



Trans People Are in Grave Danger

The GOP has focused their vitriol on the trans community, whom they depict as an existential threat to justify their plans to eradicate their existence from society. Sound familiar?

Bryn Tanehill Mar 15, 2022

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In 1935, Lewis Sinclair wrote the novel *It Can't Happen Here* as a warning to Americans of the pernicousness of demagogues and fascist ideology. More recently, books called *It Can't Happen Here*, by Alexander Laban Hinton and *It Could Happen Here*, by Jonathan Greenblatt, explore what an American government dominated by hate could, and would, do. Unfortunately, with U.S. democracy heading toward a rather grisly death in 2025, and the high court amenable to laws allowing isolation and segregation of people, we may need to grapple with the unthinkable sooner rather than later. These books tend to focus on racism and anti-Semitism. But they are also offering a roadmap into what we're seeing now with trans people.

There won't be death camps and cattle cars. These are specific to a particular time and place in history. What I am seeing is that conditions in the U.S. will likely be there for a Republican-led effort to remove a class of people from American life via a combination of demonization, legal oppression and stochastic violence, with the goal of forcing all of them to either flee or hide who they are to avoid persecution.

The GOP has completely demonized trans people to the point where they are depicted as an existential threat. Every day, trans people lose more and more of what very few legal protections they have. And when you lack any sort of political power or friends in government, and are part of a group that would cause minimal economic disruption if you disappear, you are extremely vulnerable. At a percent of the adult population, trans people can be scapegoated without being able to effectively defend themselves politically or physically. Just not right persons that few people know them, but everyone knows Of them, and what they know usually comes from conservative media sources that are framing the existence of trans people in increasingly apocalyptic terms—very similar to the way Hitler spoke of Jews in the 1930s.

Fox's most popular host, Tucker Carlson, regularly invites *Algalia Slater* on his show—he makes claims that trans people are brainwashing children, sucking them into a cult, conducting medical experiments on them, and murdering them afterwards. She's also promoted the narrative that trans people are part of a trans-humanist plot to destroy humanity, led by a cabal of Jewish billionaires. All of this is eerily back-to-back to "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion" hoax—a fabricated anti-Semitic text written in 1903 in Russia that popularized the idea of a "global Jewish conspiracy," which Hitler would use to justify his exterminating the Jews.

Carlson, for his part, has declared that the existence, and tolerance, of transgender people threatens the "perpetration of the species." Echoing "Cultural" accusations that Muslims are terrorists, the Chief of Staff to Governor Kristi Noem in South Dakota declared that transgender children are "like terrorists." Fellow Fox News host *Laura Ingraham* declared that transgender people are "poisoning" young children with "gender ideology," which is a clear callback to accusations of transgender people being a contagion, pedophiles, and a clear threat to children. The implication is that transgender people are dangerous inhuman monsters who must be eradicated from society at any cost.

Most worrying, though, is podcaster Joe Rogan and Jordan Peterson are teaming up to declare that *utilizing the existence of transgender people* is a sign of the collapse of civilization, and that "transgenderism" is a contagion. Before his interview with Peterson, Rogan had also interviewed Slater on his podcast. Rogan, in the past, has been treated as a supposed moderate, and has an audience many times larger than Carlson's.

Peterson, a controversial alt-right psychologist, author, and YouTube presence, has an enormous following among the alt-right atmosphere, and, as far back as 2016, he told his followers that Nazis and fascists completely control and *understandable* response to the supposed outrageousness of transgender people. Even "hater" Trump "Republicans like David French" have stated that there can be no tolerance of transgender people in our society, and that the only option is for them to be crushed before they gain cultural acceptance like what happened with the gays.

Charlie Kirk, conservative radio host and founder of Turning Point USA, has also promoted the conspiracy theory that transgender people are part of a transhumanist plot by billionaires (who just happen to be Jewish) that *involved his audience*, that "the transgender movement is an introductory phase to get you to stop yourself of your humanity to mesh with machines," adding that "if you stop being a man, then maybe you can stop being a human being." The clear implication is that trans people are already less human than the rest of the population. Or, in other words, subhumans.

The *Claremont Institute*, a conservative think tank, has called for taking power for several generations in order to "effect a realignment of our politics and take control of all these branches of government for a generation or two." They believe that the U.S. should be re-established as a Christian nation—which would certainly exclude trans people. "Most people living in the United States today—certainly more than half—are not Americans in any meaningful sense of the term," wrote *Clash Ethics* in an essay for the Claremont Institute's publication, *The American Mind*.

