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# RESISTANCE AND ABOLITION IN THE BORDERLANDS

CONFRONTING TRUMP'S REIGN OF TERROR

EDITED BY

### ARTURO J. ALDAMA AND JESSICA ORDAZ

FOREWORD BY LEO R. CHAVEZ
AFTERWORD BY KARMA R. CHÁVEZ



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### CONTENTS

	Toreword by Leo R. Chavez	XI.
	Introduction: Terror, Trauma, and Resistance in the U.S./México Borderlands  ARTURO J. ALDAMA AND JESSICA ORDAZ	3
	PART I. XENOPHOBIA, ABJECTION, AND STATE VIOLENCE	
1.	"They're Bringing Drugs!": Reflections on Movement and Migration, the War on Drugs, and the Opioid Crisis in Trump's America REBECCA AVALOS	25
2.	Separating and Caging Immigrant Families: Case Studies in South Texas from the Postwar  Fra Through Trump's Reign of Terror  JENNIFER CULLISON	44
3.	Human Trafficking and the Politics of State Violence Through Operation Lone Star	70
4.	The Uterus Collectors: The Lineage of Hemispheric Medical Abuse and Experimentation in the United States and Guatemala  ALEXANDRIA HERRERA	89
5.	Reflections on Right-Wing Leadership in the United States: From LAPD Chief William Parker to Donald Trump ROBERTO A. MÓNICO	101
6.	Refugees and Human Rights Law During the Trump Administration JASMIN LILIAN DIAB	124

# REFLECTIONS ON RIGHT-WING LEADERSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES

From LAPD Chief William Parker to Donald Trump

ROBERTO A. MÓNICO

TRUMP'S DEHUMANIZING IMMIGRATION POLICIES WERE not the first of their kind in the United States. The George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations, for example, both utilized the 287(g) program, which deputizes local police departments to act as de facto federal immigration agents, to detain unauthorized immigrants within the borders of the United States.1 Numerous sitting presidents—regardless of their party affiliation—have conducted some form of deterrence, detainment, or deportation to sway immigrants from entering the United States. However, most presidents have focused their deportation efforts on Latin American immigrants. In 1994, President Bill Clinton enacted Operation Gatekeeper during his first term to appear tough on unauthorized immigration and appeal to the conservative electorate.2 Moreover, in 1996, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act expanded aggravated felonies and mandated that undocumented immigrants serve their prison sentence in the United States before being deported.3 Regardless of the administration in power, liberal and conservative presidents have hyperpoliced immigrant communities and scapegoated them as the source of crime and economic woes while ignoring decades of colonialism, imperialism, and U.S. efforts to overthrow democratically elected

governments.<sup>4</sup> Such foreign policies led immigrants to flee their countries to search for basic living standards and a semblance of dignity. These foreign issues are hardly discussed within the American context of its purported greatness. Instead, the narrative is reframed to give the appearance that the United States is a nation where immigrants are unquestionably welcomed.

Since the 1950s, politicians have advocated for enhanced deportation strategies to target people of Latina/o/x descent. In 1953, for example, U.S. attorney general Herbert Brownell expressed concern that people of Mexican descent were a problem for the American workforce.<sup>5</sup> In the 1990s, California governor Pete Wilson supported the ballot initiative Proposition 187 ("Save Our State"), which would have precluded undocumented people from receiving education, health care, and access to social programs. Wilson wanted local law enforcement professionals, such as Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) officers, to act as deputized immigrant agents to investigate the status of undocumented people.6 Brownell and Wilson are examples of individuals who used draconian anti-immigrant policies to target undocumented immigrants. This chapter discusses two leading proponents of such polices: LAPD chief William H. Parker and former president Donald Trump. Parker and Trump exerted their authority in the press by producing and reproducing old narratives that criminalized undocumented communities while attempting to avoid appearing racist. They presented themselves as steadfast leaders of a deportation regime punishing and deporting undesirable immigrants. The history of deporting unwanted immigrants is long, but to understand its current manifestation, I examine how the federal government worked with local municipalities throughout the 1950s, at a time when police departments like the LAPD became de facto federal border patrol agencies.7

