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### Chapter 5: Displaced Abjection

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*Published in:*  
The Trump Carnival

*DOI:*  
[10.1515/9783111238135-005](https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111238135-005)

**IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.**

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*  
2024

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Gaufman, E., & Ganesh, B. (2024). Chapter 5: Displaced Abjection. In *The Trump Carnival: Populism, Transgression and the Far Right* (pp. 51-64). (De Gruyter Contemporary Social Sciences; Vol. 35). De Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111238135-005>

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## Chapter 5: Displaced Abjection

“The cruelty is the point,” the title of Adam Serwer’s 2018 article in *The Atlantic* and of his 2021 book, is a pithy and illustrative catchphrase to describe Trump’s campaign, presidency, and movement. It is immensely difficult to take stock of all of the callous decisions President Trump made, from a blanket ban on travel from some Muslim-majority nations and the separation of migrant children from their parents to neglecting victims of the COVID-19 pandemic. The kinds of racism that Trump trafficked are, of course, part and parcel of American politics rather than something he brought back to the field. Trump, however, made attacks on the dignity of the vulnerable a badge of pride. The cruelty did not stop when Trump left office in 2021. From the howling mob demanding the heads of Mike Pence and Nancy Pelosi to the transportation of refugees to Democrat-run cities orchestrated by Texas Governor Greg Abbott and Florida Governor Ron DeSantis: Trump showed the power of cruelty, and the GOP has since been enamored with it. For example, on September 15, 2022, Abbott sent a bus full of migrants to the Vice President’s residence at the Naval Observatory in Washington DC—in response to comments Vice President Kamala Harris made on TV—using vulnerable, undocumented people as pawns in a publicity stunt to score political points with the GOP base and trigger the ‘libs.’

The Trump carnival brings this cruelty to the fore, venerating it as a righteous form of transgression against an imagined oppression of political correctness, and in this case, the bogus argument that the Biden administration is pushing “open border” policies. This is a tradition for Trump, who enforced punitive policies towards communities of color before, during, and after his presidency (Abrajano and Hajnal 2015). Kivisto (2019), drawing on Shklar’s warning about the fragile nature of liberal democracy (Shklar 2013) emphasized the gratuitous and strategic use of cruelty by the Trump administration while Giroux highlighted the additional cruel architecture of neoliberalism that reinforces white nationalism (Giroux 2019). However, the cruelty and the effort to further marginalize those who have been historically left outside of the power structures is in fact a constitutive element of the carnival. As Kallis notes, in a discussion on fascism (Kallis 2008), “the format of discharging violence created an exceptional psychological space where ritual transgression, and the anonymity of the crowd produced the illusion of an extraordinary experience of unbound permissibility, governed by the empathic lapse of conventional moral *norms*” (p. 6, emphasis added). In many ways, engaging in violence cements the group’s identity against the perceived outsiders who are the targets of that violence. Using the concept of displaced abjection, this chapter discusses how the Trump carnival, populist as it is, is not focused on ridiculing or

challenging elites, but instead *punching down*, by targeting marginalized groups. Through displaced abjection, we see how the Trump carnival is centered on licensing and encouraging transgressions against specific democratic norms that affirm human dignity and equality. Trump, by humiliating and insulting age-old enemies, translates what is broadly considered unacceptable and undemocratic behavior into a transgressive, carnivalesque politics of violating fundamental democratic norms of equality, dignity, and pluralism.

## 5.1 Displaced Abjection

Demonization is central to carnival culture. Bakhtin notes the presence in the carnivalesque tradition of “comic images of death” and “merry dilaniations” and argued that “laughter never conceals violence” or “builds pyres.” This idealistic portrayal of the laughing culture is at odds with the many examples of the carnival’s practice. Given its form as the transgression and violation of elite norms (the Church and the nobility, in this case), it is surprising that it was not the elites themselves that carnival culture demonized. Instead, carnival culture degrades a marginalized group, as in the case of Jews, as we mentioned in Chapter 3. This degradation of a targeted marginalized group is what we frame as “displaced abjection,” in which the carnival protagonists focus their anger against someone who is lower than them in social hierarchy. Of course, the repetition of the image of a corrupt Hillary Clinton by Trump and his supporters is anti-elite and deeply sexist (and we dedicate the following chapter to this issue). Transgressions against the dignity and equality of those *truly* marginalized, with Trump’s cruelty as an exemplar, play a crucial role in sustaining the carnival. The folk that reverses the hierarchy with the elite still keeps certain social groups on the very bottom of the social ladder who remain there through carnival practices of abuse. Thus, the effigy serves as the symbolic analogy of scapegoated groups and demonized ‘Others.’