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Seeing these words made me recoil in horror. This is opening the Overton window wide enough to fit the Nuremberg Laws through them, because what could be less American, less Christian, than transgender people!

Framing transgender people as an existential threat to American society leaves listeners to Rogan and Carlson with only one possible conclusion: They must be eliminated. Whether they flee, go back to the closet and disappear, or die doesn't matter. It's us or them, and anything done to transgender people is a justified act of social self-defense. If America is to become "great" again, transgender people must be removed from the equation: They are treated as the most obvious sign of its moral rot.

Simultaneously, legislatures in GOP-controlled states are systematically cutting transgender people off from society. Almost all anti-LGBT bills being filed this year target trans people, most of them have from bathrooms, sports, and receiving medical care; on government issued ID that don't use you as trans, on trans people in the military or any materials from schools that depict or describe trans people. There are also bills that use clothing and hair standards to kick trans youth out of schools, and laws that ensure no one, not even a medical doctor, can be punished in any way for discriminating against transgender people, less requiring bathrooms to exhibit warning signs alerting users to the potential presence of trans people. Most recently we've seen laws forcing teachers on our trans students in their parents. There were even some unconfirmed reports that the Trump administration was looking at how to force trans people out of federal civil service, and out of jobs with federal contractors.

There has been an explosion of laws targeting transgender people, with 2021 setting a record—twice that of the preceding year. This year looks to be even worse. An increasing number of laws are making it through state legislatures, and many are likely to be upheld. Most target youth, with the intent of preventing from attending school (via bathroom bills) or denying them access to transition-related care (either than conversion therapy, which conservative legal groups are working desperately to keep legal, and the only treatment option available).

At a state and federal level, every effort is being made by the GOP to pass bills which marginalize transgender people when they're young in the hopes that they self-select to the closet permanently. The propaganda being fed to Rogan's and Carlson's audiences is a form of stochastic violence: It encourages people to treat transgender people as badly as possible to do their part to save America and Western civilization.

Texas has gone the furthest in criminalizing trans people. Governor Greg Abbott and Texas State Attorney General Ken Paxton have ordered state agencies to prosecute anyone who supports medical transition for trans youth under the state's felony child abuse laws. This also means that doctors, teachers, nurses, and most other professionally licensed individuals become mandatory reporters, or potentially face felony charges as well. Even fleeing to another state may not be enough. It's entirely possible we could see Texas issuing arrest warrants for parents who support their trans children and have fled to other states where treatment remains legal. So far, the parents being investigated appear to be those who testified against bans on medical care for trans youth, which is another clear sign that our democracy is in a collapse. One of the surest signs of authoritarianism is using the power of the state to imprison political opponents.

Idaho has gone a step further and introduced a bill that would make it a felony punishable by life in prison to provide transition-related health care to trans youth, or go to another state to seek that treatment. We could find ourselves headed toward something like a second Dred Scott decision at SCOTUS, but this trans-people-are-the-people-being-hunted bill.

There's also an authoritarian analogy: If trans people are seen as an enemy of the bloodstream, the actions of Texas and Idaho make sense in a historical context. Anyone who gives comfort to an enemy of the people is guilty of a great crime. Anyone who knows the location of an enemy of the people and fails to report it (mandatory reporters, such as teachers and doctors) is guilty of a crime punishable by life in prison. Enemies of the people will be taken away for re-education (conversion therapy, most likely in group homes).

The Supreme Court is likely to let most of this through over time, in the name of states' rights and community morals as a basis for law. As other civil rights die (i.e., Roe v. Wade), we're likely to see complete bans on transition-related medical care for everyone, not just those under 18 or 21. Alternately, the laws will be neutral on their face, but target trans people with surgical precision to further prevent them from going out in public, going to school, or holding a job.

Right-wing militias have always held violence against trans people as a commandment. Gavin McInnes, who founded the *Proud Boys*, told them, "We need more violence from the Trump supporters. Choke a bitch. Choke a tranny. Get your fingers around the wadpuck. Get a gun." In 2021, we saw more right-wing militias showing up at *anti-trans protests*, while generally getting a pass from the police they're either *chummy with*, or off duty from.

Conservative media outlets have consistently made heroes out of people like George Zimmerman (who killed Trayvon Martin), Kyle Rittenhouse, and Ashli Babbitt (who died while participating in the January 6 insurrection). They've also made Rittenhouse (who was working with a militia at the time of the shootings) immensely rich via crowdfunding for his legal defense. It's not difficult to see people like Rogan, Peterson, and Carlson arguing that transgender victims of a shooting brought it upon themselves for any number of reasons that would appeal to the right. They were committing youth, they were communists, they were parading their sexuality to public, they're offensive to a decent society, they were using a woman's bathroom.

