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ARTICLE

The Ordinariness of January 6

Rhetorics of Participation in Antidemocratic Culture

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Abstract: *The January 6, 2021, Capitol riot appeared as an extraordinary and shocking event to many American citizens. In fact, the various framings of the riot such as "insurrection," "sedition," or "domestic terrorism" seem to confirm the unprecedented nature of the day. By contrast, in this article we argue that January 6 can be understood in terms of its ordinariness, that is, as "the most ordinary thing that could happen" when viewed in the context of right-wing politics. We first argue that the reliance on a universalized dichotomy between authoritarianism and democracy in current research on right-wing politics in the United States tends to reify those terms, and thus miss the ordinary and routine dimension of antidemocratic practices. We subsequently propose the concept* antidemocratic cultures *to understand how right-wing political dispositions are fabricated through and mediated by rhetorical acts including speech, written texts, and embodied everyday practice. We analyze the* rhetoric of participation *of riot participants by reading their text messages, social media posts, and interviews with law enforcement and news media, as detailed in their arrest sheets. The rhetoric of participation of riot participants reveals how political dispositions are fabricated through ordinary language use and how these identities congeal in antidemocratic cultures. In the last section, we further discuss how a theory of antidemocratic cultures provides a novel framework to understand contemporary right-wing politics.*

Keywords: antidemocratic culture, rhetoric, January 6, authoritarianism, democracy, US Capitol riot

> Yesterday's "sacrileges" in our temple of democracy—oh, poor defiled city on the hill, etc.—constituted an "insurrection" only in the sense of dark comedy. What was essentially a big biker gang dressed as circus performers and war-surplus barbarians—including the guy with a painted face posing as horned bison in a fur coat—stormed the ultimate country club, squatted on Pence's throne, chased Senators into the sewers, casually picked their noses and rifled files and, above all, shot endless selfies to send to the dudes back home. Otherwise they didn't have a clue."
>
> —Mike Davis (2021)

The spectacle, shock, and horror of Trump supporters storming the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, has overshadowed the fact that the event was one out of forty-five protests at state capitols and elsewhere in thirty-two states on that day (Tanner and Burghart 2021). As the Capitol riot unfolded, pundits scrambled to give meaning to an apparently unprecedented event. Critical commentaries about extremist or far-right politics since then have attempted to assign a singular meaning to the Capitol riot by applying a unitary analytical approach. In this approach, we can know the meaning of the riot in the following ways: it was an "insurrection" engineered by Donald Trump (January 6th Committee 2022), guided by a "patriotic counter-revolutionary" "political mindset" (Pape 2022b) that was fomented by a "white supremacist" political ideology (Belew and Gutierrez 2021) and proof of predicted, but now realized, "fascism" (Stanley 2018, 2021), "tyranny" (Snyder 2017, 2021), or "Christian nationalism" (Baptist Joint Committee 2022). Attempts to shoehorn the riot into a unitary analytical category have produced "January 6" as an "event," an epistemological object that can represent a broader societal context (Jeppesen et al. 2022).

In our view, treating the riot as an event that can be analyzed through unitary categories gives us little insight into its *meaning* for the participants and as political practice. Unitary and universalized analyses are limited on two counts. First, those who claim that the riot was inspired by patriotism or white supremacy fail to explain how the participants understood these concepts and whether they saw them as part of their (dynamic and fluid) identities (what we will refer to as their dispositions and stances). Second, unitary analyses often measure the beliefs or actions of the rioters against a normative understanding of democracy (and, by extension, authoritarianism); again, the rioters' understanding of political discourse is flattened out in order to maintain the (liberal) framework through which democratic politics is normatively defined—an approach that Mike Davis satirizes in the epigraph above. Even there, Davis exaggerates by claiming that the rioters "didn't have a clue." They might have been strategically clueless, but the riot was meaningful to the participants.

Our argument is that the meaningfulness of the Capitol riot to the participants and its significance as a political practice provide clues to the ordinariness of American

extremist right-wing politics. The extremist right-wing discourse and activities that proliferated during the Trump years, and that seemed to reach their nadir on January 6, have prompted much anxiety about the rise of fascism or a looming second civil war (Walter 2022). Even when not imagining such catastrophic outcomes, critics characterize the rise of such politics as a threat to the future of the United States as a political formation—one believed to be moving from democracy to authoritarianism. This approach assumes that democracy and authoritarianism have clear normative definitions and meanings. Rejecting such an assumption, as well as a fixed understanding of right-wing politics according to a singular ideology, we argue that today's American extremist right-wing politics is rooted in political identity formation and cultural practices. In our understanding, the larger meaning of the riot, and thus the nature of the political right, is clearer if we start by understanding political identity and cultural practices rather than with an a priori definition of extremism or right-wing politics.

As active processes of self-making and self-styling, political identities are fabricated through ordinary, routine, and everyday social struggles online and offline. It is the power of such fabricated political identities—and the power to fashion them—that are meaningful to social actors. They represent the basic scaffolds upon which the architecture of right-wing politics is built via a highly mediated and participatory culture (Jenkins 2009; see also Starbird, Ahmer, and Wilson 2019). By characterizing right-wing politics as ordinary, we do not seek to downplay the egregious nature and consequences of the January 6 attack on the Capitol. On the contrary, by emphasizing the ordinary we seek to show that such an attack is possible again because right-wing politics does not emerge solely from extraordinary efforts at propaganda, or from ideas with impeccable logical consistency, or from well-financed and skillful organizations. By ordinariness, we mean the ubiquitous but elusive everydayness of sociopolitical practices. These are practices that we notice in the everyday but often consider to be undeserving of critical thought because of their triviality. The ordinary also consists of practices that we witness and that arrest us but that we choose to pass over in silence for fear of breaking a social convention or upsetting the flow of social life. By conceptualizing ordinariness in this way, we seek to highlight how habitual processes of identification (for example, the ways in which we identify self and other, who poses a threat, and where we are safe) and the routine reproduction of a normative social order (the maintenance of separations, appropriate social distances, and relations of ordering) already embed an everyday right-wing politics that was spectacularly expressed on January 6. The threat from the right is not based upon a choice between two political formations—democracy or authoritarianism—but rather rests upon the very ordinary stances that people fabricate for themselves.