However, as Kelly points out (1990), the seemingly merry reversals of the carnival, with its comic violence, morphed into the grotesque of Stalin’s terror that Bakhtin hints at. Stalin’s purges were mass repressions often translated to a general public through the spectacle of show trials (Ellman 2001; Fitzpatrick 2018) with gruesome sentences being accompanied by laughter at the expense of the convicted “enemies of the people” (Groys 2017). Given that *Rabelais and His World* was written during the increasing repressions in the Soviet Union, with Bakhtin himself being exiled for his own work, dark allusions were all he could afford.

Abjection has been utilized in contemporary critical theory to describe how societies connote particular groups of people—mostly minority groups—as revolting figures (Tyler 2013). Some researchers also note that the pogrom violence of the

20th century also had a highly ritualistic and performative nature that was aimed at re-asserting the power that was perceived as threatened (Kallis 2007; Hagen 2005; Burke 2005). When we introduced abjection in Chapter 3, we developed on its theorization by Julia Kristeva in her famous 1982 book *Powers of Horror* (Kristeva 1982):

The abject is not an ob-ject facing me, which I name or imagine. Nor is it an ob-ject, an otherness ceaselessly fleeing in a systematic quest of desire. What is abject is not my correlative, which, providing me with someone or something else as support, would allow me to be more or less detached and autonomous. The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to (p. 10).

At the same time, Kristeva pointedly gives agency to the abject as a challenge to the “master” (Kristeva 1982), often through its mere presence in the carnival. Its costumes exposed belly buttons and saggy breasts violating Renaissance norms that differentiated savagery and civilization. Further, modern abject art explores themes that transgress “our sense of cleanliness and propriety, particularly referencing the body and bodily function” (Ravenscroft and Gilchrist 2009). The mere presence of abjected and grotesque bodies signifies spaces of transgression in carnival, which we delve further into in Chapter 8.

Classifying someone as a subaltern is a performative move, often done by oppressors who claim the status of victims for themselves (Koplatadze 2019; Krystalli 2019, 2021). The affective narrative of victimization that tends to restructure communication (Chouliaraki 2021) prioritized Trump’s rendering of America (and, more specifically, white men’s in general) suffering at the hands of both domestic and foreign Others (Löfflmann 2022). Hence the “great again” slogan (Al-Ghazzi 2021): it’s not only a call-back to a previous supposedly “great” man in presidential history, but also an implicit call to heal the vulnerability caused by those whom Trump and his campaign falsely represented as being in power. While a number of scholars have written on the politics of resentment in the Trump campaign and administration, Ganesh has a more apt term for this type of political grievance: white thymos, “the part of our souls that desires recognition of injustices done to us, draws our attention to the nexus of pride, rage, and indignation” (2020, pp. 893–894).

The grievances aired by Trump during his campaign were not new in the course of American history. While his constant blame game even earned him the title of Scapegoater-in-Chief (Heidt 2018), there is a definite political genealogy of right-wing politicians claiming unjustified victimhood from different societal groups and the government that are purportedly preventing the mainstream and privileged from continuing to bask in the same structural preferences. Especially on social media, the promise of violent fun at the expense of marginalized

groups was a cheap means of empowerment in the capitalist media landscape (Anderson and Secor 2022). Apart from social media and mainstream media that were happy to report Trump's racist statements without proper contextualization, there were certain other outlets that thanks to Trump were propelled to the epicenter of the American media space. For instance, Breitbart cultivated the white victimhood narrative as well as anti-Black racism that propelled Trump's campaign (Inwood 2019).