This article compares Parker and Trump, two right-wing leaders who used specific rhetoric to criminalize undocumented Latin American immigrants. Parker was the chief of the LAPD between 1950 and 1966. He joined the force in 1927 and reshaped the LAPD. For example, in 1934, he was a co-architect of the rewritten Los Angeles Charter Amendment Section 202, which protected police officers from public scrutiny and disciplinary actions unless doled out internally. Parker transformed the LAPD from a local disgrace replete with scandals to the

best professionally trained police force in the United States. He has been lauded for increasing police salaries, instituting a paramilitary apparatus, and installing a corruption-free police department. His authoritarian rule emphasized military analogies, such as "police science" derived from criminologist August Vollmer.8 When Parker was appointed chief in 1950, the LAPD radically changed, becoming a quasi-military centralized bureaucracy. The newly transformed department was unleashed onto the streets of Los Angeles as a tightly structured paramilitary apparatus, an occupying battalion entrenched in nonwhite neighborhoods, targeting individuals who appeared "suspicious." Parker's policies are critical to understanding the similarities he shared with Trump because both men advocated for the repatriation of people of Latina/o/x descent by using this paramilitary structure of policing. They did so by positioning themselves as saviors who could restore law and order. The Parker era left a blueprint later taken up by men like Trump. Their rise to power was predicated on villainizing and further marginalizing undocumented communities.

Anti-immigrant sentiment toward the Latina/o/x community has a long history, but one pivotal moment can be traced to the midcentury, when the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) conducted an operation to deport unauthorized people of Mexican descent from the interior of the United States: Operation Wetback.9 Today, many conservatives and ultra-right-wingers champion the fifties as an era when white people were at the apex of a racial hierarchy that attempted to obscure the overt and institutional racism embedded within our social structures. Trump capitalized on this era as a marketing strategy during his campaign and presidency, as was clearly apparent to his detractors. His followers, however, saw this form of capitalist production as a reinforcement of their beliefs, expressed through fashion in MAGA ("Make America Great Again") products.

Much has rightfully been said about the Trump administration's draconian stance on immigration, but his presidency was not the first to implement anti-immigrant policies. Older anti-immigrant legaciesstemming from an era that readily produced fabricated moral threats to the white power structure—have become the framework used to criminalize undocumented populations. In taking up this legacy, both Parker and Trump relied on a savior complex, representing themselves

as sober-minded leaders who were concerned for the safety of their supporters while scapegoating immigrants as the source of high crime rates.

Many politicians in the United States have positioned immigrants as undeserving to be citizens. With limited access to legal recourse, immigrants remain vulnerable to a mode of punishment that includes deportation and separation from loved ones. 10 Conservative discourse perpetuates the false narrative that criminalizes immigrants, with right-wing media operatives often employing misrepresentations of immigrants as unfit to be Americans. This, in turn, fosters public consensus regarding a need to apprehend, incarcerate, and forcefully remove immigrants from the United States. Regrettably, the United States has a disturbing history of people of Mexican descent enduring this deportation regime. During the 1950s, according to the INS, millions of Mexicans were repatriated to Mexico (current research argues that the INS figures were likely exaggerated to prove success, but families were still torn apart). With the aid of the LAPD, people of Mexican descent, regardless of documented status, were criminalized. Such partnerships continue to operate today between local agencies and the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).11 With this history in mind, this chapter argues that these two eras are crucial to understanding the long trajectory of deportations in the United States: the 1950s, when local and federal law enforcement agencies worked in concert to deport people of Mexican descent in Los Angeles, and the years of the Trump presidency (2017-21), when the president and other officials extended these exclusionary policies by falsely claiming that immigrants committed more "crime" than American citizens.12

In his leadership of the LAPD, Parker's use of anti-immigrant rhetoric was strikingly similar to Trump's own, many decades later. With the help of the press, people of Mexican descent were villainized as political subversives. Local newspapers such as the *Los Angeles Times* promoted this narrative to scare their white readership. Trump's anti-immigrant policies are merely an extension of the way immigrant communities have been criminalized in the media. Today's young generation may have never witnessed such cruelty, specifically the separation of children from their parents, but this was also executed during so-called liberal administrations, such as with Bill Clinton and Barack Obama.<sup>13</sup>

