumanizing. Unlike anything we've seen in a long time across North America.

And I think that in many ways fascism begins with language. Because once you move to the language of dehumanization, it's very easy to move to the language of extermination. And from the language of extermination, you're basically moved to a

full grown fascist state that is entirely unapologetic because it has normalized relations of cruelty, exploitation, and suffering.

So I think in that sense, what we see are elements of a fascism that we've seen in the past, sort of being reprogrammed, re-energized, and reimagined in different forms.

And I'm particularly concerned about two things in that question, Resh.

One is that neoliberalism, which really has been as powerful as the divine right of kings in both depoliticizing people and exploiting them. Depoliticizing them by virtue of making it appear that all problems are individual problems so people can't translate private issues into larger social issues.

But at the same time, arriving at a point where it suffers from what I call a "legitimation crisis". It can't defend itself anymore. It can't say in the midst of massive inequality: Oh, there are ample jobs around, we're going to increase the quality of life. Everybody's going to pick themselves up from their bootstraps. You know, life in general will be better. That's over.

So instead of attempting to legitimate itself, it now basically embraces a neo colonial logic of basically racism. Now it merges with a far right wing set of considerations that says, yeah, we have problems, but it's not neoliberalism, the problem now are Blacks. The problem now are Brown people. The problem now are immigrants. The problem now are refugees. The problem now are anybody who basically doesn't fit into a White Christian notion of citizenship, which says you have to be White and a religious fundamentalist to even occupy the space of citizenship.

So I think that in that sense, what we've seen emerge is an entirely different paradigm than anything that we have seen in the past, particularly in the United States.

RESH: And again, these are really hallmarks of the Trump presidency, a very volatile presidency. And we're all caught in this. Right now, Canada is caught in a puzzling and destructive trade war that just seems to be so arbitrary.

However, where mainstream media tends to treat him as a political absurdity in a system gone awry, you argue that Trump is actually emblematic of authoritarianism. Perhaps even the logical outcome of the neoliberal system.

HENRY: Yeah, I think I think your point is well taken. I think to view Trump as a clown, to view Trump as simply a kind of odd political figure who appears out of nowhere, that means you have nothing to learn from history.

I mean, I think that Trump is the logical endpoint of the collapse of capitalism into its most ruthless gangster forms. And in fact, the endpoint of a legacy of a call for racial purity and white supremacy that has now basically emerged in a way that is almost

unimaginable. So the conditions that have, basically created Trump have been around for a long time.

Of course we can go back before Reagan and Thatcher and others. But it really begins with an attack on the social and the Social State and the Welfare State and people of colour. Whether we're talking about Reagan claiming that government is the problem and attacking Black people or we're talking about Thatcher claiming, there's no such thing as society. What we have with Trump is an outcome of what I call the *crisis of the social*, the crisis of public goods, the crisis of public consciousness, and the crisis of ideas itself.

We have seen since the 1980s a systemic attempt to destroy all those cultural institutions that in some way shape civic consciousness. And it's worked. Seventy million people voted for Trump, over 70 million. That speaks to the creation of a fascist subject in the absence of an educational structure in the broader sense with respect to both schools and the culture that have utterly failed to address the importance of agency as central to democracy itself.

RESH: Now, I just want to get into some terminology. You frequently talk about gangster capitalism and racial capitalism. So what is gangster capitalism?

HENRY: Gangster capitalism is a form of capitalism that basically is based on cronyism, exploitation, corruption, everything that you would imagine is antithetical to how a democracy should work. It models itself after the mafia. It models itself after matters of loyalty being more important than matters of justice.

It models itself on the concentration of power in relatively few hands. And it operates under what I would call a kind of death march. In that it's a politics that is concerned more about producing misery and suffering than it is about expanding the contours of justice and equality.

It's a zombie politics, which I've used in another book. It's a politics in which people basically who run these countries have blood in their mouths. It's a politics of cruelty. It's a politics of exploitation. It's a politics that basically demeans human life and elevates profit over everything else.

RESH: And racial capitalism.

HENRY: Well, racial capitalism is a form of capitalism that basically is deeply rooted in a systemic exploitation of people of colour. It functions in a way as to make clear that people of colour have no place in either the production and then the organization of power or the participation of power.

It's enormously discriminatory. It's systemic. And basically it functions in a way to advance what I would call, not only ultra nationalism and the politics of disposability, but also the politics of racial purity.