In the American context there is another grim carnivalesque tradition—lynching. Lynching, marked by abnormal cruelty, crowds and publicity, continued as a violent tradition in the US peaking between 1890 and 1940 (Garland 2005). In many ways, lynchings were extremely carnivalesque as they also ultimately served to maintain the racial status quo. Lynching as a practice was foremost a spectacle (Jackson 2008) that was supposed to draw a public and let that public engage in the cruelty of very much pointedly placed abjection (Wood 2013). As Harold and DeLuca point out (2005), “images of the abject Jesus icon continue to be an indispensable focal point for Catholics. This corporeal spectacle serves as a testimony of an injustice (‘look at what they’ve done to our Lord’), a warning of the risk of discipleship, and an ennobling of the martyr who sacrificed his or her life for others” (p. 275), which also led to Black communities in the US circulating the photographs of Emmett Till's body as proof of his vicious murder and to emphasize the grotesqueness of the violence as evidence of white racism (Harold and DeLuca 2005).

In the Trump carnival, displaced abjection is fundamentally about licensing the transgression of democratic norms. The Trump carnival's targets are racial, religious, and sexual minorities. If Trump started with “radical Islam” and “illegals,” his carnival's effigies now include the as well “woke left” and non-binary people, all in the context of a narcissistic racial fantasy that imagines white Americans as those who are the truly oppressed, a narrative rendered in its most extreme form in theories of “white genocide” we discussed earlier in this book. Trump's radical cruelty towards immigrants and Muslims in particular, characteristic of his campaign and the counter-jihad social movements that supported it (see Pertwee 2020), is not only or simply racist. Trump's promises to ban all Muslims from entering the US or forcing Mexico to pay for a border wall are designed to transgress the red lines of democratic order itself: calling for blanket discrimination, a violation of the post-war civil rights tradition in the US, and claiming that his negotiating skills would make Mexico pay for a wall, certainly a non-starter in any serious diplomatic discussion, were intended to show that discrimination and bullying other countries signify strength and virtue.

In this sense, political correctness is a keyterm. On the right, use of the term ‘political correctness’ primarily refers to an oppressive silencing of free speech on the grounds of respecting the dignity and equality of others. In this regard, those

who claim to be oppressed by political correctness lament that they are no longer entitled to offend others with full immunity from the consequences. This has played out in dramatic fashion in a galaxy of social media platforms, where far-right users (often those directly associated with fascist activism) are suspended or banned from platforms like Facebook and Twitter for violating these companies' rules and who then relocate to fringe platforms that provide unfettered, 'free speech' alternatives where there are few, if any, rules about offense. The 4chan board /pol/, an abbreviation of Politically Incorrect, celebrates the practice of transgressing politically correct discourse by purposefully causing offence, often with the goal of 'triggering' the libs. In making politically correct discourse—a set of norms that seek to enforce the dignity and equality of all groups in a public sphere—transgressive, the Trump carnival licenses hatred.

## 5.2 The Trump Carnival's Targets

Many commentators were quick to describe Trump as the carnival fool. Former New York City mayor Mike Bloomberg referred to him as a barking carnival clown (Smith 2020), while former Texas Governor Rick Perry described him as a carnival barking act (Dann 2015). Rodney Wallace Kennedy argues that Trump made every day a "Feast of Fools" (Kennedy 2021), connecting the temporary carnivalesque transgression to the white evangelicals' preference for the Trump campaign. In many ways, the entire presidential campaign was emblematic of "[the time turning] old power and truth into a carnival effigy, a funny monster that the people tormented with laughter in the square" (Bakhtin 2015, p. 101). The actual torment was reserved for somebody else. Despite its violation of 'high culture' and its heteroglossia, carnival preserves social hierarchy and ordering, rendering marginalized groups the focus of populist anger and frustration. The understanding that the hierarchy reversal and popular anger were play-pretend and not entirely real was a significant factor that was widely understood by the carnival crowd, hence the executions of the mock king and ritual abuse of groups that are in the minority and are unlikely to have a claim to power. This phenomenon is particularly visible in alt-right communities online, one of the main Trump supporting groups (Ganesh 2020).

Here, we cover the primary targets of the Trump carnival, identifying those groups that it renders into effigies against which transgressions are enacted. There is of course already an extensive literature on Trump's racism, his Islamophobia, the antisemites he tacitly supports, and the militant heteronormativity that characterizes right-wing politics today. Our aim in this chapter is not to rehash this well-known aspect of Trump's politics, but to show how displaced abjection func-

tions as part of carnivalesque populism. For the Trump carnival, displaced abjection allows for the transgression of norms associated with the ceremonious elite and the manners of the so-called political establishment. By ‘punching down,’ the Trump carnival turns the derogation of minorities into a source of pride because it violates the democratic norms of diversity and equality. Displaced abjection in the Trump carnival is not simply the dehumanization of the other, it is about turning minorities into effigies that are nothing more than materials that serve as objects for transgression; respecting other humans becomes yet another taboo to violate. Fundamentally, while Trump’s carnival is often seen as populist, it is not the elites that are transgressed against, but rather the rules and norms—of respect, dignity, equality, and the rule of law—with which they are associated (and it is well known that many of these elites have violated these norms).