In this article, we reconstruct the political dispositions of the participants of the January 6 Capitol riot from New York State (NYS) by analyzing the reasons that rioters gave for their actions on that day. In the first section, we critique the tendency to analyze right-wing politics in terms of a strict universalized dichotomy between authoritarianism and democracy, and we argue for a different interpretation of political

life. We subsequently propose the concept of *antidemocratic cultures* to understand how right-wing political dispositions are fabricated through and mediated by rhetorical acts, including speech, written texts, and embodied everyday practice.[1] We then present a discussion of our research methods and dataset and discuss how they allow us to understand such political stances and practices. In the third section, we analyze the *rhetoric of participation* of NYS riot participants by reading their text messages, social media posts, and interviews with law enforcement and news media as detailed in their arrest sheets, which are criminal complaints accompanied by statements of fact and of information. The rhetoric of participation of NYS riot participants reveals how political dispositions are fashioned out of ordinary language usage and how these identities congeal in antidemocratic cultures. We analyze our findings in the last section and propose a theory of *ordinary antidemocratic cultures* to better understand right-wing politics today.

Authoritarianism and Democracy

Typically, critics of right-wing politics in the US frame their argument through an axis that runs left to right, from democracy to authoritarianism. Since the election of Trump, this authoritarian/democratic dichotomy has shaped concerns about the "erosion of democratic norms" (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2019; Brown, Gordon, and Pensky 2018), populism (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017), conspiracy theorizing and political lies (Ben-Ghiat 2020, 111), digital culture and practice (Fielitz and Thurston 2019), and disinformation (Marwick and Lewis 2017). Academic and mainstream commentators warn of growing authoritarianism in the US (Ben-Ghiat 2020). Such an approach has been common to the analysis of "the radical right" in the US since World War II (Bell [1955] 2002, see essays by Hofstadter [1955] 2002 and Lipset [1955] 2002), and it was pioneered by the publication of *The Authoritarian Personality* (*AP*, hereafter) by Theodor Adorno and his colleagues ([1950] 2019).

As Max Horkheimer ([1950] 2019, lxxii) observed in the preface to the *AP*, the "authoritarian type of man" was threatening to "replace the individualistic and democratic type prevalent in the past century and a half of our civilization." This dichotomy between the authoritarian and the democratic personality structures the *AP*. A totally administered society creates a disposition toward authoritarianism in all spheres of life, starting with the family and radiating to interpersonal and supernatural relations, and finally to political existence. Accordingly, authoritarianism became necessary to force the individual to adjust, and thus be submissive, to the needs of a

1 Our approach to rhetoric is grounded in contemporary rhetorical theory and its emphasis on non-agentic, distributed, ecological meaning-making. As Thomas Rickert (2013, 34) defines it, rhetoric is "an emergent result of environmentally situated and interactive engagements, redolent of a world that affects us, that persuades us to symbolicity."

capitalist social structure at the very moment when "technical civilization" had created a "stage of enlightenment" that would have allowed individuals "to become true subjects if the control mechanism would be superseded at any point" (Adorno et al. [1950] 2019, lxv). Although the *AP* provides a theory of subjectivity—the conformist, submissive (to the strong), domineering (to the weak), and hierarchical mode of being as a way to deal with the increasing irrationality of a totally administered society (Adorno 1974)—the logic of the explanatory framework is buttressed by the authoritarian/democratic dichotomy. Adorno and his colleagues in the Frankfurt School posited that a democratic possibility emerged for social subjects because of the post-Enlightenment triumph of reason and autonomy over the domination of religion and absolutism, only for those same subjects to be disciplined into new modes of submission in the name of rationalization and efficiency. Thus, the potential democratic subject is continuously captured by an authoritarian net.

We find much relevant to our study in the *AP*—particularly the notions of "susceptibility" and "antidemocratic potential"—but we go beyond the authoritarian/democratic distinction to shape our analysis of contemporary right-wing politics. This distinction has become the silent—and thus normative—background for critiquing right-wing politics. By not directly challenging this distinction, scholars of right-wing politics lock in a number of assumptions. First, by failing to question the authoritarian/democratic dichotomy, researchers risk naturalizing historically constituted political forms and practices. The meanings of democracy and antidemocracy are historically and relationally situated—early modern democratic practices took shape, acquired distinctive meanings, and gained particular salience in relation to absolutism. Those meanings thus emerge in the context of social struggles and are never predetermined beforehand. For example, Rydgren (2018, 23–24) characterizes "right-wing extremism" in terms of an opposition to "democracy" as such, or to "the way existing democratic institutions actually work." This characterization allows Rydgren to argue that "the radical right" (a subcategory of right-wing extremism) rejects "the pluralistic values of liberal democracy" in favor of "a general sociocultural authoritarianism." Appealing as the characterization is, it nonetheless passes over in silence liberal democracy's paradoxical relationship with heterogeneity and difference (Goldberg 1993; Scott 1996). This paradox manifests itself in the disciplinary function of pluralism to rein in and manage democratic demands for greater inclusion, recognition, and equality (Connolly 2005). For example, the discourse and practice of pluralism celebrates diversity and tolerance, but only "within settled contexts of conflict and collective action" (Connolly 1995, xiii; see also Brown 2009). This approach to pluralism seeks to contain the social struggles through which political protagonists question and transform the meanings of democracy and authoritarianism.

Second, by failing to problematize the authoritarian/democratic dichotomy, researchers operationalize a normative conception of (liberal) democracy that discursively and ideologically naturalizes its meanings. Normative meanings of democracy can reduce politics to a number of procedures and practices such as voting or the functioning of certain institutions such as parliaments (see Pateman 1970). While Jan-Werner Müller

(2021, 3–5) does not reduce the political to the procedural, he nevertheless frames the rise of "right-wing populism" and its "authoritarian-populist art of governance" in terms of "threats to democracy." Yet, this dichotomous characterization again ignores the "arts of governance" operational in the industrial factory, the household, or the prison that critics ranging from Karl Marx to Michel Foucault (as well as their intellectual heirs) have characterized as despotic or authoritarian. These despotic forms of governance have lived not only in authoritarian regimes but within the capillaries of democratic power. As such, normative understandings can disguise how antidemocratic practices operate within democracies in very normal and ordinary ways, without the need for "exceptional" measures (Mondon and Winter 2020).