## CONSERVATIVES AND LIBERALS: UNDERSTANDING THE DEPORTATION REGIME

During the years of the Trump presidency, the Republican Party's stance on undocumented immigrants became a focal point for liberals. The racist rhetoric employed by Trump during his presidential bid in 2015-16 emboldened white supremacists' beliefs of racial superiority and nationalism, two key components of fascism. Liberals were astonished to discover that over sixty million people voted for Trump in 2016 and then, four years later, over seventy million. Stunned by his victory, liberals began using platitudes of resistance, attempting to counter Trump's rhetoric. The so-called postracial society that liberals espouse obfuscates the racism within our social institutions, including police departments and the unions that support Trump. His administration promoted efforts to hyperbolize what has been called a precarious demarcation between chaos and order.14 It is worth pausing to reevaluate what each side represents. In this regard, "chaos" was associated with leftist organizations that support undocumented communities and a slew of social issues, such as abolishing ICE and defunding the police, whereas "order" reflected police power and people who supported fabricated causes, such as an opposition to the "siege" of American cities by immigrants, leftists, and criminals. However, those who were astounded by Trump's victory have seemingly been immersed in a life that shields them from the dayto-day racism that nonwhite communities endure regularly.15 Local law enforcement and federal agents have long worked together to criminalize nonwhite and undocumented communities.

Liberals who exalted the Clinton and Obama administrations as a framework of progress must acknowledge their role in advancing criminal justice in this country: the Clinton administration passed the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, which created the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), and the Obama administration significantly increased funding to this office. Both administrations also gave local police departments more money to acquire military-style equipment. It would be used to patrol poor and working-class neighborhoods. Clinton deployed 350 military troops to help with immigration law enforcement along the California and Arizona border, with the sole purpose of deterring immigrants from entering the

country.<sup>17</sup> Obama, for his part, expanded Secure Communities, a database used by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to determine whether immigrants are living in the country unauthorized (by 2013, a record 3,181 jurisdictions were using the program).<sup>18</sup> These technological advancements, accelerated by bloated budgets, are not used to patrol white, affluent communities. Rather, they have been utilized to target vulnerable immigrant communities.

Criminalization has long been a major component of the racial formation of the United States. Scholars such as Khalil Gibran Muhammad have astutely noted that crime has historically been ascribed to race, beginning in the late nineteenth century.19 In the production of racial formation, the ascription of criminal activity to certain racial and ethnic groups such as people of Mexican descent can mold public opinion. This is a useful analytic when discussing how unauthorized border crossing has been associated with Latina/o/x people. Right-wing media helps perpetuate this narrative of criminality. Unauthorized immigrants have been falsely portrayed as criminals who have entered the country "illegally," by a media that simultaneously ignores the reasons that force them to emigrate. In this view, because of the unauthorized route they embarked on, people who live in the United States without proper documentation can only be of Latina/o/x descent. Making the production of "illegality" worse, Trump began his 2016 campaign with racist and false allegations such as, "Mexico sends their worst . . . rapists and such." This salvo of politically and racially charged language shocked liberals, but for the right-wingers, Trump was simply reinforcing their racist beliefs, which culminated in his presidential victory.20

The Trump presidency is the result of white resentment that has been festering since the gains of the civil rights movement. This strategy was first applied when Richard Nixon won the presidency in the late sixties, and again with Ronald Reagan in the eighties. It is worth noting that both Republican presidents won two terms, which reflects the white anger seen in the United States across those decades. Racist white people have fallaciously depicted themselves as the true victims in a country where nonwhite people are striving to regain their power after years of abandonment, violence, and discriminatory practices in schools, work sites, and the criminal legal system. Claiming that Latina/o/x immigrants are draining economic resources and that they are the source of rising

crime has become a focal point for Trump, who exploits white anxieties. The narrative that criminalizes (undocumented) Latina/o/x immigrants as a public nuisance can be understood more clearly when seen in tandem with the one that declares white Americans to be the true victims, robbed of legal entitlements.<sup>22</sup> White lives are provided with sanctioned protections akin to the commodification of private property, as critical race theorist Cheryl Harris explains: "Whiteness defined the legal status of a person as slave or free. White identity conferred tangible and economically valuable benefits, and it was jealously guarded as a valued possession, allowed only to those who met a strict standard of proof. Whiteness—the right to white identity as embraced by the law—is property if by 'property' one means all of a person's legal rights."23 Immigrants are not seen as Americans in the eyes of Trump supporters. This was made evident when millions of white Americans embraced Trump as their president in 2016, and again in 2020. Furthermore, to disguise their racism, many claimed that they accept immigrants entering the United States, but only through a legal pathway. A repeated claim recalls how their European ancestors arrived in the United States, while omitting their family's participation in genocidal warfare against Native Americans.24