Already, there's some evidence this campaign to denigrate transgender people is working as intended. FBI statistics show that *hate crimes* against transgender people rose by 20 percent in both 2020 and 2021, while crimes against LGBTQ people fell. Over the same period, documented murders of transgender people have also doubled.

We can see modern examples of what this type of crowd-sourced stochastic violence looks like in practice in the Russian state of Chechnya. *Police and pro-government thugs* have systematically kidnapped, tortured, and killed lesbians and gays in Chechnya. The Russian government has turned a blind eye to these abuses because fundamentally they also believe that LGBTQ are a threat to the moral order. Many of the lesbians and gays have had their identification documents confiscated to prevent them from fleeing. As a result, LGBTQ people there have either *fled or gone into hiding*.

This is not a farfetched outcome when you consider that Franklin Graham, son of Billy Graham, America's most influential evangelist, confidant of Donald Trump, and one of his most outspoken supporters, is a big fan of Putin and Russia for the way it *handles gays*. Indeed, Putin is popular among many *conservative leaders* for this exact reason.

Trump, for his part, was usually quick to offer these leaders whatever they wanted in exchange for their *adulation and loyalty*. During GOP administration in the future, after elections cease to matter, there will be pressure by those closest to the administration to impose a more Russian-style solution to all those trans people wandering around in public. Trump, for his part, *never had a problem with cruelty* if it benefited him. Congressman Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA), the new face of the GOP base, has explicitly *called for beating trans people "into the ground"* to "stand up against this stuff," on *The Alex Jones Show*. Jones, for his part, agreed with her.

Not in the idea of GOP governors or the president abusing the power of the position to abuse people who kill trans people of their crimes. Donald Trump has proclaimed that if he becomes president again, he will pardon anyone convicted of crimes related to the January 6 insurrection. If conservative media and personalities claim the media waters with enough misinformation and hate, GOP politicians will be heavily pressured to pardon or commute the sentences of those convicted of murdering undersables. We can see the power these media figures have: *Congressmen are receiving calls* from constituents who watch Tucker Carlson and spending Russian government talking points about why the U.S. should back Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

All of this might seem farfetched, but we've seen examples of these tactics already, along with GOP politicians firing slip that they prefer transgender people to disappear or flee. In Loudoun County, Virginia, school board members have received *dozens of credible death threats* for supporting trans youth. There will likely be tremendous pressure from the base on Republican politicians to protect those who commit violence against transgender people, which is almost certainly coming.

Jennifer Birk, a prominent anti-trans campaigner who is widely published in mainstream conservative websites, is one of the best-known promoters of the conspiracy theory that trans people are part of a plot by Jewish billionaires to spread "transhumanism" and destroy humanity. She has also attempted to generate stochastic violence against gender clinics by providing lists of their locations and *receiving 7771 responses* camps for children stating *unsubstantiated* daily, just going about their life. "I'm just saying I'm a waiting after all the work of finding them. While trackers in Canada are willing to do." This constitutes a clear call for violence, in the same way that the Right called for violence against abortion providers in the past. In fact, many of the clinics listed belong to Planned Parenthood. Trans healthcare providers are routinely picketed, receive *death threats*, and bomb threats are called into the hospitals where they work.

Occasionally, politicians let the mask slip, and their real intention for trans people come out. When *Senator Ted Cruz* (R-TX) was asked about transgender people, he responded, "If any one of us wants to dress up as a woman or man and wants to live as woman or man and believes that we're bringing something other than what we were born, God has made each of us with free will and the ability to choose to do that man to want to dress as a woman, and live as a woman, and have a bathroom at home." The implication is that it's OK to be trans, but only if done within the privacy of your own home, and not in public. Shelley Latham, a Republican candidate for the Texas House of Representatives, was similarly known to her donors for a world where there are no visible trans people, and believes people have a right to harass them until they disappear. "I am not comfortable with the transgenders," Latham said. "The kids that they brought in my classroom, when they were that kid, I was transgendering into a different sex, that I couldn't have kids laugh at them... like other kids got in trouble for having transgender kids in my class."

In a Facebook post, Debi Jackson, the mother of Avery Jackson, her trans daughter who appeared on the cover of *National Geographic*, recounted how she confronted a Missouri Republican sponsor of an anti-transgender bill there, explaining to them how much harm a ban on healthcare would do to her child. "My daughter doesn't feel safe living here anymore," she told him. The Representative looked down at her, smiled, and replied, "Well, I know that I would do anything for my kids, even more, so why don't you think about it." He ended the meeting there. He had no interest in any harm he might cause, he was simply doing what his base wants, and that's making transgender children go away.