I mean, it's a language that so dehumanizes people of colour, so dehumanizes and operates off the logic of racial hierarchies that in many ways it's so overwhelming in the discourse that we see today that it becomes normalized.

I mean it functions so as to create a kind of historical amnesia in which people forget the legacy of slavery. They forget the legacy of Jim Crow. They operate in a discourse in which the spirit of the Confederacy sort of emerges again as part of the long history of racial capitalism, which then gets eliminated.

It gets eliminated in schools. It gets eliminated through censorship. It gets eliminated in books. It gets eliminated by basically subjecting students who are fighting for people of colour in Gaza, by putting them in jail or expelling them from schools or claiming that they're basically terrorists and support terrorist groups. It's absolutely endemic to how we understand.

You can't understand capitalism and its legacy without understanding its embrace of hierarchies based on race and ethnicity. It's impossible.

RESH: As you said, we are seeing right wing populism and authoritarianism emerging in many places throughout the world. What is the attraction of people towards these authoritarian leaders, towards these anti-people, anti-worker, anti-planet parties?

HENRY: I think there are a couple of issues at work. And of course, there's no one factor. But I think that what we see in the United States, and also in a sense in many of these other right wing governments is that we see massive degrees of inequality that bear down on people's lives in ways in which time is no longer a luxury. It's simply a burden.

They don't have enough food. Poverty is widespread. Increasing homelessness. Massive degrees of anxiety. But more importantly, an enormous sense of loneliness. People are alienated in the United States. The social networks that used to provide a sense of solidarity have not only been transformed into objects of contempt, but I think that out of that desperation and anxiety, is an increasing failure on the part of two parties.

One, you have the Republican party, which basically is a party of the rich and white supremacists. On the other hand, you had a Democratic party that basically defines itself as being liberal, but doesn't have the courage to critique capitalism as a form of gangsterism. And in doing that, sided with the financial elite, and at the same time turned its back on the working class.

Out of that combination of poverty, misery, no party is speaking in a fundamental way to the issues that matter, except for Trump. I mean, Trump said he was going to turn the economy around. You know, they're concerned about basic issues.

On the other hand, the Left really has no language about education. It has a very minor, if almost irrelevant language about cultural politics. And in doing so there's an absence of what I call a language of attention, an attentiveness to the problems that people have in which we can speak to them in ways in which they can recognize themselves.

The Right hates the politics of identification. All the Right identifies with is White Nationalism. Democrats, they make a gesture towards liberalism and so forth and so on, but they have no language for dealing with inequality. None whatsoever. And basically doesn't understand that education is central to politics.

Where did that get us? It got people looking for the strong man. It got people looking for people who could say, I can solve your problems because they didn't have a language to really understand the nature of the problems that bore down on their lives, both at the level of ideology and at the level of some sort of systemic analysis.

RESH: In the book you do speak about the liberal, the middle, the moderate. And what's interesting is that even as we're focusing on the frenetic, often irrational and cruel decisions of the Trump administration, the Democrats are getting sort of a free pass or a redemptive cleansing of their record. So there seems to be an amnesia that's happening there.

How is this translating into what's happening in Canada? Are you seeing the same types of things happening here?

HENRY: I think that there are a couple of things happening in Canada. I mean, of course there's an increasing and onset of circumstances that are pushing against what was happening in Canada, right? Whether we're talking about the tariffs or we're talking about Trump claiming he wants to annex Canada and in a sense bolstering and reviving a sense of nationalism that Canadians have to think very seriously about in terms of which way you want to go with that nationalism.

If you want to go in the way that Trump is going, then Canada will collapse into authoritarianism. If not, then it might be a healthy nationalism that basically is rooted in a sense of justice and equality and a willingness to deal with questions of global solidarity.

But I think those forces are always at work, the forces of fascism. I mean, you have a right wing party in Canada that basically talks about banning books, that talks about immigrants, that uses the language of Trump at a lower sort of intensity. And they're dangerous. And you also have massive inequality in Canada.

Yes, we have national health care, and that makes a difference. But you have people like Ford, who are doing everything they can to eliminate that, who are moving towards the language of privatization.

With the language of privatization, comes the language of dehumanization. And I say that because I think that what that means is that all problems now get translated and the inability of people to really address those problems individually. And so the question of character begins to take over the public consciousness.

Oh, people are homeless because they're lazy. People are not working because they don't know how to fill out an application, and they want to stay home all day and just cheat on the state. All those issues are there. And I think in light of the shadow of Trump, I want to believe that Canadians particularly can move more to the Left and begin to recognize what the link is economically between fascism, authoritarianism, and what we see in Trump with his utterly racist Manifest Destiny, colonialist ideology.