There is a long tradition of dog-whistling rhetoric in American politics (Haney-López 2014), where coded racial appeals are supposed to cultivate resentment against non-white people. This tradition is also actively buttressed by the long tradition of racist humor (Pérez 2022), which will be examined further in the laughing culture chapter. After all, despite Bakhtin’s assertions, humor can also lead to abuse and violence. Moreover, many carnivalesque practices that are common on far-right platforms and social media are essentially echoes of blackface minstrel performances (Pérez 2022). Blackface minstrelsy refers to a form of entertainment that emerged in the United States in the early 19th century. It involved white performers darkening their skin with burnt cork or other substances to portray exaggerated caricatures of Black people. These performances were typically presented in theatrical shows, vaudeville acts, and later in early forms of media such as films and radio, not to mention early Disney cartoons. Many scholars consider blackface minstrelsy the first genuine American cultural product to be exported abroad (Thelwell 2020; Springhall 2008). Minstrel shows featured a variety of stereotypical portrayals of Black people, which were demeaning and offensive, reinforcing racial prejudices. The white performers would wear tattered clothing, apply exaggerated makeup, and engage in mocking behaviors to depict Black Americans as ignorant, lazy, and foolish. The shows often included songs, dances, comedic sketches, and jokes that perpetuated racial stereotypes (Saxton 1975). It was considered such a cultural mainstay that many new immigrants, even Jews, engaged in the practice (Rogin 1996). Blackface minstrelsy played a significant role in shaping popular culture in the United States during the 19th and early 20th centuries. It contributed to the normalization of racist attitudes towards and stereotypes of African Americans, perpetuating notions of inferiority and mockery, making characters such as Jim Crow, Mammy, Uncle Tom, or the ‘uppity’ black person trope, mainstays in American popular culture that are still common now (Lockett 2021). These performances were widely popular and reached audiences across different racial and



social backgrounds and were a part of the carnival tradition in the US and Canada (Howard 2018; Lott 2013). The legacy of blackface minstrelsy is deeply intertwined with the history of racism and discrimination against Black people.

Another carnivalesque phenomenon that also has genealogical roots in minstrelsy is ‘digital blackface,’ a pervasive use of gifs on social media featuring Black people by non-Black people. The way Khadija Mbowe, a popular YouTuber, explains it, many popular reaction gifs exploit the same minstrelsy stereotypes but using contemporary Black entertainers and sportspeople as stand-ins. Moreover, Black people are treated as performers or masks through the decontextualized use of African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) and performative outrage by non-Black people about the perceived overuse of AAVE (Matamoros-Fernández 2020). Moreover, Kremlin trolls also engaged in blackface in order to cultivate a certain kind of Black identity on social media (Freelon et al. 2022), which exemplified the masked and carnivalesque nature of the global media ecology. Interestingly during his rallies, Trump appeared often much more ‘politically correct’ than on Twitter. In many cases, he let the opening speakers engage in more abjectionable rhetoric, often platforming Black conservative pundits, preachers, and performers. Diamond and Silk, also known as Lynette Hardaway and Rochelle Richardson, were an American conservative political commentary duo from the United States who often served as an opening act to Trump’s rallies.

Perhaps one of the most evident forms of displaced abjection is summed up in the term ‘illegals,’ a vague appellation that Trump gives to those crossing the US’s southern border. While this is only correlation, Google Trends showed a steady increase in the term ‘illegals’ in the aftermath of Trump’s official presidential campaign announcement in June 2015 and peaked around the presidential elections in November 2016. ‘Illegal,’ like ‘terrorist,’ is a spectral term that comes to represent bodies crossing the southern border that are simultaneously racially other, criminal, and potential terrorists. In fact, as stories about “migrant caravans” came up during Trump’s administration, on many occasions, he suggested that they were a route for so-called “radical Islam”, and made frequent reference to the criminality of these so-called “illegals” (De Genova n.d.; Padilla 2022; Viladrich 2023), though it is important to note that Trump actually gained votes from Hispanic Texans and Floridians, which might be explained by reference not to physical attributes, but a dichotomy between legal, entrepreneurial immigrants and the spectral ‘illegals’ (Padilla 2022; Viladrich 2023).

