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# Racism and Fascism

Toni Morrison, *Department of Creative Writing, Princeton University\**

*In this address, given at Howard University during its 1995 Charter Day celebrations, Morrison spoke eloquently about the origins and social significance of Howard and other historically Black institutions of higher learning, about the education and miseducation of African Americans, and about the aberrant societal tensions wrought by racism and fascism. In this excerpt, she describes the persistent fallacies that emerge when racial and gender issues connect and intersect, and discusses the tendency of some to focus on a narrow sector rather than the full range of human abilities to differentiate, and most often disparage, members of minority and underrepresented groups.*

. . . Let us be reminded that before there is a final solution, there must be a first solution, a second one, even a third. The move toward a final solution is not a jump. It takes one step, then another, then another. Something, perhaps, like this:

- (1) Construct an internal enemy, as both focus and diversion.
- (2) Isolate and demonize that enemy by unleashing and protecting the utterance of overt and coded name-calling and verbal abuse. Employ *ad hominem* attacks as legitimate charges against that enemy.
- (3) Enlist and create sources and distributors of information who are willing to reinforce the demonizing process because it is profitable, because it grants power and because it works.
- (4) Palisade all art forms; monitor, discredit or expel those that challenge or destabilize processes of demonization and deification.
- (5) Subvert and malign all representatives of and sympathizers with this constructed enemy.
- (6) Solicit, from among the enemy, collaborators who agree with and can sanitize the dispossession process.
- (7) Pathologize the enemy in scholarly and popular mediums; recycle, for example, scientific racism and the myths of racial superiority in order to naturalize the pathology.
- (8) Criminalize the enemy. Then prepare, budget for and rationalize the building of holding arenas for the enemy—especially its males and absolutely its children.
- (9) Reward mindlessness and apathy with monumentalized entertainments and with little pleasures, tiny seductions, a few minutes on television, a few lines in the press, a little pseudo-success, the illusion of power and influence, a little fun, a little style, a little consequence.
- (10) Maintain, at all costs, silence.

\*This is an excerpt from a speech delivered at the Charter Day celebration, Howard University, March 3, 1995. Ms. Morrison, a former Howard faculty member, won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993 for her novel, *Beloved*. She is presently the Robert F. Goheen Professor of Creative Writing at Princeton University.

In 1995 racism may wear a new dress, buy a new pair of boots, but neither it nor its succubus twin fascism is new or can make anything new. It can only reproduce the environment that supports its own health: fear, denial and an atmosphere in which its victims have lost the will to fight.

The forces interested in fascist solutions to national problems are not to be found in one political party or another, or in one or another wing of any single political party. Democrats have no unsullied history of egalitarianism. Nor are liberals free of domination agendas. Republicans may have housed abolitionists and white supremacists. Conservative, moderate, liberal; right, left, hard left, far right; religious, secular, socialist—we must not be blindsided by these Pepsi-Cola, Coca-Cola labels because the genius of fascism is that any political structure can become a suitable home. Fascism talks ideology, but it is really just marketing—marketing for power.

It is recognizable by its need to purge, by the strategies it uses to purge and by its terror of truly democratic agendas. It is recognizable by its determination to convert all public services to private entrepreneurship; all nonprofit organizations to profit-making ones—so that the narrow but protective chasm between governance and business disappears. It changes citizens into taxpayers—so individuals become angry at even the notion of the public good. It changes neighbors into consumers—so the measure of our value as humans is not our humanity or our compassion or our generosity but what we own. It changes parenting into panicking—so that we vote against the interests of our own children; against their health care, their education, their safety from weapons. And in effecting these changes it produces the perfect capitalist, one who is willing to kill a human being for a product—a pair of sneakers, a jacket, a car—or kill generations for control of products—oil, drugs, fruit, gold.

When our fears have all been serialized, our creativity censored, our ideas “market-placed,” or rights sold, our intelligence sloganized, our strength downsized, our privacy auctioned; when the theatricality, the entertainment value, the marketing of life is complete, we will find ourselves living not in a nation but in a consortium of industries, and wholly unintelligible to ourselves except for what we see as through a screen darkly.