But Canadians have to be alert. I mean this is not a country in which working class people and others have control of, it's a country controlled by bankers. It's a country controlled by the rich. And with all of that, there's always the shadow of fascism. The shadow of fascism always lurks beneath, it seems to me, those set of economic political relationships.

RESH: When we're talking about fascism, this is really sort of the partnership between the State and the corporation.

And this right now is all occurring in the age of social media, AI and tech billionaires, Elon Musk, the world's richest man, now has enormous influence in the world's most powerful nation. This is happening in an age that Oxfam has identified as the age of corporate driven inequality and billionaire colonialism.

So could you speak a bit more about this partnership between the State and the private market or corporations?

HENRY: Well, I think that what we've seen emerge over time is corporations evolving into something that was unimaginable in the past. I mean, when you have five corporations controlling the entirety of the media in North America, what you're beginning to see is a concentration of power and wealth that completely destroys almost any vestige of an appeal of the idea or even the appeal to democracy.

You can't have that massive degree of inequality in the hands of a financial elite and expect that democracy is going to be able to emerge. It's not going to emerge, it's going to be destroyed.

But I think the other side of that is that, and you hinted this, but I don't think I quite heard what I'm about to say in your comments. And that is, yes, we do have a new economic political formation, no question. The State has become captive. It's a captive state. Captive by the corporations. And captive also by Christian fundamentalists.

But what is new here is that the degree in which the state now operates outside of having to sort of become an authoritarian state by simply arresting people, putting soldiers in the streets, it is captured culture. We have a captive culture. And that culture is enormously powerful and unlike anything we have ever seen before.

"Politics now follows culture", in the words of Vaclav Havel, in ways that are unimaginable because you now have cultural apparatuses that are so powerful as pedagogical machines. So powerful in shaping public consciousness. So powerful in commodifying people. So powerful in shaping notions of agency, that it really represents a new form of political domination.

And it also in many ways makes it very, very clear that any notion of resistance that doesn't create a culture that can support it, will fail. So central to my work and central to that point is that education is now central to politics in light of these new configurations, in light of the merging of power, culture, everyday life, and the concentration of wealth in relatively few hands.

We've never seen anything like this before. I mean this is unimaginable.

It's unimaginable because what you have is the shaping of mass consciousness in ways that are creating subjects and modes of agency and modes of political identification that are almost entirely on the side of domination. And that's new.

The scope and the intensity of that are far removed from anything we saw in C. Wright Mills. Far removed from anything that we saw in Stuart Hall and others. who had a grasp of how powerful culture was. But where we are now is truly, in light of the Elon Musk and Bezos and, ah! It's unimaginable.

RESH: I want to get to those points about education, but I just want to quote you again. You say that "21st century authoritarians camouflage their disdain for democracy by championing illiberal democracy." So what is *illiberal democracy*?

HENRY: Illiberal democracy has been basically articulated in its most powerful forms by Orban, Victor Orban in Hungary. Illiberal democracy defines itself in a number of ways.

First, it says that democracy is too messy, it doesn't work and for that reason, we need an authoritarian politics and an authoritarian economic system that will provide people with what he calls a certain degree of security and safety.

Secondly, he says illiberal democracy refuses the notion of mixed races. In other words, it sort of highlights, it reproduces itself through a politics of exclusion that is focused on making sure that matters of racial purity and the language of racial purity and the policies of racial purity can basically become normalized. In other words, illiberal democracy is a call for ethnic cleansing. That's basically what it is.

Thirdly, it's a call that in many ways suggests. that power has to be concentrated in relatively few hands. And while it's concentrated in relatively few hands, it operates off a politics of exclusion that says that some people aren't worthy in any way of a kind of citizenship that would allow them to engage in the claim that an illiberal democracy could provide more economic security.

So thirdly, illiberal democracy is based on the logic of what I call extermination. That is, we will purify the country. We will get rid of people who don't belong here. We will do everything we can to create a global network that basically is one that is rooted in what I would call the borders of racial cleansing.

And so I think they're the three moments of illiberal democracy that we now see being embraced all over the world by a number of far right wing governments.

RESH: Again, all of this is going towards I mean, one of the things that's going towards is the desperate need for having a systemic analysis, which is not happening within mainstream media, or in political centers among the parties.