As mentioned above, Donald Trump was one of the most prominent ‘birthers’. Obama was born on August 4, 1961, in Honolulu, Hawaii. However, the birthers claimed that he was born in Kenya, his father’s home country, and that his birth certificate was forged or non-existent. These claims were largely fueled by racial prejudice, xenophobia, and political opposition to Obama. Despite over-



whelming evidence, including Obama's Hawaiian birth certificate and newspaper announcements of his birth in local Hawaiian newspapers from 1961, the birther movement persisted and gained some traction in conservative circles (Austin 2015). In April 2011, after years of speculation and demands from the birther movement, Obama released his long-form birth certificate. The document confirmed his birth in Hawaii and was certified as genuine by state officials. Despite this, a small group of die-hard birthers continued to promote this baseless conspiracy theory. This was more than poorly veiled racism: the fact that a Black man became the president was too much of a reversal of the status quo in American politics—to such an extent that Obama's election was widely viewed as evidence for the claim that racism has been overcome. In the logic of carnival, this reversal had to be corrected, with a return to the status quo of white men in power. Ultimately, the controversy did not gain widespread acceptance or have a significant impact on Obama's presidency, as he was reelected in 2012. However, it did highlight the power of conspiracy theories and the persistence of misinformation in public discourse, not to mention provided yet another opportunity for the mainstreaming of racist views.

At this stage of Trump's involvement in a presidential campaign, when he was not even a candidate, he already enabled very fringe voices. Moreover, Islamophobia became yet another major issue in the 2016 presidential campaign (Tesler 2018) following the call for "a complete and total shutdown of Muslims entering the United States" (Taylor 2015) proposed by Trump in the aftermath of the San Bernardino mass shooting. There is an immense literature on Islamophobia, and some recent research has pointed to Muslims being the most acutely affected of the targets of racial resentment, being seen as the "least-evolved" group in American society, even by other minority groups (Lajevardi and Oskooii 2018). There is also a long history of research into Islamophobia as part of a US empire and the subjection of Muslims to extensive systems of control and surveillance (Kumar 2012; Kundnani 2014; Massoumi, Mills, and Miller 2017). The literature on online hate speech, which focuses on the impacts on Muslim victims of hatred and abuse, Islamophobic networks often associated with Trump, and far-right movements, is also plentiful (Awan 2014; Berntzen 2019; Ekman 2015; Evolvi 2018; Poole et al. 2021; Vidgen and Yasseri 2020). Indeed, both Benkler, Faris, and Roberts (2018, p. 144) and Pertwee (2020) argue that Islamophobia was central to Trump's appeal, which of course built upon a much longer-term development of anti-Muslim groups in right-wing civil society (Bail 2014). As in many cases of abjection rhetoric, Islamophobic rhetoric did correlate with the rise of violence (Abdelkader 2016).

Antisemitism probably has one of the longest (displaced) abjection pedigrees to the extent that Jews were the focus of ritual carnivalesque abuse in the Middle Ages (Martin 2006; Bristol 2014). American politics and political communication has not been immune to antisemitic dog whistles or openly antisemitic remarks.

One of the main target of right-wing antisemitism is the figure of businessman and philanthropist George Soros, who has become one of the main targets of “Protocols of the Elders of Zion”-esque smears and harassment over the years, propagated by commentators ranging from Bill O’Reilly and Glenn Beck to Ron DeSantis (Langer 2022). In a sense, there is even some sort of continuity between Henry Ford, one of the main sponsors and spreaders of the Protocols conspiracy in the US, and Trump, another businessman who was trying to pin all his misfortunes on “Soros-sponsored” Deep State (Douglas 2020) and similar outrageous claims that his supporters actively spread (Bongino 2020). Especially after the 2022 and 2023 indictments, Trump doubled down on his antisemitic claims in his PAC and campaign emails. Moreover, Soros became yet another seemingly acceptable antisemitic dog whistle, with Republican candidates trading insults and accusations about which one of them is supposedly backed by Soros (Archive of Political Emails 2023; Beauchamp 2023). Even though Jewish space lasers have entered the mainstream discourse, some disillusioned Trump supporters have also moved to the right of Trump himself: hence, accusations of Trump running a MIGA campaign (Make Israel Great Again) or even himself being a Zion Don can be found on Reddit and 4chan (Luddy 2021).