This desire for an America with far fewer trans people (if not none) isn't just anecdotal. There's polling data to reflect this. A *Pew Research* poll released in February 2022 found that 54 percent of Republicans believe that acceptance of trans people is bad for society, while only 14 percent disagreed. When you look at the converse of this, it shows that the vast majority of Republicans who have an opinion on the matter believe that transgender people are bad for society and should not be tolerated. This is more than enough pressure from the base to ensure that the GOP takes steps to remove transgender people from public life. These numbers will only get worse, as the belief that trans people are an existential threat to our society becomes dogma, just as the belief that the 2020 election was stolen has. Polling by the Public Religion Research Institute from 2019 supports this conclusion. Republicans aren't liberalizing over time on trans issues the way they have on same-sex marriage: They're actually becoming *more hostile*.

The second number of laws being introduced targeting LGBTQ (that mostly trans) youth are increasingly dystopian. In addition to the bans on sports and medical transition, we now have "Don't Say Gay" bills that allow parents to sue schools and teachers if they so much as mention anything LGBTQ. A gay teacher could be in deep trouble if they so much as mention their spouse, or tell other students not to laugh at or harass another student for being transgender. Other laws require schools and teachers to *warn students* if they come out as LGBTQ, or attend a GSA (Gay-Straight Alliance) club meeting.

"Concerned citizens" groups are *issuing anything* with LGBTQ content from school and public libraries across the US. Some of the same laws banning Critical Race Theory are also defining anything depicting homosexuality as *harmful* and making it a crime for it to be made available to minors. This includes picture books for young children, like *Tango Makes Three* or *I Am Jazz*. At this time there are a whopping total of 153 bills like this across 35 states. There are even books burning rallies of LGBTQ material, which eerily resemble their German counterparts from 1933. Make no mistake, the goal is to erase the existence of LGBTQ people from schools and libraries across the U.S., and to make life as hazardous and unpleasant for trans youth as is legally allowable without inviting Proud Boys to "purge" school grounds. (Which is probably coming after the inevitable next mass school shooting anyway.)

That's why there's also every sign that the GOP intends to make demonizing transgender people one of their top issues in 2022 and 2024. The GOP tried to avoid LGBTQ issues in 2020 (as did Democrats), but we saw PACs run *anti-trans ads* in key battleground states, and afterwards the GOP concluded that they were effective. Since then, Donald Trump has been going on *anti-transgender rants*, *issuing his speeches*, in wild applause. He even trans people, simultaneously as something unbelievably awful, and fundamentally unironous, much the way Ted Bundy described fascists needing to create *straw man enemies* who are simultaneously both weak and strong.

It's not saying a genocide is going to happen. But we're heading in a direction where it's increasingly possible. Democracy is dying. The courts sit far to the right. The party on the left is increasingly taking permanent control and the perfect scapegoat. They're already passing laws meant to isolate and segregate trans people from the population, most of which will likely be upheld by the courts.

After 2025, when we've reached permanent single-party rule at the federal level, they'll ban trans people from the military again. They'll keep looking for ways to remove them from federal service, including revoking clearances. States that don't ban trans students from bathrooms will lose their state and federal funding. The GOP is already making every effort to treat the existence of trans people as obscenity. At the same time, the American Right will be throwing in its power to encourage their audiences not to tolerate trans people. Media personalities like Rogan, Carlson, and Sean Hannity will all pounce on a peddler when they do, ensuring they have the best defense money can buy. And if that fails, there's a pardon waiting for them anyway.

All the while, the base will demand that they take the next step to protect society. And the next, and the next, all over a period of years while trans people are either going to go underground or leaving the country. When the country doesn't get better despite this persecution, the GOP base will conclude that more must be done to save the country. The draconian laws just erode frustration enough. The GOP in turn, keeps passing laws and issuing executive orders that are more extreme. Until, one day, when there are no more obvious ways to make transgender people any more excluded, stigmatized, impoverished, segregated, or witchhunted, GOP leadership will meet to decide once and for all how to *answer the transgender question*.

This is the path we're on right now, and there are very few exits. The degradation of our democracy looks locked in at this point, and they won't forget that transgender people exist, as we are not the outgroup of the moment. The only real uncertainty seems to be whether the GOP will be willing to take that last step.

About the Author

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