And when you bring in the language of fascism, there are many that casually dismiss or even balk at the term "fascism" saying, well, you know, that's going too far or it's tantamount to hysteria. And instead, they call for decorum or for balance. And I assume, Henry, you have faced a great deal of this. What is your response to that?

HENRY: Well, I mean, there are a couple of things. I think that balance in the face of genocide is a retreat into supporting genocide. I think that the question of neutrality is absurd at a time when basically fascist governments are emerging all over the world and in doing so destroying the planet and destroying the lives of millions of people.

I also think this notion that the truth somehow should be ignored in support of making people feel comfortable is one of the most absurd liberal notions that I've ever heard.

The truth is too important it seems to me not to embrace. And if it makes people uncomfortable, then I would support the painful realities that we have to face in our histories in order to embrace the truth and to make it visible. And to operate off it than to basically become complacent by constructing an argument for therapy that has nothing to do with justice and has everything to do with injustice.

And I think that around the question of objectivity, I don't know what that means. I don't know what it means to make the claim that you operate a place from nowhere. That you have no values. And that basically in the face of injustice, what you have to do is sit back and either be quiet or refuse to name an evil for what it is, an evil.

I mean, just as one could say, and I think you suggested earlier, you know, Trump is not a normal candidate. Trump is a proto Nazi. And that's how he should be named. And that's how we should deal with it.

RESH: Now, when you're talking about truth, truth seems to be the victim here. We're hearing about alternative facts. We're engaging in sort of this Orwellian upside down logic. And you write that "this culture of misinformation and truth denial is now a central feature of politics." That lies and misinformation are a necessity for fascism.

HENRY: I think there were a couple of issues. I think institutionally, what we have seen is the rise of what I call "disimagination machines" and the purpose of these disimagination machines is to basically misrepresent reality, whether we're talking about conspiracy theories or we're talking about a culture of lies. A world in which the distinction between reason and misinformation simply disappears.

I think that is now a central political component of a party that does everything that it can to make sure that the greatest threat to authoritarianism is basically eliminated and that is creating an informed public.

You can't have a democracy without an informed public.

And I think the Right knows that.

And I think that what the Right has done in saturating the culture, basically, whether we're talking about the far Right MAGA machines, or we're talking about a government that basically simply trades in lies endlessly in order to legitimate them. We're talking about the inability to distinguish, not just simply between the truth and falsehoods, but the inability to distinguish between good and evil. And I think that's where the great crime is being permitted.

When a people cannot recognize either facts or the truth or evidence and become uninformed; we have no protection against the ability to recognize evil, to recognize injustice, to recognize the abuse of power, in order to hold it accountable.

This is an attack, not just simply on the truth, Resh. This is an attack on the ability of people to be critically and informed agents. This is an attack on something fundamental to democracy, and that is an agency that can translate private troubles into larger systemic issues, can act with a sense of passion, can be informed, and can do everything it can amidst their solidarity to bring this country, or whatever country we're talking about, in line with the ideals and the promises of democracy. And I think that this attack on truth, this attack on evidence, this attack on logic, this attack on informed judgment is really part, and aligns nicely with an inability, as you mentioned earlier, for people to think in terms of a totality.

I mean, to be able to put the pieces together and to say, Whoa, look what we're dealing with here. We're dealing with a system that truly, truly embraces the horrors of the past. And I think that the attack on truth, the culture of lying is another way to reinforce the kind of fragmentation that prevents people from being able to think in terms of larger totalities.

RESH: And higher education is one of these disimagination machines. I mean, we were talking about this the last time you were on the show, and certainly this features prominently within this book. How is higher education sort of recruited into this project?

HENRY: Well, I, think there are a number of things.

I think that increasingly, as almost everybody knows, higher education has moved from being an adjunct of corporations and, in a sense, divesting power from both students and faculty and turning it over to managerial hedge fund types who really have no vision of the university as a public good at all and really see the university as basically a machine for making money or for preparing people for the workplace.

They have no vision. And consequently they have faulted on their ability to be a crucial public good, a central public good in educating people in some way to be active and engaged citizens. That's a moment in the evolution of education that has been going on since the 1980s.

I mean, yes, we had the Red Scare, we had McCarthyism, but they weren't all that important. They just made the claim that universities were inhabited by a few Marxists and we needed to get rid of them.