While the 2016 campaign might seem relatively tame compared to the virulent transphobia and constant attacks on queer and trans rights of the 2020s, the queer community was far from safe from being a target of abuse. Trump himself did not necessarily make many homophobic or anti-queer statements, but he did significantly gut LGBTQ protections over the four years of his presidency. This kind of hypocritical attitude towards the queer community is illustrated by groups like “Gays for Trump” or other prominent gay, male, far-right figures such as Milo Yanopoulos (Tobin 2017). This provides a very good illustration of homonationalism, as an American gay identity was often used to buttress Trump’s Islamophobia (Tobin 2017). If the far-right corners of the Internet that routinely traffic in homophobia in order to compensate for their fragile masculinity is somewhat understandable in this context, it was the Trump campaign that elevated many ultra-conservative pundits and politicians, who were previously only at the margins of the carnival square. If we take a look at the campaign ads of Ron DeSantis, he is very clearly targeting Trump’s alleged ambiguity on LGBTQ+ rights by asserting that he is the true conservative who would strip away the remaining protections or even public visibility that the queer community still has.

Left-leaning political commentators and pundits are also not immune to homophobia. For starters, given the rather public displays of affinity between Trump and Russia’s President Putin, the public on both sides of the Pacific Ocean did not hesitate to imagine the ‘bromance’ between Donald Trump and the Russian president. In the American case, this imaginary relationship brought

increasingly hardcore pornographic references into the mainstream (Rowley 2017) that culminated in gay (slasher) romance fiction and an abundance of memes and other visual material on American social media. Archive of Our Own, one of the biggest fanfiction-hosting websites in the world to date, has 160 gay romance fan fiction stories featuring Trump and Putin. In the more mainstream spaces, in one his monologues Stephen Colbert on the *Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, emphatically thundered that “the only thing [President Trump’s] mouth is good for is being Vladimir Putin’s cockholster [censored]” (*The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* 2017). He later apologized for the statement, but the joke rather trafficked in homophobia than obscenity. Perhaps because of the obscenity (not the homophobia), this monologue was investigated by the Federal Communications Commission, but neither the host nor the network ended up being punished. Colbert did (sort of) apologize for the homophobic nature of the joke and made fun of the fact that the hashtag #FireColbert was trending on Twitter (Lopez 2017).

### 5.3 Practicing Displaced Abjection in the Trump Carnival

From referring to “shithole countries,” and banning Muslims (Vitali, Hunt, and Thorp 2018), to his infamous 2020 tweet, “when the looting starts the shooting starts” (Sprunt 2020), Donald Trump uses racism, hatred, and bigotry to serve specific functions of transgression that direct the rage of his supporters. His use of displaced abjection is thus a powerful tool in violating norms of dignity, equality, and democracy. In the last section of this chapter, we walk through a few examples of how Trump practices displaced abjection. This is only a first set of examples. It is important to note that while we focus on misogyny, laughter, and sex and materiality in the chapters that follow, displaced abjection reappears throughout these carnivalesque practices that we describe in subsequent chapters.

It is deeply ironic that Trump—whose supporters are the first to cry when they feel their right to free speech is unjustly limited—would turn Colin Kaepernick into an effigy to score points. Following Kaepernick’s insistence on kneeling during the national anthem to protest police brutality and racism—a protest that ultimately cost him his job as a quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers—and the movement of athletes that supported him, Donald Trump (as did many other conservatives) attempted to turn this into a weapon in the culture wars. In September 2017, Trump said of Kaepernick “Wouldn’t you love to see one of these NFL owners, when somebody disrespects our flag, to say, ‘Get that son of a bitch off the field right now. Out! He’s fired. He’s fired!’” (Graham 2017). This of course is not the only time during Trump’s campaign that he singled out athletes. When Megan Rapinoe was asked if she would go to the White House if the

US women's soccer team she co-captained wins the World Cup, she responded, "I'm not going to the fucking White House." Donald Trump tweeted back, "Megan should WIN before she TALKS!" (North 2019). Both Kaepernick and Rapinoe are politically outspoken against Trump and the far-right politics he represents: Kaepernick, a model for Black activism fighting against police brutality and racism; and Rapinoe, who herself took a knee during the anthem before doing so was banned by the US Soccer Federation, who has been outspoken about her sexuality. In both cases, attacking these athletes is a way for Trump to stir up cultural polarization to reinforce his appeal to his base.