The American myth of Manifest Destiny, which saw North America as vacant lands awaiting white settlement, plays into this false narrative that has been widely exploited by conservative leadership to garner support from racist white people. The genocidal warfare aimed at Native Americans and the enslavement of Africans falsely propagated a chauvinistic representation of American individualism, characterizing white Americans as rugged individuals who built a society out of sheer hard work, while the surrounding population was portrayed as uncivilized and without history. This characterization of American identity led to the othering of people who were considered to be racially impure based on blood quantum. The hypodescent rule stipulated that any drop of nonwhite blood—usually but not always African—was deemed to be contaminated.25 As violence and blood spilled across the North American continent, the social construction of hypodescent seeped into the consciousness of millions of Europeans, and the ideology that arose was racial superiority and nationalism. European descendants believed that the land preordained them, justifying their murderous rampage. The racialized project of the United States is grounded in acts of violence that

persist today. Vigilante violence and military conquest under the guise of Manifest Destiny and the doctrine of discovery were followed by the rise of local police departments to not only annihilate unwanted populations, but criminalize them in the process. This diluted history foregrounds North America as a land where Europeans created an advanced civilization, with large swaths of land becoming the private property of those individuals who toiled to achieve them. <sup>27</sup>

The history of the United States often omits the horrific experiences of nonwhite communities. Shameful acts of violence, conquest, and imperialism distort the myth of American exceptionalism, revered by conservatives and liberals alike. The Trump presidency was criticized for detaining undocumented immigrants and refugees at the border, and rightfully so. The separation of children from their families was an appalling act and a form of psychological abuse. However, when the Obama administration broke deportation records and itself separated families, liberals were silent on the issue, redirecting their attention to executive orders like Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), announced in 2012. Marveled at as a great achievement, the policy did not provide a pathway to citizenship for undocumented families. According to political scientist Alfonso Gonzales, the Obama administration pacified the immigrant rights movement in order to temporarily garner support for social reforms thought to protect undocumented individuals who contributed to the United States economically and militarily.28 DACA was a step in the right direction but left millions without legal protections from work raids and deportations. As Malcolm X once shrewdly pointed out regarding the lack of progress in the United States, "If you stick a knife in my back nine inches and pull it out six inches, there's no progress. If you pull it all the way out there's no progress. The progress is healing the wound that the blow made."29 In this case, the wound that is in dire need of healing can be traced back to the 1950s, when the deportation regime sought to exclude people of Mexican descent from the United States through Operation Wetback. Liberals are quick to blame the Trump administration's anti-immigrant policies because of the appalling language he used to galvanize his base during campaigning—but they shouldn't overlook that this language was simply not as digestible as the furtive raids and deportations overseen by the Obama administration.30 The fact of the matter is that deportation policies—regardless of who sits in the White House—are racist law enforcement tools that have been wrought to detain and eradicate people of Mexican and Latina/o/x descent since the 1950s.

### THE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE LAPD AND INS: OPERATION WETBACK

In 1954, people of Mexican descent were exposed to what was advertised as one of the largest sweeps in American history, aimed at deporting one million people in the Southwest region of the United States. Though current scholarship refutes the historical figures, arguing that the numbers were exaggerated to induce panic, historian Kelly Lytle Hernández writes that eight hundred border patrol agents were deployed to the southwestern United States to conduct a series of raids that were believed to be successful by then attorney general Herbert Brownell.31 The sweep, which sought to deport people of Mexican descent from the interior, regardless of their citizenship status, was labeled with a pejorative term, Operation Wetback.<sup>32</sup> With the full cooperation of the LAPD, the deportation process was a racialized project to segregate people of Mexican descent from the white population in Los Angeles. The remnants of racial segregation can still be felt in Los Angeles as the city is still separated into ethnic and racial enclaves that sprang up in this era.33 Operation Wetback arose in part as a reaction to the Bracero Program. Though thousands of families of Mexican descent already called Los Angeles their home in the first half of the twentieth century, the creation of the Bracero Program in 1942 invited Mexican nationals (mostly men) to the United States to work as farmhands to support the agriculture industry. The guest worker program lasted for two decades, hiring approximately four million men.34 Braceros were initially viewed positively because they filled wartime labor shortages. But nine years after World War II ended, the mood had soured. It was in this context that the LAPD, mostly composed of white men, partnered with the INS to conduct one of the largest deportation operations in U.S. history.35