But what has happened now is the university has moved from being simply corporatized to being an indoctrination machine. And that's very different. That means that trustees appointed by political hacks, billionaires who have an enormous influence on universities, the government which provides some financial funding, are now saying, we don't really care about whether you educate people for the corporate workforce, because we no longer believe you can even do that well.

What we really care about is you make sure that students can no longer think critically. What we really are concerned about is that you don't turn out students who would hold power accountable. What we really care about, as DeSantis is doing with New College in Florida, is banning books. Eliminating certain ideas. Instilling a sense of fear in faculty. Taking away the power of faculty. Diminishing students when they have the courage to say that universities should not be involved in research that produces arms that end up killing people.

So we're at a moment with the university in which it has become unapologetically, ideologically corrupt. And I think that we need to be very careful about understanding this transition from it being corporatized to being basically collusive or in collusion with fascist ideals and authoritarian sort of ideologies and practices and policies that basically threaten one of the few places left that hold the promise of students to be educated, to be critically and engaged citizens.

I mean, the notion that education should not only defend democracy, but enable it and should be defined through its claims on democracy Resh is basically almost dead. That language is almost dead. And both political parties have contributed to

that. But now in the reign of this MAGA authoritarianism, universities are really in trouble.

I mean, if you read about Columbia today, Trump just said that he was withdrawing, I don't know, \$400 million from Columbia because he believes that they're in some way supporting students who were too critical and, you know, engaging in free speech. And all of a sudden, Columbia, which has been repressing students lately in ways that are unimaginable. I mean, hauling students in because they don't like what they're saying on their websites or hauling them in because they've written an op ed. contesting the war in Palestine and claiming that they're making other students feel uncomfortable, using antisemitism as a weapon to basically crush student dissent. This is shameful. And yet they still get punished in spite of the reactionary policies they were instituting.

RESH: So distraction, shortened attention spans, depleted critical and complex abilities in thinking are not so much the unintended consequences of social media, as we so often hear, but are the intentions of deliberate policy.

HENRY: Absolutely.

RESH: But, education, you write, and particularly higher education, has a very important function to fulfill, a civic function, in what you call the building of a radical democracy.

HENRY: I'll say three things about that in light of what I've just said.

One is partly a correction, and that is, I never want to make the argument that universities now are so controlled by elements of domination that there aren't spaces of resistance and there aren't spaces of possibilities. I think in the more general sense, I don't think power should ever be completely defined by domination, and it never is.

At the same time, I think that these institutions are one of the few institutions left where the possibility for a spirit of critical inquiry, a spirit that affirms the importance of democracy, a spirit that is in some way informed by the need to create critical and informed citizens and is critical of injustice, I think it still exists. It's there. I think it's under siege, but I think that one of the things that I feel very hopeful about is a younger generation of students who are not buying this crap. You know, who are speaking out. Who are resisting in universities in spite of the police violence and in spite of the emergence of a punishing State that really has no regard for them as young people. Who basically will determine the future of in many ways North America and the world. So I think in that sense there are possibilities.

Thirdly, I think that there's been an enormous silence on the part of faculty in general around a number of important issues that have emerged in light of the ongoing repression. And I don't blame the faculty, I blame the conditions under which they work. And that is that many of them are part-time. Many of them are just struggling to stay alive in universities. And I think that we need to build a social movement among

educators that in North America and internationally can work together to basically change this prescription for depoliticization and powerlessness that now haunts and has shaped the university in ways that are terrible.

And we've got to learn how to translate that into forms of direct action that are meaningful and basically are powerful enough to begin a possibility of reclaiming the university as democratic public spheres.

But I'll tell you one thing that I find enormously significant. Unlike in the past, and I've been teaching for 40 years, you know, the students I have today are unreal. They're energized, they want to read everything, they're concerned about social problems. They find it hard to tolerate a class that you can't link what you're reading and talking about to larger social issues. I'm more energized by these students than I've ever been.

RESH: And they're really putting their as you pointed out their minds, their bodies and their futures on the line, because we're seeing such a crackdown on scholarships and future job opportunities and whatnot. Absolutely.

HENRY: I mean, the other side of this Resh, and you and I know this look, students are now confronted with a university that is so fragmented and so specialized that it becomes very difficult for them to have a language that is both attentive to larger systemic issues and social problems, and in some ways deals with the totality of the world in which they find themselves. And I find they they just get so energized over putting these things together in a way with a passion and a concern that energizes them.