Therefore, we propose the concept of *antidemocratic cultures* to analyze contemporary forms of right-wing politics. Antidemocratic cultures—like all cultural formations—are open, fluid, and always changing. Before illustrating how we use antidemocratic cultures to analyze contemporary right-wing politics, let us clarify what we do not mean by this term. In our definition of antidemocratic cultures, we are not referring to political backlashes against democracy, such as how reactionary movements counter democratic advances (Hirschman 1991). In addition, we are not talking about a theory of democratic containment by constitutions, laws, or historical amnesia, that is, measures taken to tame the disruptive and disorderly nature of democracy (Wolin 1994; see also Brown 1995; Cover 1983). It should also be noted that we do not mean, as did writers in antiquity and as do their modern heirs (Berman 2018), that democracy becomes mob rule, whereupon its unruliness overwhelms the institutions that constrain it. Democracy, in our understanding, and following Wolin (1994) and others such as Graeber (2007), Honig (1993), and Negri (1999), is agonistic and essentially disruptive. It institutes forms of social organization that sustain acts of disruption, excess, or refusal without threatening democracy's own conditions of possibility. Democracy, in this sense, is an organized disorder; it is a politics that exceeds its characterization as a form of government/governance.

Thus, by antidemocratic cultures we mean a historical phenomenon whereby democracy turns its modes of action *against* itself. In other words, the disruptive, excessive, and dissenting character of democratic practices are weaponized against the very social forms instituted to enable disruption, excess, and dissent. Antidemocratic cultures are defined by conditions in which everyday cultural practices and ordinary social interactions modify the cultural matrix that makes democratic practice possible. To be sure, January 6 was unprecedented, shocking, and extraordinary, but it only revealed the extent to which antidemocratic cultures had permeated and shaped dispositions and associated identities that were already inhabited in an ordinary, everyday fashion. We speak of antidemocratic cultures rather than politics because the issue is the possibility of democracy rather than a political choice for a form of government. In our understanding, cultures refer to modes of being and desiring, the ways a collective communicates its collectivity to self and others, and its meaning-making practices. We use this capacious sense of antidemocratic cultures—not too dissimilar from the

AP's notion of "susceptibility" to fascism—to grasp the manifestation of right-wing politics in its so-called shocking dimension (January 6 or the proliferation of extremist organizations) but also as an ordinary phenomenon that rarely makes the headlines. We thus understand antidemocratic cultures in terms of the ways that citizens fabricate their political dispositions—and hence their self-understanding as members of a community in public and intimate spaces—through a range of rhetorical, social, and aesthetic practices.

Methodology

The fabrication of dispositions and identities is accomplished through rhetorical practice (Arendt [1963] 2006; Bourdieu 1991; Butler 1997; Foucault 1972). Rhetoric, therefore, is not only representational but also contributes to the "invention . . . of cultures" (Clifford 1986, 2). Accordingly, we argue that antidemocratic cultures are shaped by rhetorical strategies that not only reflect the dispositions of the actors but constitute them as political subjects.[2] Examples of such strategies include the crafting of "formulaic" statements that create "unassailable speech" (Riley 2005); the use of clichés that foreclose the capacity for political judgment (Arendt [1963] 2006); a tendency toward paranoid and catastrophizing modes of argumentation that offer all-or-nothing solutions; the repetition of simplistic dichotomies that infantilizes communication; and appeals to an innocence that dehistoricizes the social world (see Berlant 1997). All of these rhetorical strategies of "pure persuasion" (Burke 1969) shut down deliberative engagement.[3] Antidemocratic cultures can be analyzed through these and other rhetorical strategies and networks that people use to understand themselves and to write themselves into the social world. Our argument expands on the above rhetorical strategies to offer additional rhetorical patterns that connect digital and physical spaces. We aim to move the conversation about antidemocratic participation beyond disaggregated, single-factor, demographic analyses and the fixed ideological categories created by those analyses, which have the paradoxical potential to reify the rhetoric of

2 Historians of the conservative revival of the 1950s have shown how internal migrants in Orange County and Dallas fabricated a new set of identities based on a new suburban lifestyle, the embrace of Cold War militarism, the experience of financial success due to an individualist ethos, and a belief that the free market guaranteed a new sense of empowerment. Hence, these "suburban warriors" adopted a militant attitude against anything that threatened this newly acquired sense of self—communism, civil rights, federalism, and ultimately, the very notion of equality (McGirr 2001; see also Miller 2015). From the crafting of such identities there arose deep antidemocratic values and dispositions: the suburban warriors opposed forms of equality that exceeded its formal exercise; they developed militant dispositions against collectivization, aware that their relative advantages were the product of federal spending and that its expansion would wipe out those newly acquired privileges; and they developed their own narrative of empowerment as tax-paying citizens who compete for resources and opportunities on the free market.

3 As William Duffy argues, following Kenneth Burke and Jonathan Butler, "pure persuasion is more of a *withdrawal* from rather than *engagement*" (2023, 2, emphasis in original).

the far right. Instead, we focus on relational and networked rhetorics of participation and the rhetorical ecosystems of those arrested in NYS for participating in the January 6 Capitol riot.[4] This inductive rhetorical analysis enables us to see the ways ordinary people compose their networked antidemocratic identities.[5]

New materialist theories of rhetoric are particularly helpful in understanding how rhetorical networks and pathways lead to certain kinds of rhetorical identity construction. Rather than starting with universalized and oppositional ideological categories, we trace rhetorical practices to identify pathways and networks, what we are calling *rhetorics of participation*, in order to demonstrate how January 6 participants defined their political dispositions through networked everyday rhetoric and practice. This offers a more dynamic and nuanced sense of how antidemocratic culture is constructed by ordinary citizens and focuses on the ways the social is more than a sum of its parts, and on the ways the individual cannot be reduced to totalizing categories.

This analysis can help to identify and name the ways texts, and thus their rhetorical framing and doxa, create and travel within and across discursive networks, pedagogically and performatively. In other words, when the January 6 rhetorical actors take up language such as "you're making us do this" or "nothing to see here," they are both participating in the circulation of that discourse as well as transforming and remaking it (and their own identities) as they participate in their social network. Each time these discursive pathways are networked, they are made meaningful in a new context and thus do not adhere to master categories of fixed ideology. As Bruno Latour (2005, 4–5) argues, these "assemblages" of "many connecting elements circulating inside tiny conduits" together create the social, not as a fixed object of study but as a nontotalizing network of relations comprised of what Latour calls actants.[6] We take up Latour's (2011, 800) actor-network theory, then, as a useful methodology to "redistribute and reallocate action" and agency to a network of actants who do not exist outside of the network and without whom the network does not exist. Doing so enables us to recognize how ordinary rhetoric use is constitutive, and it allows us to think outside of preexisting ideo-ontological categories like "white supremacist" or even "far right."

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4 As Wendy Hesford, Adela Licona, and Christa Teston (2018, 3) argue in *Precarious Rhetorics*, "a rhetorical approach to [dichotomous] divisions reconfigures them such that they can be understood as relational rather than simply as oppositional."