One of the most racist and publicized incidents of the Trump administration took place in January 2018, during a meeting on immigration. According to several sources, including lawmakers who were present at the meeting, lawmakers were discussing protections for immigrants from countries affected by political unrest and economic challenges. It was reported that when discussing immigrants from Haiti, El Salvador, and African countries, Trump allegedly asked, "Why are we having all these people from shithole countries come here?" (Dawsey 2018). This comment is a quintessential example of the carnivalesque abject in Trumpspeak. As Bahrainwala (2021) notes, the statement "locates this racism on the axis of toileting, and ties it to both anatomy and infrastructure since 'shitholes' can be interpreted as one's anus or as unplumbed, squatting toilets," as contamination is an inextricable part of the abject. The previous, seemingly politer version of this idea was the "drain the swamp" slogan, a fascist slogan that combined the notion of dirt and the act of purification performed by the populist leader. In this way, dog whistling became a technology of abjection: by technically not breaking 'the norms' of political correctness, Trump and his supporters signaled the transgressiveness of their rhetoric. Even though Trump, throughout his campaign, did not shy away from using openly racist rhetoric or from openly accusing certain ethnic groups of "bringing drugs and crime," he did not necessarily need to specify who it was doing that. For that, he needed to keep repeating his "build the wall" chant, which was supposed to instantly remind his audience and the media of who it was he wanted to protect the people from. Emphasizing the fact that Mexico was supposed to be paying for the wall only elevated the whistle to bullhorn.

Trump's presidential campaign and his presidency had a significant effect on the mainstreaming of far-right rhetoric as well as conspiracy theories (Bleakley 2023). One of the most prominent ones, the aforementioned Pizzagate, ended up in gun violence that could have turned deadly. The conspiracy theory, which emerged from within the alt-right Twitter community, alleged that John Podesta's emails exposed some members of the Democratic party as being part of a DC pizzeria-based child-sex ring (Bleakley 2023; Kang 2016). The theory gained momentum primarily through social media platforms (Fisher, Cox, and Hermann 2016).

Supporters of Pizzagate pointed to supposed coded language and symbols found in the leaked emails, claiming they contained hidden references to illegal activities. The allegations were thoroughly investigated and debunked by law enforcement agencies, journalists, and independent researchers. Despite the lack of evidence, the conspiracy theory had real-world consequences. In December 2016, an individual motivated by Pizzagate beliefs entered Comet Ping Pong with a firearm, firing shots but causing no injuries. As children are seen universally as symbols of the future, attacks on them can be viewed as an existential threat to a nation. This is also the way homophobic fears are stoked: in the US, and most recently in Russia, homosexuality has constantly been discursively linked to pedophilia (Alcoff 1996; Gaufman 2017). This is the mechanism borne out of ‘blood libel’ cases, which were pretexts for organizing Jewish pogroms: false rumors about ‘killing of babies’ and the ‘use of their blood’ during Passover is a perfect way to incite hatred.

Hillary “nasty woman” Clinton is also present in the blood libel narrative. Trump’s constant engagement with antisemitism, in which he or his surrogates have implied that Hillary Clinton had some mysterious ties with “Jewish capital”—such as the “History made” poster with the \$100 bills and Star of David image, or his last campaign ad, which was universally condemned as antisemitic (Rozsa 2016)—sustained this incredibly old anti-feminist trope with its antisemitic tinge. Long after the presidential campaign and presidency, in his post-indictment in the classified documents case speech Trump stated: “Together we stand up to the globalists, we stand up to the Marxists. [...] We stand up to the open border fanatics and [...] the lawless prosecutors [...] in blue states” (CJ 2023). Much as Nixon used “heroin” and “marijuana” to signify Blacks and hippies, Trump signifies the Democratic party with antisemitic dog whistles.