I mean, we're not in there to interview ourselves. We're in there to, at least I think as educators who matter, we're in there to set the conditions for them to engage in both a dialogue with us and with others, their fellow students, and with themselves. To break down those common sense assumptions, to get energized about how smart they can be, and how that can embrace and enlarge their lives in ways that are crucial, important, and matter.

RESH: Absolutely. A great deal of the book focuses on the weaponization of language, silence, and memory. And you've spoken to some of this already. Again, under the title of "Blood in Their Mouths", you write that "violence has become the organizing principle of communication". In terms of this chilling, this silencing, but also the articulations that are coming from the State. Could you speak a bit more about the role of violence?

HENRY: I think that what we have seen particularly since 2016, is rather than hiding State violence, whether it would be Cointelpro in the sixties, the various forms of discrimination that result in tragic numbers and disproportionate numbers of Indigenous people and Black and Brown people being put in prison. There was an attempt to hide all of that. And an attempt in some way to create a soft language to either explain it so as to normalize it or just to be quiet about it.

But I think that since 2016, violence has become central to politics itself, through the use of the language of dehumanization, the language of threats, the language of fear, and the mobilization of violence itself.

And I think it began with Trump coming down that escalator. When he began his run for office in 2016, he begins with the language of dehumanization. He then holds endless rallies in which he actually condones violence, suggesting the police should really be more ruthless and beat people up. Suggesting that people who basically disagree with him should be shot in the legs or tortured. Up until 2024 making threats and violence against people who disagree with him, whether they're judges or lawyers.

Violence for him and the MAGA party has become the organizing principle of politics.

It's a combination of threats and the actual mobilization of violence on the part of his followers who basically believe that those threats matter.

Now, where did that end up?

It ended up in a spectacular way on January 6th with the attack on the Capitol. And basically, its end point was not a resolution like we saw in Brazil of holding people in contempt and charging them in some fundamental way, the leaders of that revolt, Bolsonaro for instance, and making sure they never would be involved in politics itself. In a sense, we held back and really did very little.

Some people went to jail, but where did it end up? It ended up with the President who pardoned people who basically assaulted the police and a number of other people. It ended up in condoning violence. And if I may say this, I hate to say this, rewarding it.

The pardoning of the January 6th people was a way in which the government said, look, loyalty will be rewarded even if you're violent. You have now a collective sense of immunity to make violence the ultimate organizing principle of protest and politics. That is unadulterated fascism. There's no other way to talk about it.

There's no other way to talk about it.

Violence is now a virus in the United States. It's now become part of the DNA of the political and social and cultural fabric. Violence is now the engine that drives cruelty. It's now the engine that drives the rise of the Punishing State and the death of the Social State.

RESH: And incredibly difficult to counter. The gutting of the social state, we saw that within Trump's latest speech to Congress. We're seeing laws that don't seem to matter anymore. We're seeing the weakness coming from the other side politically from the other party.

I mean, how can people gain hope? How do they counter this all encompassing State violence?

HENRY: First of all, I think that there's no agency without hope. There's no way to engage in a culture of resistance unless you can imagine a different future.

So what does that mean? It means basically the first thing that we have to acknowledge is that the stuff has to be named. And it has to be named very specifically in terms of how it's bearing down on people's lives. In terms of the suffering, the misery, the unemployment, the forced unemployment, people's lives being ruined. And I have to tell you if you watch Rachel Maddow, who is one of the few people who is actually doing this, who is charting these modes of resistance that are emerging all over the United States in light of this unbelievably apocalyptic assault on the public, we see seeds of hope. We see it.

Secondly, it seems to me to go back to the question of young people, young people are being written out of the script of democracy and they know it. And I think in many ways they're trying to rethink how they can work internationally with other youth groups and how they can mobilize to basically face this issue.

Thirdly, I think that if I may, and I'll use the United States as an example, I think the one thing that authoritarians do is they always overreach, and that's why these governments never last that long. Dictatorships don't last that long, and that's basically what we have increasingly in the United States. And hopefully not in Canada.

And I think that the contradictions are becoming so overwhelming, that if the Left, the Democrats, these various groups fighting for social justice can begin to speak in a language in which people can recognize themselves, in which they can link the suffering they see all around them as being engineered through the vehicle of an updated fascist politics, I think there's hope.

My worst fear is that as the resistance increases, these unaccountable zombies who have blood in their mouths in Washington and in Hungary and in India will resort to using the military domestically to put these protests down. And I think if that happens, there'll be a civil war in the United States. There's no question in my mind.