The LAPD willfully participated in the removal of people of Mexican descent. The operation could not have happened without the leadership of William Parker, who was named chief in 1950. Parker was a staunchly conservative Catholic who was admired by the John Birch

Society, a right-wing organization that embodied (and continues to embody) a brand of Christian values mixed with white supremacist nationalism purportedly predicated on American patriotism. Among its other stances, the society supported racial segregation, opposed women's right to abortions, and called for prayer in public schools. In the 1960s, the official publication, American Opinion, posted Parker on the cover multiple times as a savior amid the supposed social disorder occurring in Los Angeles. He was a recurring guest on a radio program hosted by a right-winger named Clarence Manion, who was also a member of the John Birch Society's National Council. Parker used the radio program to denounce the courts as being too lenient toward alleged criminals and to downplay civil liberties during the nascent civil rights movement.36 This sentiment parallels Trump's law-and-order rhetoric today, with both Parker and Trump epitomizing a type of hypermasculinity in their performances as protectors amid fabricated crises (whether communist or antifa). In the 1960s, the members of the John Birch Society thought of themselves as ideological warriors in the fight to save America from a growing, fictitious Red Menace. With the Cold War as a backdrop, far-fetched allegations from the society included that a "Soviet Negro Republic" would emerge in the southern states and be controlled by Soviet Union. The segregationist politician George Wallace was a close ally to the society, and one hundred chapters sprang up across southern states.<sup>37</sup> Promoting itself as aligned with Christian principles, the society criticized anyone who went against its right-wing values.

When Parker's LAPD began cooperating with the U.S. Border Patrol in the early fifties under Operation Wetback, it deepened social fissures between the white population of Los Angeles and the Mexican community. As the INS descended on Los Angeles, its presence exasperated the social anxieties felt by people of Mexican descent. These law enforcement agencies set their sights on all Mexicans, whose actual citizenship status was of little concern to federal officials. The partnership between the agencies meant that racism was institutionalized and put into practice within both local and federal law enforcement agencies. This operation occurred amid a race-based immigration quota system that was enacted by the Calvin Coolidge administration in 1924 and that lasted until 1965. The law favored northern and western European immigrants over those who hailed from southern and eastern European countries,

Asia, or Africa.<sup>39</sup> Though immigrants from the western hemisphere were exempted from this quota system, Mexican nationals were seen as unwelcome by so-called nativists.

The U.S. Border Patrol was used as an institution of social control. At its 1924 advent, Congress allocated \$1 million to the Immigration Bureau of the Department of Labor, in part to enforce immigration quotas through the National Origins Act of 1924. The establishment of the U.S. Border Patrol set a precedent on how federal agents would be used to thwart immigrants migrating from Mexico. The novel federal law enforcement agency used its equipment funding to procure horses and guns and to construct buildings. Most expenditures, however, went to salaries to kick-start careers for white men. 40 The National Origins Act meant that Nordic immigrants were the primary immigrants welcomed to the United States; it imposed restrictions on immigration using a quota system (set at 150,000 total immigrants annually in 1929), with countryspecific quotas based the number of people from those countries who were living in the United States in 1890.41 At the time, the country was mostly composed of "Anglo-Saxons."42

In 1950, Chief Parker called Los Angeles the "white spot of the great cities of America today. It is to the advantage of the community that we keep it that way."43 Parker claimed that people of Mexican descent committed five times more crimes per capita than the white community and that they had a genetic propensity toward violence because of their ancestry. 44 He stated, "The Latin population that came here in great strength were here before us and presented a great problem because I worked over on the East Side when men had to work in pairs . . . and it's because some of these people being not too far removed from the wild tribes of the district of the inner mountains of Mexico. I don't think you can throw the genes out of the question when discussing behavior patterns of people." When Mexican American councilman Edward Roybal demanded an apology for his racist comments, Parker refused. 45

Though Mexican immigrants were allowed to enter the United States to work in the agriculture fields, they were surveilled and criminalized through newspapers. So-called nativists opposed the flow of Mexican workers entering the country and wanted them to be placed in the same quota system used to exclude undesired immigrants. Nativists characterized Mexico as a nation of mongrels that would destroy the social

fabric of the United States. As such, Mexican workers began demanding better living wages, which raised alarm among the business elites and summoned the police to quell strikes. As the workers struggled to attain livable wages by protesting, local newspapers seized on the opportunity to depict Mexicans as a threat to U.S. capitalism.