5 As Bruno Latour (2005, 11–12) argues, "in situations where . . . group boundaries are uncertain, when the range of entities to be taken into account fluctuates, the sociology of the social is no longer able to trace actors' new associations. At this point, the last thing to do would be to limit in advance the shape, size, heterogeneity, and combination of associations." He argues that we must forego imposing the kind of attractive order that "limit[s] actors to the role of informers offering cases of some well-known types," and instead that we must "follow the actors themselves" by tracing their associations to "learn from them what the collective existence has become in their hands."

6 In Latour's (2017, 7) words, "An actant can literally be anything provided it is granted to be the source of an action."

We focused on NYS because it offers multiple opportunities to challenge the traditional categories through which we understand divides in American politics today. As a so-called blue state, NYS nonetheless confounds the traditional red/blue, liberal/conservative divides. Although it is a large state with the fourth most electoral college votes, which have traditionally gone Democratic, it has strong pockets of Republican voters and significant economic and social diversity and variation. Because 6 percent of those charged hailed from NYS—70 out of 1,106 arrestees nationwide at the time of writing—it provides a significant and varied dataset. Nationwide, January 6 participants were from geographically dispersed areas, with some clustering around urban centers. According to a county-by-county study of the Capitol riot, most arrestees came from areas that generally vote Democratic in presidential elections (Pape 2022a). Antidemocratic politics is thus not simply a product of the "left behind" or rural areas of the United States: it is a spatially dispersed phenomenon that cuts across geographical scales (local, national, international), powered by new (digital) modes of community formation. NYS follows the national pattern with clusters of participants from Long Island, the lower Hudson Valley region, and western New York around Buffalo and Rochester.

We analyzed all seventy of the arrest sheets from NYS residents that were publicly accessible on the Department of Justice's website in 2023.[7] Of the Capitol rioters arrested from NYS, at the time of writing, only three were known to be affiliated with extremist organizations: two were Proud Boys members, and the third was an Oath Keeper. Despite no records of extremist membership, another arrestee made social media references to the Three Percenters. Therefore, 96 percent of those arrested were "ordinary" citizens. We mean "ordinary" in the sense that they did not belong to organized ideological groups. The majority consisted of citizens who viewed themselves as exercising their political right rather than performing as "operatives." Ordinariness, as we discuss below, is also a socially constructed ethos that is crucial to identity formation.

The January 6 arrest sheets offer substantial information about how the arrestees characterize their political dispositions and how they describe why they were at/in the Capitol. The arrest sheets contain social media posts; SMS messages to acquaintances, friends, and family; and in some cases interviews with law enforcement or the media. There are practical reasons to read from the arrest sheets. The first wave of arrests caused many January 6 participants to delete their social media accounts. Law enforcement retrieved the messages and videos. In the arrest sheets, private SMS messages of arrestees were made available since many were found because of a tip-off from a friend, coworker, or relative. Those SMS messages are valuable because they reveal an intimate or private dimension of the self-narration that is usually not displayed publicly on social media. Those messages would be inaccessible without the arrest sheets. The January

7 The site is updated as participants are identified and charges are filed. See "Capitol Breach Cases," United States Attorney's Office (District of Columbia), Department of Justice, accessed December 17, 2023, https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/capitol-breach-cases.

6 databases, maintained by the Department of Justice (DOJ), National Public Radio (NPR), and Just Security, offer regularly updated datasets. While the NPR and Just Security sites offer extensive contextual information, such as timelines and journalistic accounts, the DOJ site focuses solely on the criminal complaints against identified participants. Taken as a whole, these written texts from DOJ files provide excerpts of self-narrative, if not ethnographic accounts, of January 6 participants. Although the databases refer to arrestees by name, in this article we omit names in order to emphasize rhetorical practices rather than individuals.

The DOJ database of arrests and charges also has limitations. The excerpts from arrestees' speech and writing have been preselected by the arrest sheet authors, typically investigating FBI agents, from all available media reporting and social media messages. And the database is constantly being updated as the government makes new arrests and files new charges, and as cases proceed through the court system. Despite these limitations, NYS, with seventy cases, offers a sizable number for rhetorical analysis. In addition, the rhetorical dispositions represented in the arrest sheets conform broadly to those cited in other studies and media reports across the political spectrum. We anticipate that a comparable analysis of the rhetoric of participants from other large states with a significant number of arrestees would yield similar insights. The significance of our study is the approach to those dispositions by analyzing their rhetorical stances rather than slating them into preexisting and ostensibly fixed ideological categories.

This study employed qualitative methods in interpreting data from arrest sheets of January 6 participants from NYS. Our research team organized the data from the arrest sheets for each person arrested in NYS according to name, reasons/justifications for participation, charges, and what led to their arrest.[8] Each arrest record was then coded by five people. As a first step, we extracted descriptive and justificatory texts from the arrest sheets, including capturing direct quotes and rhetoric from arrestees' social media posts, video captions, hashtags, and social media handles. Descriptive content consists of the choice of labels for videos and photos. Justificatory content refers to reasons for entering the Capitol and intentions once inside. This discourse was then coded by the rhetorical positioning of the arrestee using affective categories such as "bragging," "casual," and "aggressive."

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8 The authors thankfully acknowledge the dedicated support of the undergraduate students Emily King, Alex Moon, Sara Parkhurst, and Rui Zheng, who worked with us to code all of the NYS arrest sheets, and of graduate students Chuning Xie and Ryan Stears, who created layers of maps of arrestees' origins in relation to 2020 political, economic, and demographic data. The concept of the ordinary emerged throughout our discussions with the student coders and, indeed, was one of the features that most struck them. Recreating the maps of the familiar categories—such as race, party affiliation and voting preferences, and socioeconomic status—used in many studies of the January 6 Capitol breach demonstrated to us the necessity of a different analytical approach to understand and chart how anti-democratic culture finds expression.

Finally, through an inductive rhetorical analysis of the different forms of texts, patterns of more specific but ordinary rhetorical positioning emerged. These categories are: a) Sense of Community, including referencing attending with partners, friends, and family; b) Active Stance, including rhetoric of "making a stand," "making a point," "taking back" or "fighting back," and "being where the action is"; c) Passive Stance, including "you're making us do this," or "doing the country a service"; d) Ethos, including rhetorics of police as normative order, and rhetorics of patriotism, values, and social order such as those who "believe in the impossible" or those picking up trash; e) Hyperbolic Stance, including rhetoric of egocentrism, self-aggrandizement, glory, history, liberty, and excitement; f) Minimizing Stance, including a rhetoric of innocence and "nothing to see here," or bragging about not being charged; and finally g) Violent Stance, including rhetoric of violence and militancy. These rhetorical positions—some of the participants displayed multiple, overlapping stances—were then used to reconstruct the political and rhetorical networks of participation of Capitol rioters.