I want to hope that's not the case. But I do think the resistance will grow. I think the contradictions will become more severe. And I think the inability of this government to defend itself in any way, even to its Right wing supporters who will lose Medicare, who will lose their Medicaid, and maybe Medicare, lose their jobs, have social security gutted...

You know, 70% of the American people live from paycheck to paycheck. Three families control more than 170 million people in the United States. The poverty is endemic. The inequality is staggering. This cannot go on unless you have a full fledged military dictatorship. And I don't think that's possible in the United States.

RESH: But, where America's current descent into authoritarianism is shocking for many on the domestic front, this has been its habit as a global superpower prone to foreign invasion and intervention. I mean, we've been talking about neoliberalism 50 years before this latest onslaught on Gaza, Chile was the bloody laboratory for the neoliberal experiment that was orchestrated by the U. S. in 1973. Many see what's happening in the US today as either the chickens coming home to roost or as the desperate actions of a declining superpower in a quickly emerging multipolar world. And I want to get your thoughts on that.

HENRY: I think that what we see happening today in light of what happened in the past is that in the past, any vestige of socialism, any vestige of democracy in any one of a number of countries in which the United States interfered was always done under the wraps of Manifest Destiny and exceptionalism, American exceptionalism.

I think that what we're seeing today is an appeal to American exceptionalism that basically doesn't work anymore. So now what we're seeing when we talk about taking over Greenland, you know, annexing Canada, sending troops into Panama, is we're seeing an element of manifest gangster capitalism, colonialism, that is unapologetic in its ruthlessness to appropriate resources and wealth for a financial elite who find themselves now in a world where there are new resources to be harvested in light of new technologies.

I mean, this is techno gangster capitalism at work and it's now embracing its colonial roots, its colonial history in ways that we have never seen before.

RESH: Now, let's talk about Gaza. Because Gaza, in many senses seems a crucible for this moment. The book starts with the horrors inflicted on the Palestinian people by Israel, especially since 2023. The burden of conscience and veil of silence is also very much about the Western institutional response to it. So talk about the significance of Gaza.

HENRY: I think that Gaza is the canary in the coal mine. Because I think that Gaza reveals unapologetically in enormously gruesome ways through the media that basically attempts to turn it into a spectacle but at least in some way cannot control the horrible images coming out of Gaza. Is that Gaza represents the resurgence of a colonialism that basically now is not just simply about controlling the minds and dispossession of people of their history, their memories and their land; it's about a politics of disposability that is rooted in the question of ethnic cleansing and extermination.

It's a model, an upgraded model, for the concentration camps. That's what basically it is. And I think that it reveals to the world, not just simply the horror of the Israeli State and what it's doing, but it reveals the end point of an ideology that is circulating around the world about the eliminating of the memories, the institutions, the histories of both people who are being dispossessed and anybody who might want to attempt to hold people accountable who are engaging in these kinds of acts. And I think that it's a very important issue.

What we see in Gaza basically is the end point of what plays out in so called alleged democracies in slow motion.

We're not Gaza yet. But I think that all the language is there. It does certainly in some way engage in the kind of punishing cruelty, police actions, militarizations, destruction of institutions that could be on its way in countries that for the most part have escaped that in ways that would seem unimaginable in the past, but now seem very probable.

RESH: And in the West, what we do, even though we're not there yet, is that we also rationalize what's happening. You write about how the McCarthy like crackdown on pro Palestinian solidarity, the student protests, as well as violence against Palestinians themselves, is routinely rationalized through sort of these liberal democratic arguments, the "both sides-ism" and whatnot.

HENRY: What I've been very concerned about, what is clear here is that institutions that hold the promise of making power accountable, and particularly young people and faculty who are courageous enough to do that, now pose a threat to authoritarians, unlike anything we had seen before.

I mean, remember the first casualty of authoritarianism are the minds that would oppose it and the institutions that would make that possible. And I think that what we see happening in the U. S. and in some ways in Canada and in other countries, the end point of that is the destruction of historical consciousness, of civic literacy, of the institutions that make that possible. Not simply in the ways that's happening now in the US, through sort of slow motion types of violence, but in a way that in Gaza is the end- point where these institutions are bombed. The professors are killed. People who speak out in the media are abducted. Children are basically put in prison who are under 14. Doctors are being tortured for in some way treating people who are suffering. In other words, the violence reaches a point where it's so out of control that it can't tolerate the slightest bit of justice. And the endpoint of that is a massive warfare state at work in ways that are unimaginably cruel.