In the early twentieth century, newspapers such as the Los Angeles Times played a pivotal role in criminalizing people of Mexican descent. With headlines like, "Brownell Pledges Wetback Action" and "U.S. Increased Guard Against 'Wetback' Horde," the Los Angeles Times deliberately assisted the deportation regime's efforts to remove people of Mexican descent.46 The endeavor can be traced to 1934, when Mexican farmworkers went on strike in the Imperial Valley for better wages. The LAPD's notorious Red Squads claimed that the disturbances in the agricultural community stemmed from Communist agitation.<sup>47</sup> The Times depicted Mexican farmhands as disobedient laborers looking to beset the U.S. government. Although Mexican laborers clashed with the LAPD during these strikes, the Times reported that Mexican workers were responsible for the hostilities and framed them as the culprits who initiated the violence. LAPD officers were represented as the true victims of these skirmishes, as men who were simply trying to enforce the law against Mexican workers who refused to comply. The Times ignored the violence that was endemic to the culture of the LAPD. 48 By consistently misinforming the public, it used the Mexican Revolution as a backdrop to conjure up moral panics among its readers. It was a maneuver that helped control public opinion by embedding fear within articles. White people living in Los Angeles began feeling anxious over the political leanings that people of Mexican descent held and worried that the Mexican Revolution would inspire the local population to rise up. The potential overthrow of the U.S. government was enough to imbue panic among local white people and convince them that people of Mexican descent needed to be contained at any cost, even if that meant exercising violence over them.49 Their safety was of low priority. Whatever violence was exerted by the LAPD on the Mexican community was a justifiable act. The fear tactics that were used in the Times convinced white people that violence was a justifiable measure to prevent an uprising among people of Mexican descent. In this capacity, the LAPD was only doing its job, which set the stage for its consorting with the U.S. Border Patrol.

Both Parker and Brownell, like many other high-ranking officials in the U.S. government and law enforcement, wanted the United States to remain a white nation. The country was rapidly changing as more and more people of Mexican descent were entering. The partnership was an enforcement tool that created a legal apparatus to help keep America white. In 1949, five years before Operation Wetback was launched, James Butterfield, district commissioner of the Vermont division of the INS. sent twenty patrol officers to the border to hinder the "traffic influx" of people of Mexican descent entering the United States. 50 This precursor to Operation Wetback followed a similar logic to Trump's executive order no. 13767, which he issued in his first week of office. Falsely claiming that the country's national security was in dire jeopardy, the executive order stated that the job of federal law enforcement was "to deploy all lawful means to secure the Nation's southern border, to prevent further illegal immigration into the United States, and to repatriate illegal aliens swiftly, consistently, and humanely." Parker and Brownell used much the same rhetoric of national security as a pretext to detain people of Mexican descent under Operation Wetback.<sup>51</sup> This collaboration between local and federal officials was a powerful current that swept the Mexican community. It was a paramilitarized strategy that relied on local police departments to apprehend and bolster anxieties, but the operation could not have advanced without the support of right-wing ideology.

Right-wing ideology dovetails with law enforcement policies. In the United States, such ideology has historically been intertwined with white supremacy, capitalism, and policing. It has largely existed to place nonwhite and working-class communities in subordinate positions, leaving many to feel unprotected by the law. Men like Trump and Parker are the personification of this ideology. Yet this ideology relies on falsehoods that are made evident when certain groups are portrayed as enemies. Propaganda is used with the intention of inciting feelings of a nationalist traditional past; this propaganda positions enemies as hordes of invaders and criminals "illegally" circumventing immigration laws. Conversely, positioned as the true patriots of the land are so-called nativists, particularly those who live outside the city. Philosopher Jason Stanley explains, "resources that flow to cities must be directed to the rural communities instead, to preserve this vital center of the nation's values. And the rural communities, as the source of the pure blood of the nation, cannot be

polluted by outside blood via immigration."<sup>52</sup> The racist rhetoric that Trump spewed toward immigrant communities during his presidency attempted to position Mexicans and Central Americans as foreign criminals. Trump declared that he could fix the "broken" border. Like Parker, he positioned himself as an ideological savior, willing to protect his supporters and the country's national security. For both men, their egos emerged while they were espousing rhetoric grounded in right-wing ideology that censures oppositional groups while asserting their authority.