Our study is informed by interdisciplinary approaches including rhetorical, humanistic, and social science research developed over the last thirty years. We draw on theory that questions the relevance of approaches that posit dichotomies such as nature versus culture or individual versus society. This research instead points out the need to historicize notions such as individualization and society, and categories such as race, gender, or class (see Bauman 2001; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Latour 2004; Urry 2012). We aim to analyze the rhetoric of participation in order to reveal how antidemocratic cultures are built through rhetorical networks via modes of stylization and self-making (Nuttall 2004). Although we name those modes in terms of rhetorical stances as described above (and detailed more fully below), we emphasize that the terminology arises from arrestees' participatory rhetoric, which is itself a dynamic form of self-making.

The Ordinariness of January 6

Sense of Community, Active Stance, and Passive Stance

For one NYS arrestee (case 1:21-mj-644), the Capitol riot was a family affair justified through a sense of participation in community: he went to Washington, DC, with his brother, dad, and uncle, riding a bus with other protesters. He is fairly typical of the January 6 participants. He had no known extremist affiliation, understood the protests as a political and social occasion (according to our analysis of the NYS arrestees dataset, 24 percent went to DC with friends or family), is a white male, and was an avid poster on social media. However, it was his rhetoric of participation—the reasons and justifications he provided for being at the Capitol, as well as the language through which he styled his political disposition—that typifies him as an ordinary bloke. At the outset, he presents himself as a peaceful citizen who will only use violence in self-defense. But, in a video posted to Instagram (case 1:21-mj-644, 3), he declares: "Listen brothers

and sisters, we come in peace today. But I swear to God, if the Antifa touches me, or my family, I'll headbutt them in the f . . . [inaudible] bro. Straight elbow, left hook." Community identification in this example grounds both passive and active stances, and the posts demonstrate how rhetorical stances can be dynamic, shifting, and overlapping.

After the George Floyd protests in summer 2020, opponents of racial justice began justifying violence and other extralegal actions by claiming the right to self-defense against a violent and malevolent left represented by antifascists and Black Lives Matter (BLM). In contrast to "peaceful" citizens, this amorphous left, the argument goes, is attacking counterprotesters and their families. The rhetorical juxtaposition of a peaceful self and a violent left creates a militant identity. The arrestee quoted above justifies this transformation from passive to active stance and even violent participation through the rhetoric of community belonging. The peaceful self is produced as something personal and intimate ("me and my family"), whereas the left is transformed into something impersonal and destructive. Additionally, the video's addressees are "brothers and sisters," which suggests intimacy and familiarity amid an extraordinary event (preventing the election from being stolen, as he states in another video).

Ethos

Normalcy, ordinariness, and authenticity represent modes of identification within a social order, or ethos. As in the case of the participant quoted above, intimacy projects a form of earnestness about the action. It is not the motivation behind the action—the ratiocination that allows one to act deliberately (and justly)—but the authenticity or ethos of the person that counts. Because authenticity gives a sense of normalcy and ordinariness to a person (he or she embodies a normative identity), it reassures the "brothers and sisters" of the just cause. This just cause cannot be divorced from the previous summer's racial justice protests (hence the reference to "Antifa" above). As the Floyd protests made clear, the normative social order is one created by policing (Neocleous 2000). Such a social order defines who can claim a right to self-defense (Kaba 2014; Dorlin 2017), who can claim humanity (Wall 2019), and who represents threats (Goldberg 2009). These normative assumptions represent the ordinary background against which January 6 participants shape their identity. Even when they oppose the federal government, as do those in the militia movement (Belew 2018), they nonetheless believe that police *ought* to protect and assist them as the righteous embodiment of the political and social order. Invoking this ethos in another video, the same arrestee (case 1:21-mj-644, 8) discussed above presents the following narrative: "Today my group and I were key players in conducting peaceful pushes. The game plan was to talk the offices [*sic*] and tell the [*sic*] to STOP FOLLOWING ORDERS AND UPHOLD THE CONSTITUTION. . . . When they didn't listen we pushed through (without hitting them of course) we did these peaceful pushes all the way into the capital [*sic*] building." In this narrative lies a set of dispositions in relation to police officers. The speaker believes that he and his group can order police officers to stand down. The

repetition of "peaceful" betrays naive ideas about the police-protester relation—a set of beliefs that contrasts with the narratives of a terrifying ordeal presented by Capitol police officers present at the scene (Fanone and Shiffman 2022).

On the other hand, there is nothing naive about the belief that police officers should behave in a certain way. Many participants we analyzed construct their identity through the normative order of policing, so the "game plan" (talking to the officers) forms part of a structure of expectations. A *structure of expectations* is formed from routine beliefs and practices in the everyday: policing is seen as a force that creates an exclusionary order that benefits a subsection of the population.[9] As the speaker above asks police to "STOP FOLLOWING ORDERS AND UPHOLD THE CONSTITUTION," he places their actions on that day at odds with what is expected of them regularly. That is, in following orders (from a presumably malevolent force in the Democratic Party, now hijacked by the left), police officers are neglecting their everyday and ordinary duty to secure the social order. When police follow illegitimate orders, they must prepare for resistance, as the transcript of a video (posted to social media, and available in the arrest sheet) of the abovementioned arrestee makes clear: "Peep my war cry at the end as we push through this riot team *after* they didn't listen to us" (case 1:21-mj-644, 9, our emphasis). Again, the "after" shows a clear structure of expectations and the thinking that underpins the encounter with police. A Black Lives Matter protester demanding that a police line part would put a serious strain on the imagination.