While the US is known for its racist practices of law enforcement and frequent reports of police shootings of unarmed Black men, the country reached a new low on May 25, 2020 in Minnesota. On that day, Minneapolis police officers responded to a call about allegedly passing a forged banknote at a convenience store. George Floyd was arrested by four officers, namely Derek Chauvin, Thomas Lane, J. Alexander Kueng, and Tou Thao. During the arrest, Officer Chauvin knelt on Floyd’s neck for an extended period, even as Floyd pleaded for his life, saying, “I can’t breathe.” Floyd’s pleas were captured on video by a bystander, and the footage quickly circulated on social media, generating outrage. The video showed Floyd being held down on the ground, face-first, while Chauvin knelt on his neck for over nine minutes. Floyd became unresponsive and was later pronounced dead at a nearby hospital. The incident raised concerns about the excessive use of force and the mistreatment of Black individuals by law enforcement officers. Following the release of the video, protests erupted in Minneapolis and soon spread to other

cities across the United States and around the world. The demonstrations called for justice for George Floyd, an end to police brutality, and an examination of systemic racism within the criminal justice system. The Black Lives Matter movement sought to raise awareness about the disproportionate use of force against black individuals and to advocate for meaningful change in policing and racial equality. Many conservative commentators, instead of condemning the murder, focused on Mr. Floyd's background, as though any rumors of substance abuse could ever excuse police brutality. This tendency highlighted the fact that the pro-Trump crowd saw a threat in the actual carnivalesque resistance and reversal of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement: Trump's carnival sought to conserve the existing hierarchy that the BLM movement questioned. During the protests, Trump tweeted, "When the looting starts the shooting starts" (Sprunt 2020), a phrase that was originally used in the summer of 1967 in the context of racial riots in Miami. This, once again from the president that referred to those marching among white supremacists in Charlottesville as "fine people," was a strategic transgression against the right to protest, using age-old myths of Black people as violent rioters. Trump's post was too extreme even for Facebook, which led to his account being suspended by the platform.

The COVID-19 pandemic provided yet another example of how carnivalesque politics can incorporate experts in processes of displaced abjection. With the carnivalesque reversal of the hierarchy, a complete disregard for authority and expertise makes complete sense. Why would you want to go to a pharmacy when the quack doctor next door (or podcast) is selling his wonder potion, as members of the alternative influence network like Alex Jones did? Who cares if ivermectin is for horses when the influencers say it works and is being deliberately covered up by the health institutions? In this case, Antony Fauci, one of the main faces of governmental expertise, became the target of so many violent threats that he was forced to live under police protection. The main enemy in carnival is the enemy of freedom, consequently slogans abounded among the anti-vax and anti-lockdown crowds who demanded to get a haircut, to not be "muzzled," and to not be "injected with poison." They even compared themselves to Jews for the "repressions" they faced because of their anti-science attitudes. Again, the notion of freedom, so important in the American context, was stretched to the extreme with the wide-ranging protests against lockdowns, mask mandates, and vaccines. The attempts by social media to dampen the spread of misinformation only led to the emergence of online communities that used coded language that would not get them into trouble.

Displaced abjection is a central feature of the carnival, but it should not be understood simply as racism. It is a complex process that incorporates a multitude of different actors and models that serve as the objects at whose expense transgres-

sion takes place. This derogation and dehumanization of the ‘Other’ is about violating fundamental norms as such, about transgressing against the basic values of democracy. With such displaced abjection, Trump manages to render hatred a populist act of reclaiming power. This happens through the identification of specific targets, projected as specters in the case of ‘illegals’ and ‘radical Islam,’ while still drawing on older, masked forms of racism and antisemitism. After all, the participants at the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville in June 2017 that featured Neo-Nazis, Ku Klux Klan, “alt-right” and neo-Confederates among others chanted “Jews will not replace us” and other racist slogans. Trump, of course, said there were “very fine people on both sides”, referring both to counter-protestors and the white supremacists at the rally. Trump tacitly condoned these extremists, and his administration pandered to their hateful, violent, and anti-democratic beliefs. We argue that displaced abjection in the Trump carnival also makes use of many different targets, from athletes standing up against injustices to experts like Dr. Fauci during the pandemic. As we move to three practices of carnival in the final parts of this book, we discuss how multidirectionality, displaced abjection, and carnivalesque populism come together in the transgressive, but ultimately anti-democratic, practices of laughing, misogyny, sex and materiality in the Trump carnival.