**Hypothetical harms**

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There is a common thread between the recent mass shootings in Buffalo, Uvalde, Texas, and Laguna Beach, California, the January 6 insurrection, everyday police lethality, and the overturning of Roe v Wade. Add to this list the critical race theory and queer American discussion bans in public schools across the country. It is the tangled web of violent white supremacy, or at least, the threat of it.

The goal here has always been to terrorise, cower, exploit and marginalise anyone who isn’t a straight white male. Although white males are the primary practitioners of violent white supremacy, one need only subscribe to its main tenets – racism, elitism, narcissism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, and control over the bodies of women and the marginalised – to be one.

White males who are die-hard white supremacists and their fellow travellers have and will continue to create hypothetical hurts, slights, and people (especially theoretical children) to create their ideal nation-state. One that fully represents their worldview while fully denying the rights and humanity of everyone else. And while hate may be the trigger for white supremacists to commit their domestic terrorism, power and the pursuit of such is white supremacy’s everlasting fuel.

The recent near-violent incident in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho is yet another example of this seeming contradiction between the rhetoric around protecting children (in this case, from the harms of queer “indoctrination”) and the planned harm of hurting and killing people over queerness.

Police arrested 31 members of the white supremacist group Patriot Front as they were set to riot in the middle of a local Pride event on June 11. Each member of the group wore a blue shirt with the words “Reclaim America” printed on the back. In response, white supremacists have issued death threats to members of the Coeur d’Alene police department. The gall of law enforcement to arrest white supremacists in a nation where many police officers are among white supremacy’s “fellow travelers?” This explains why white supremacists would react to their arrests with threats to kill police in Idaho – law enforcement there bucked the white supremacist code.

It does seem hypocritical for conservatives to champion policies against hypothetical harms to kids while doing little or nothing to stop mass shooters from regularly mowing down living and breathing children in classrooms, or anyone else, for that matter. Or to discuss making schools safer with more armed law enforcement officers, even though police in schools would rather over-police kids than actually stop an active shooter.

Politicians have fought for laws banning the teaching of critical race theory, slavery, racism, queerness, and queer authors because they claim this information could traumatise kids while also advancing anti-abortion rights laws to “protect the unborn”.

But there’s no hypocrisy here. Among so many others, the recent mass shootings at Tops grocery store in Buffalo, New York and at Ross Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas are the result of an American gun culture which itself stems from the larger American culture of white supremacy. That culture is encoded in America’s DNA, and it drives these supremacist policies supposedly meant to protect children and other hypothetical innocents.

As author Jonathan Metzl has discussed, the culture of white supremacy is evident in the drumbeat of American death, from Covid-19, from opioid abuse, from suicides, and from mass shootings, all part of death by whiteness.

This is more than the accusation that today’s GOP is a “death cult” and certainly more than the violence embedded in Hollywood movies, in video games played from Kenosha to Korea, or in popular music lyrics for the past century.

The violence is wrapped in the Americana that is white supremacy, a violence that encourages neglect, poverty, abuse, and misery. For those who delightfully practice white supremacy, those so-called others who suffer from racist, sexist, and transphobic policies – and those who die because of them – are a residual reward, a high that never fails to bring ecstasy.

The violence of white supremacy need not even be direct. Consider the Supreme Court decision on abortion. With just a few hundred keystrokes, a few white supremacy-affirming neo-con justices and one evangelical anti-abortion rights activist overturned Roe v Wade. This decision put fertilised ova – theoretical babies – ahead of millions of flesh-and-blood women, including women whose pregnancy complications could kill them.

This decision is psychological terror – especially for women of colour, those living with poverty, and those in rural communities who were already facing the greatest obstacles to abortion care.

White evangelicals like the late Rev Jerry Falwell, Sr and Pat Robertson pursued Roe’s end for decades. Theirs and others’ anti-abortion rights efforts have often been connected to the racist Great Replacement Theory. Doctor-activist Horatio R Storer once asked whether the US shall remain “filled by our own children” in 1868. Former congressman Steve King (R-IA) tweeted “We can’t restore our civilization with somebody else’s babies” in 2017.

When combined with Alito’s “domestic supply of infants” line in the draft opinion leaked in May, the historical bond between the anti-abortion rights movement and violent white supremacy becomes clear. Attacks on curricula through bad legislation are likewise a form of psychological violence towards Black, Brown, and queer students in public schools across the US, justified in the name of “defending our children”.

Bans like the ones in Tennessee and Florida outlaw “school instruction”, training, and “instructional materials” (books) on gender fluidity, sexual orientation, the prevalence of systemic racism, Black history, slavery, and The 1619 Project.

Really, conservatives and white supremacists want to render students ignorant of America’s ugly past and present, and want the right to heap on them myths and lies, and the right to erase LGBTQIA+ people in the classroom altogether. All because hypothetical white kids may get upset or ask their parents, “Are you a racist?”

Never mind that experiencing racism or homophobia or misogyny causes trauma every day for children, and that the majority of students in America’s public schools are actually Black and Brown kids.

There’s the remotest possibility the Senate could enact HR 8, the universal background check bill the House passed last year, creating more obstacles for trigger-happy racists to clear if they want to legally obtain an assault rifle (as the alleged Buffalo attacker and many before him have done). That is if there is any real desire to protect via gun control legislation. But there is too much money involved, for the National Rifle Association, gun manufacturers, and conservative politicians at all levels for them to turn away from the gun-industrial complex. Even if HR 8 became law, it would only slow down the scale of mass shootings across the US, unable to erase its extensive black market for automatic and semiautomatic weapons.

Excerpted: ‘White supremacy’s hypothetical harms and violent delights’. Courtesy: Aljazeera.com