Although the dominant image of January 6 shows protesters battling police, we emphasize policing as a normative order and as a more salient characteristic of antidemocratic cultures. In one video from the body cam of a Washington, DC, Metropolitan Police Department officer, the same arrestee (case 1:21-mj-644, 18) is heard shouting, "We're on the same team." This rhetoric, or a version of it, can be read in the transcribed videos included in the arrest sheets of a number of riot participants. That Capitol police officers did not simply let them through seemed to enrage several rioters. For example, another NYS participant (case 1:21-cr-208, 2) is captured on police officers' body cams yelling, "You fucking piece of shit. You fucking commie motherfuckers, man. . . . Come on, take your shit off. Take your shit off." This explains

9 The police, according to this narrative, ought to naturally side with those who are defending the Constitution and exercising their rights as Americans. In right-wing politics, the "law enforcement" function of the police takes a rather amorphous definition. The police are not supposed to uphold the laws created by a parliament through representative democratic politics; rather, policing serves a higher function. Its goal is to uphold the true law of the land, namely the constitutional rights bestowed to the legitimate and sovereign people. Therefore, only those that the practice of policing confirms (through its differential treatment of the population) as the legitimate and sovereign people belong to the normative social order. This explains the expectations that the political right has of the police: cops should respect that higher law rather than democratically created legal orders, however exclusionary such laws may be. Terms such as "law enforcement" and "law and order," because they are created on the terrain of social struggles, have different meanings to different political actors, ranging from everyday antidemocratic beliefs to the extreme ones of far-right militias such as the Oath Keepers.

the apparently contradictory images from the Capitol: a mass of "thin blue line" or "blue lives matter" flags coupled with the violent battles against the line of police officers. Yet, there is nothing contradictory in the assault on police officers: their motto is to "serve and protect," but who police really serve and protect reflects the structure of expectations that triggers the violence. And yet another arrestee (case 1:21-cr-193, 4) yells to a capitol police officer in one of his videos, "You serve this country. Are you even proud of yourself? Are you guys even proud of yourselves? Who are you serving: Who are you guys serving? We are the people! Why are you not protecting us? . . . This is a communist act right here." When this expectation is not met, police become "commie motherfuckers" or unpatriotic. Hence, patriotism is understood as staunch belief and commitment to a certain kind of normative social order. We can also note the use of "you guys," which denotes a familiarity with police officers, one that speaks to a "one of us" worldview that knows who is (and is not) encompassed in the normative order. The structure of expectations around policing is central, in that case, to the formation of political identity. It forms a core component of the crafting of antidemocratic cultures.

Hyperbolic Stance

Beyond the rhetoric of police as normative order and ethos, hyperbole, often in terms of self-aggrandizement, was also a common rhetorical pathway in the rhetorical network through which riot participants framed and constructed their identity. Take, for example, the rhetoric contained in the transcript of a conversation with family members recorded by one participant. After going through a series of justifications about why the Capitol had to be stormed, he declares: "There needs to be the right hearings, a special counsel, something has to be done and today was a huge step toward it." He declares in conclusion, "That's just a brief f****** story of what happened. We'll tell the full thing tomorrow, but it was epic as f***, today was epic" (case 1:21-mj-644, 25). The notion of an "epic" day was a common rhetorical strategy among a number of participants (one in five of our sample). Hyperbole and ordinariness intersect in these comments. The self-aggrandizement and hyperbolic statements serve to project an idealized notion of democratic participation: one that is based on participation and spectacle but where consequences become unimaginable.

The hyperbolic stance also reflects participants' sense of meaningful belonging in something bigger than themselves, the chance as an ordinary person to partake in something extraordinary. As another participant (case 1:22-cr-82, 4, figure 3) told a poster on his Instagram account (included as screenshots in the arrest sheets), "[M]y story is better than anything Netflix is putting out so enjoy the show!" When asked what he was doing at the Capitol, the reply was matter-of-fact: "Participating in Government." When told that there would be consequences, he seemed blasé about the fact that the authorities could take action against those who stormed the Capitol: "Lol they can come and get me; I didn't break or vandalize." Similarly, another participant (case 1:21-mj-84, 6–7) posted a selfie with the caption "Outside Pelosi's office," followed by the

tongue-in-cheek comment, "Nothing to see here." In the words of yet another rioter (case 1:21-cr-83, 9), "We took the Capitol and it was glorious." That characterization reflects affective stances not captured by categories such as violent extremism. It evokes joyful participation, honor, and a deep sense of purpose as opposed to anger and hate or a fixed ideology. The Facebook post of still another (case 1:21-mj-128, 10) read, "This will be the most historic event of my life." The fact that riot participants were actively communicating a sense of impunity in the heat of the moment shows the extent to which antidemocratic culture—demonstrated by political practice without accountability—is embedded in ordinariness and how this culture manifested itself within the extraordinary event of January 6. This sense of impunity reveals the presence of an everyday right-wing politics that is all the more imperceptible to ideological analysis because it appears so ordinary. The ordinariness of antidemocratic cultures means that sociopolitical practices that express themselves in a joyful and purposeful sense of self and community go unrecognized by categories of analysis that foreground hate.

Many commentaries about the Capitol riot so far have accentuated the historic and extraordinary nature of the events. This is reflected above in the rhetoric of self-aggrandizement, namely in the idea that this is a uniquely historic and glorious event. On its own the rhetoric of self-aggrandizement could reassert a (liberal) discourse that the country wavered in the two months after the 2020 elections, but that the institutions proved to be resilient enough to put the nation back on its righteous path (Bowden and Teague 2022). However, as Cedric Robinson (2019, 152) once argued in relation to the historiography of fascism, an "exemplary" narrative portrays liberal democracies as the rescuer of the West from its moment of weakness. Such a narrative tends to occlude the fact that "militarism, imperialism, racialist authoritarianism, choreographed mob violence, millenarian crypto-Christian mysticism, and a nostalgic nationalism" were not an "aberration" but central to the formation of "the West" (see also Césaire [1955] 2000; Du Bois [1947] 2007; and Padmore 1936). As such, we caution that the rhetoric of self-aggrandizement, and hence the so-called extraordinariness of January 6, needs to be read within a context of normality and ordinariness.

Minimizing Stance

The ordinary is also reflected in forms of what we call the rhetoric of minimization, typically enunciated through claims of innocence, which plague the justificatory strategies of January 6 participants. This form of innocence was later popularized by Tucker Carlson and other self-styled right-wing figures who have described the Capitol riot as no more than a tourist trip by "sightseers." Yet, it was already there in the rhetoric of the participants. For example, one arrestee (case 1:21-mj-38, 5) told the FBI that he considered his time in the Capitol as a "little adventure." The sense of innocence is also reinforced when participants express (in their social media posts included as transcripts in the arrest sheets) that they committed no offense, that authorities "can come and get

me, I didn't steal anything" (case 1:22-cr-82, 4, figure 4), that "I didn't touch anything" (case 1:21-cr-652, 4), and that "I simply walked into the lobby of the capital [*sic*]" (case 1:21-cr-56, 7). One of the participants we cite above (case 1:21-mj-644, 13) was even more certain of his innocence: "Ill [*sic*] also talk about how I got out of it with NO CHARGES and nothing on my record and got out of DC without being in a jail cell." Others, of a more conspiracist bent, were in denial over what happened, asserting that this was the work of "antifa" (case 1:21-cr-652, 4) or that it was a "false flag" operation (case 1:21-cr-418, 4, figure 2). Conspiracy thinking is a form of political agency (Dean 2009), a way to explain and divide the world, according to which there are those who commit crimes and those who are righteous, and thus innocent of wrongdoing. Within this framework of innocence and minimization, the Capitol riot does not appear as extraordinary but instead as the most ordinary thing to do.