### CREDIBILITY VIA EGOTISM

Many right-wing leaders have shown this egocentrism, using it to propel a false sense of their credibility. As Dawn F. Colley describes, "Trump is credible not because he understands and is capable of handling the issues that we face as a nation but because his words are, ostensibly, not clothed in the colors of rhetoric." Colley continues, "As such, his targeted audience is invited to accept what he says at face value; his words are believable for the very fact they are not well considered."53 Parker used a similar strategy by invoking his credibility whenever he spoke on the concerns of rising crime. Often, Parker cloaked his racism by eschewing race in his speeches, but he still understood how to exploit social anxieties by using his position as a trusted police chief. He stated, "we do not control economic cycles; we are not equipped to deal with racial, religious, or political prejudice; we are not arbiters of right and wrong. In short, we are not healers of social ills. Our job is to apply emergency treatment to society's surface wounds; we deal with effects, not causes."54 Here, Parker could absolve himself and the LAPD of any responsibility for the violence committed by his department on nonwhite, working-class communities because it was the duty of the LAPD to curb crime. In a 1956 article on the role of the police in the community, Parker wrote, "Deployment is often heaviest in so-called minority sections of the city. The reason is statistical—it is a fact that certain racial groups, at the present time, commit a disproportionate share of the total crime."55 Parker was careful in how he stated his assertions. By inserting the phrase "at the present time," he removed himself from potential accusations of racism. If only these communities would simply rectify their behavior, then "social ills" such as

poverty, unemployment, and crime would cease to exist. The statement evades race as a motivator for higher crime rates and refocuses our attention on police deployment to arrest the criminals living in nonwhite communities. Moreover, Parker used statistical evidence to advance his claim and thus gain public support. This incorporation of data establishes his credibility and validates his authority in matters concerning crime. Race is not a central concern; instead, crime redirects our attention, becoming the main issue. As a police officer, Parker used his position to dole out information in whatever modus he needed to persuade the (white) public. The data cited in this statement gives credence to his position as chief of police and allows him to be observed as a concerned police officer working tirelessly to protect the public's safety.

For Trump, his credibility relied on the aggrandizement of his intelligence, the below-average nature of which was made evident every time he spoke or tweeted. Regularly referring to himself as a "stable genius," he compensated for his inferior intellect by highlighting his devoted supporters in his interviews and on social media.56 Trump gloated that his followers would never refute him as they were personally committed to his nonsensical pomposity. He demonstrated this in 2016 by stating, "They say I have the most loyal people—did you ever see that? Where I could stand in the middle of 5th Avenue and shoot somebody, and I wouldn't lose any voters."57 But the notion that anyone would follow Trump blindly has its origins in him appearing on reality television. His popularity did not materialize out of nowhere. Trump had been in the public eye for years and used his celebrity status to eventually cross over into mainstream politics and get himself elected, even though he had no previous political experience. For right-wingers, he spoke a language that resonated with them, a language grounded in racism and fear, overcompensation and arrogance, that demonized nonwhite people and the Left.

This sort of showmanship among right-wing politicians can be traced back to Parker and an earlier generation of television: the short-lived television show The Thin Blue Line, which Parker produced for the local NBC station in 1952. This panel show aired weekly in Los Angeles and featured purported experts on political and police affairs. The show was broadcast as a form of resistance to the barrage of criticism that the LAPD received for its violent and racist tactics in nonwhite communities. According to LAPD historian Edward J. Escobar, "Parker argued that criticism of the

police hindered officers' ability to fight crime, thus leaving law-abiding citizens defenseless against the depredations of gangsters and criminals who sought to overrun the city." Though it only aired for one season, the program served as a vehicle for right-wing propaganda in a period characterized by Cold War politics, which stigmatized leftists.

Though Trump's television persona did not tackle political issues in this same way, his media platform allowed him to ascend into the political theater, where he drummed up fear among his base, leaving many to believe that leftists—specifically antifascist and antiracist activists were the source of the violence occurring on the streets during the 2020 uprisings. Here, too, Trump was following a template earlier used by Parker. Seeking to attack the civil rights movement—on the belief that civil rights organizations had caused his officers to doubt themselves in their interactions with nonwhite communities—Parker falsely claimed that the movement was controlled by the Soviet Union. In 1957 he wrote, "this is a situation long sought by the Masters in the Kremlin. The bloody revolution, long the dream of the Comintern, cannot be accomplished in the face of a resolute police."59 The Comintern refers to the Third International of Communists, which sought to overthrow the capitalist structure that exploited workers worldwide in 1919.60 Both Parker and Trump, then, were vehemently against leftists and demonstrated it by redirecting their base's ire at the civil rights and antifascist movements, respectively.