Now, let's be clear. What is happening in the United States, in spite of how we often talk about the right wing Israeli government, there are Jewish people in Israel who are being oppressed. Maya Wind and others have talked about how the Jewish radicals who are writing about the war in Gaza are being interrogated, are being questioned, are being fired.

I mean, this is a virus. It's a poison and it's central to authoritarianism. It's absolutely central. The last thing authoritarians want are institutions that equip students and others with the knowledge, skills, and values and sense of responsibility that allow them to ask questions that shouldn't be asked.

That allow them to operate off capacities to hold power accountable. That allow them to begin to engage in critical analysis that strengthen the networks of solidarity and collective resistance.

RESH: And critical memory, historical memory, is part of that and it's a...

HENRY: I can't tell you, Resh, how important that is.

I think the question of historical memory is more crucial at this moment in history than it's ever been, because it's dangerous. It's dangerous because it points to crimes in the past that we have to learn from so they're not repeated. It also eliminates the histories of people who can't defend themselves in light of the erasure of history because they basically don't have the language to do it.

It whitewashes history in the so-called alleged democracy because the last thing that it wants a student is to learn that there are moments in history, their own histories, that should not be repeated. That's why the ban on books is really not just a ban on ideas, it's a ban on history. It's a ban on historical memory.

It's a ban on what history offers us in terms of resistance. What it offers us in terms of shared values. What it offers us in terms of exemplary elements and images of civic resistance and courage. That's very dangerous. History is dangerous today.

RESH: You and I are both teaching in higher education, you at the university, myself at the college, you talk about resistant pedagogy and the role of education workers.

What should we be doing now, those who are working in higher education?

HENRY: I think the first thing we should be doing is reclaiming these institutions as democratic public goods. I think we should do everything we can to redefine what purpose they have away from both the corporatization and the attempt to turn them into nothing more than indoctrination centers.

I think we need to provide a new vision for education and we need to hold people accountable for that.

Secondly, I think we need to do everything we can to engage in acts of solidarity with other educators and larger social movements so that we can fashion our grievances and our concerns into a collective force that is capable of bearing down on institutions of power, relations of power in ways that could change the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

Thirdly, I think we need to embrace new modes of solidarity with students and with other faculty simply to be able to stay alive. And to be able to have some hope, I think it's very hard to be in these institutions and to be isolated and to be fragmented and to have to bear the burden of conscience and responsibility and a punishing ethic of depoliticization that basically can make us become cynical or give up. And I think we have to fight that.

I think that fourthly, the struggle over the work that we do is probably more important than any other struggle going on in the United States or in the world for that matter.

Education is the glue. Education is the bridge that stands between fascism and hope, between fascism and justice, between fascism and a socialist democracy, a real democracy, a radical democracy.

And if we don't grasp the centrality of education here in terms of both its power and its role, both in and outside of schooling, we're in trouble. It's not going to work.

If we don't in some way recognize that there will be no resistance unless we can create an education and a culture that supports it.

We need to focus on a formative culture that in some way enlightens and promotes various forms of solidarity and engagement.

RESH: And, if we don't, to borrow a question from your book, what is the unspeakable future? And for everyone, educator or not, what is our responsibility in the face of the unspeakable?

HENRY: Well, the unspeakable becomes possible, that's the issue. And I think the real issue is imagining what that would be like and the kind of suffering and disregard for human life and destruction of the planet that implies.

All the problems that we have from the acceleration of the possibility of a nuclear war to the end of democracy, and the rise of fascism to the destruction of the planet itself, it seems to me these are all crucial issues. And if those issues aren't addressed, we won't be here anymore. It's as simple as that. The earth will end. There'll be wars, there'll be mass destruction, and what the future is no future.

And I think that people have to recognize and try to imagine that the end point of the politics we're in now demands an urgency and a sense of collective action and a sense of resistance, unlike anything we have ever seen before.

Resistance is no longer a luxury. It's no longer something we should think about, simply think about. Resistance now is an absolute urgent necessity because the clock is running out, time is running out.

RESH: Henry, as always, it has been a pleasure. Thank you so much.

HENRY: Thank you for the questions.

RESH: That was scholar, cultural critic and author, Henry Giroux.

The link to Giroux's works, including his latest book, *The Burden of Conscience: Educating Beyond the Veil of Silence*, can be found in the show notes to this episode.

And this is the Courage My Friends podcast.

I'm your host, Resh Budhu.

Thanks for listening.

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