If the rioters at the Capitol assume that they can act *without consequences*, it is because, we argue, January 6 participants have crafted a political disposition they understand as innocent. Belief in the normative order created by policing ("we are on the same team") can only operate through a certain distancing from history and politics. A naive unawareness of policing's history of violence is central to the fabrication of a political stance—what is at times clunkily called privilege—that sees the social order as necessarily just. Innocence as a form of rhetorical minimization therefore refers to a state of sheltered existence that is separate from the world of social antagonisms and struggles. It is the existence made possible, but yet untroubled, by violence, policing, and exploitation. Any attempts to politicize the innocent life—by historicizing and criticizing its conditions of possibility—appear perverse and unreasonable (Dorfman and Mattelart [1971] 1975). Yet, democracy depends on the politicization of social conditions: it is the process through which normality and everydayness are made matters of public concern. Democracy also requires dissent, and hence a critique of what is taken to be the facticity of the social world. So, *ordinary innocence* must always keep democracy at arm's length because accepting politicization and dissent would destroy the very conditions of possibility for the innocent life. It is this sense of keeping democracy at a distance in the everyday that makes storming the Capitol not an extraordinary event but the most normal thing that can be done. It explains rioters' feeling that they "did nothing wrong."

To be sure, there is a certain hubris, a blending of minimization and hyperbole, to storming the Capitol and declaring that we "did nothing wrong." This hubristic aspect can be understood, we argue, as an active rhetorical stance. A significant number of NYS January 6 participants (close to a third: twenty-two of the seventy), use the active voice—language that borders on a militant disposition—to justify their presence inside the Capitol. But even in this case, the use of the active voice and the sense of militancy only reinforce the idea of ordinariness within an extraordinary event. For some, the active voice is extremely vague, even as it justifies the events of the day. One participant (case 1:21-mj-33, 3), for example, declares in a video narrative that "[w]e did what we needed to do. We made our point . . . and we got out." Another (case 1:21-cr-

338, 7) confessed to FBI agents that he "wanted to be where the action was." A third went inside the Capitol with his mother. They were found because they had stolen two "emergency escape hoods" (they come in a sealed bag with a high-visibility strip) from the building. In his interview with the FBI, this participant (case 1:21-cr-722, 8) says, "I think everybody was going there for about the same reason I was, just to have your voice heard." There is something pathetic about the banality of the reason compared to what is seen as a historic event. The active stance—to be where the action was or to have one's voice heard—in sharp contrast with the innocent disposition that we discussed above highlights how the ordinary aspect of political identity formation is reflected in such banality.

Violent Stance

A similar ordinariness is also reflected in one female participant's (those cited above are male) almost comical narrative of storming the Capitol with her brother. Here banality sits comfortably with a clichéd violence and militancy. On January 5, this participant (case 1:22-mj-226, 5), who operates a dude ranch in upstate New York, asked on Facebook: "Does anyone have friends near Washington DC where I could keep my horses for a night?" When she entered the Capitol, she posted a series of Tik Tok videos with hashtags such as "cowgirls for Trump" and "rise up." Her captions on the videos read "We will not be silent" and "Still stormed the Capitol," followed by a later Facebook post: "It is better to die fighting for freedom then [*sic*] to live as a slave. It is better to die a prisoner fighting for what is right then [*sic*] to die a follower of the enslaver" (6). In her interview with the FBI, she says that she stormed the Capitol simply because the door was open and there was no law enforcement preventing her from entering. In one of the videos filmed outside, she is heard telling her brother: "go ahead, . . . twirl." She also posted a video accompanied by the following audio narration: "What the media doesn't want to show. . . . Picking trash inside the Capitol after two trash cans were tipped over. And yes, this was moments after the storming of the Capitol." Striking in all this is the militant rhetoric—"die fighting for freedom," "we will not be silent"—coupled with a nonchalance about the trip.

In what way did this participant understand herself as being silenced? In many ways, she embodied a normative social order, one that has made a place for her to the extent that she does not need to think outside of it, or consider whether others are excluded. She planned to have her horses with her, which displays an incapacity to think and a lack of imagination about what was supposed to happen at a large-scale protest against the outcome of elections (e.g., protests against the Bush elections in 2001 and 2005 were accompanied by mass arrests). Moreover, while she acknowledges the act of "storming the Capitol," the fact that she states that she entered the building because the door was open betrays certain thoughtless assumptions about what one is entitled to do. Moreover, she displays an awareness of the audience watching ("what the media doesn't want to show"), and hence of the need to show that the storming of the

Capitol remained a civil event conducted by people who believe in decorum (a sense of bourgeois normativity) because she (and therefore the crowd itself) is picking up trash. It is through this combination of the rhetorical stances of militancy and innocence, and other strategies of minimization, that the January 6 riot appears both extraordinary and normal.

The juxtaposition of the rhetorical pathways of violence and minimization thus becomes a powerful dimension of identity formation across the rhetorical network. This pattern is repeated in several NYS January 6 participants. Another female participant (case 1:21-cr-652, 4), for example, stated on Facebook: "I was inside but I have video of all the time I was in there. I didn't touch or break anything, *but* [our emphasis] I got video of Trump supporters stopping antifa from breaking stuff. We are the news now. I AM A CITIZEN JOURNALIST and I have a duty to my general and POTUS to be there to capture the truth. If I go to jail, I GO WITH PRIDE." She also states that she was there in support of "taking back America." Here, the "but" juxtaposes militancy and innocence: Yes, we did something unlawful (and we want to overthrow an election), "but" we did it in a civil way. I go to jail with "pride" because we ultimately stood up for what is true about America. We are essentially civil and orderly ("didn't break anything"), and we are not going to stand by while the country's normative order is rendered alien to us. The emphasis on not breaking things is made in contrast with the 2020 George Floyd protests, which saw acts of civil disobedience and a rebellion against the normative order fabricated by police. In this participant's discourse of minimization, there is always the unspoken presence of the racial justice protests—as if the actions of January 6 are rendered legitimate when contrasted with the previous summer's unrest.