### MAGA: PROFITING OFF OF HISTORICAL RACISM

When Trump introduced his campaign slogan "Make America Great Again" in 2015, it became not only a catchphrase, but also an opportunity to profit. Trump must have understood this opportunity when he chose a slogan that harked back to Reagan's declaration amid the 1980 presidential campaign, "Let's Make America Great Again." Despite what some political pundits have said about the administrations functioning differently, both the Reagan and Trump administrations are rooted in white supremacy. Reagan began his 1980 campaign at the virtually all-white Neshoba County Fair in Mississippi. (Neshoba is known for this fair, which dates back to 1889, and also for the notorious 1964 murders of civil rights organizers James Earl Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew

Goodman by police officers in the Ku Klux Klan.) Reagan launched his campaign at the fair, covertly signaling to the racists of the nation that he was the president who would represent their interests in the White House. MAGA, for its part, was not just a product that could be purchased on Trump's website; it was an attempt to reproduce an era when women, African Americans, Native Americans, people of color, the queer community, and leftists were all in danger of being violently attacked by angry white mobs. Indeed, Trump's hard-line followers viewed the midtwentieth century—a time when men like Chief Parker enforced de facto racial segregation through violent policing methods—as the ideal "great" era in America's past. 63 MAGA represented a nostalgia for racists who wanted to reproduce an era in which Parker and LAPD officers were able to operate with impunity. We saw this when Trump's followers supported Blue Lives Matter and battled antifascist activists on the streets of Charlottesville, Virginia.64 Trump wanted to remake old racist policies that many on the Right hope to re-create, but he is also a snake oil salesman who profited off of a motto that deceived his followers into believing that he would cure their social problems by traveling back to this era. If people supported him, then all the social disorders transpiring in the United States would miraculously disappear by his prescriptions.

Though Trump's pronouncements were absurd, the reality is that millions of people agreed with his racist and nonsensical rants. On January 6, 2021, white supremacists and fascists stormed the U.S. Capitol, believing Trump's rhetoric that the election was unfairly stolen from him. He convinced them that they, too, were cheated. We laughed at his childish behavior while he threw a tantrum, but this was premature—as we learned when his supporters engaged in violent acts to try to reinstate him as their leader. What is no laughing matter is how the Trump administration can be compared to the Nazi regime in Germany during the 1920s and 1930s, when antifascists and the Brownshirts fought each other on the streets.65 Moreover, the Black Lives Matter movement can be compared to how the John Birch Society used the "Soviet Negro Republic" language, and the antifascist protestors to the alleged Red Menace. Parker never rejected these bombastic allegations. Instead, he used them to promote his rightwing ideology of supporting the police. This type of language is what created the violent atmosphere that allowed Trump's supporters to physically assault anyone who disagreed with him. Historian and journalist Jelani

Cobb expressed a crucial point via a tweet on the day of the insurrection: "We should never forget that barely two months ago 70 million people voted for a man this unstable to be president for another term. The problem is not and never has been Donald Trump. It's the fact that he is the embodiment of a deep and resilient set of American values."66

While Trump's incendiary language angered many liberals and close allies alike, he was not the first to criminalize immigrant communities. Democratic presidents have also contributed to the deportation regime. Both political parties are culpable in the use of local law enforcement departments as federal agents to apprehend, detain, and deport unauthorized immigrants residing in the United States. Such policies and actions date back to the 1950s, when the INS collaborated with the LAPD under Operation Wetback. They have their roots in the actions of right-wing police chief William Parker, the racial segregationist organizations that supported him, a base of supporters willing to accept the false notion that they needed protection from fictitious criminals, and local newspapers that criminalized people of Mexican descent through disparaging language, portraying them as deviants threatening the white supremacist, capitalist structure. This has continued right through the Trump presidency. Trump capitalized on a manufactured crisis, claiming that only he could save America. As such, today we are faced with our own crisis: the rise of a new fascist movement in the United States. There will certainly be more right-wing leaders following in the footsteps of both Parker and Trump. It is up to us to challenge them at every turn; the police have certainly proven that they will not intervene to thwart this dangerous movement.

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- 63. O'Connor, "The Negro and the Police in Los Angeles," 62.
- 64. Thompson, "Police Stood by as Mayhem Mounted in Charlottesville."
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