Conclusion: Antidemocratic Cultures

To many participants, the January 6 Capitol riot represents both an extraordinary event and the most ordinary thing that could happen. In our argument, the key to understanding contemporary politics and the rhetorical network that fed the Capitol riot lies in explaining what appears to be the contradictory coexistence of the extraordinary with ordinariness. Why did January 6 appear at once "epic," "historic," or "better than Netflix," and simultaneously as a "little adventure" or as something that one can get away with ("Nothing to see here")? What kind of political identity formations and rhetorical stances sustain a belief that police officers at the Capitol should get out of the way of protesters, or that they should obey the orders of people who are trying to illegally occupy the legislative chambers? Equally, what kind of rhetorical networks form the social practices that shape such political identities? And, from what kind of social order and rhetorico-cultural formation do such practices emerge that make January 6 appear as an ordinary act in the eyes of the participants? Such questions, we argue, are better understood through a notion of antidemocratic cultures shaped through decentralized rhetorical networks than through the authoritarian/democratic logic.

As we have shown, the majority of January 6 participants do not understand themselves as authoritarians or white supremacists but rather as defenders of the social order, freedom fighters, ordinary citizens carrying out a civic duty, or, more banally, as adventurers or curiosity seekers. They did not march on the Capitol to choose a new form of government (authoritarianism) over democracy. Many believed that they were defending democracy when they stormed the Capitol to prevent the legislators from certifying what they believed was a rigged election. Yet, what they were defending was at best an abstraction: January 6 participants were more intent on defending an everyday culture, as represented by the rhetorical stances that we analyzed, displaying profound antidemocratic commitments and dispositions. Protesters' adherence to narratives of election irregularities follows from the expectation that President Trump represents a normative culture. Moving beyond the authoritarian/democratic logic, we argue that the dispositions underlying participants' everyday social practices form part of their rhetoric of participation. The rhetoric of self-defense is a disposition whose condition of possibility is one's relation to a normative and exclusionary social order. The rhetoric of minimization reveals how one relates to the social order, namely, belonging is defined by who can be presumed innocent and who is presumed guilty. Similarly, the rhetoric of violence and militancy reveals a disposition fashioned by an ordinary understanding of who can justly "fight for freedom," claim "self-defense," and oppose the government. In this way, this article contributes significantly to new materialist rhetorical theory, especially of social movements and the public sphere, because it demonstrates the everyday nature of the ways in which these citizens construct antidemocratic culture outside of oppositional categories and spectacular events.

Latour's rhetorical actor-network theory, utilized here, offers a methodology that deconstructs binaries and operates through the dispersed agentic frames of rhetorical positioning identified above. In other words, the analysis of the January 6 rhetorical network as an amorphous social movement enables us to identify antidemocratic cultures as an ecology of various participants and nodes of action that, through participation in these rhetorical networks, creates a social identity that is constantly becoming or being created. Such rhetoric is constitutive of political identities and social practices because they are fundamental to shaping self and belonging. As a result, practices of identification are always contrasted with the identities of those deemed illegitimate by a normative social order. The rhetoric of militancy, for instance, contrasts with the modes of identification (the demands, the history of fighting for justice, the call for multiracial solidarity) central to Black Lives Matter. The contemporary right-wing rhetoric of "taking the country back," "upholding the Constitution," and "dying for freedom" actively contests the place of Black (and multiracial) struggles in US history. Similarly, the struggle for racial and economic justice appears as utterly alien to the social order as communism. To be sure, the purported foreignness of communism and racial justice has a long history in right-wing politics (Del Visco 2019; see also Horne 2021). In some strands of right-wing discourse, the poor and racial others have often been viewed as vulnerable to radical ideas because of the nefarious propaganda

of communists (who themselves infiltrate from outside the US). However, for some contemporary political extremists, Barack Obama's presidency, especially its rhetoricity and symbolic dimension (Lowndes 2013), appeared to confirm a radical demographic and cultural change to such an extent that the US social order itself had become foreign. Militancy is therefore presented as a mode of identification against an alien reality that by right belongs to "ordinary" Americans.

The perceived transformation of the social order into an alien reality lies at the center of what we have called antidemocratic cultures. As multiple theorists have noted, we are witnessing the denial of a common reality and loss of a shared world (Adorno et al. [1950] 2019, 665; Arendt [1963] 2006; Mbembe 2013, 258). Those who deny reality are often said to have been manipulated or exposed to propaganda, so they hold false or mistaken beliefs about the world. Such hypotheses often presume a certain passivity on the part of those who are manipulated. However, in our understanding, to deny a common reality is to actively make oneself untouched and unpersuaded by the actual world through a set of social practices. The rhetorical stances and networks that we discuss above constitute the person's self-fashioning as ordinary, peaceful, civil, and authentic—we picked up the trash and did not break or steal anything, so ostensibly we are unlike BLM protesters. Such rhetoric forms part of a set of social practices and rituals whose goal is to contrast a normative social order against an alien reality. For example, the ritual identification with police rests on the fact that policing is seen as a form of governance that defends the normative social order inhabited by ordinary and authentic folks. That such defense costs municipalities heavily or depends on unconstitutional practices (e.g., suspicionless and discriminatory surveillance, stop and frisk) and on everyday police violence is the fact that must be kept at bay.[10] The rhetorical ecosystem in which participants in the Capitol riot function works to keep them innocent of these facts. If such violence and economic costs form part of "our" shared reality in the US, it is this reality that must be denied on a continuous basis by the politics that work to excuse or dismiss the riot. Ordinariness and authenticity form a moat around these fabricated identities, safeguarding them against the encroachment

10 Municipalities across the country spend close to 50 percent of their budgets on policing. Furthermore, it is estimated that between 2015 and 2019, the twenty largest police departments have cost cities more than $2 billion in civilian compensation for police misconduct (Ray 2021). Plus, one study points out that cities have increasingly resorted to issuing "police brutality bonds" to cover the cost of civilian payouts. The study found that between 2010 and 2017, the city of Chicago issued bonds totaling $709.3 million with an additional $860 million paid as interest to investors who purchased the bonds, costing taxpayers a total of $1.57 billion. Across five cities and counties, police brutality bonds cost taxpayers $1.73 billion (see Goodwin, Shepard, and Sloan 2020). Unconstitutional practices such as search and seizures are often "invisible to the courts" because they do not result in arrest, charge, or citation (Harcourt 2004, 363). Following lawsuits challenging the mass surveillance of Muslims by the New York Police Department, such surveillance was found to be discriminatory; the lawsuits were settled on the basis that the NYPD would reform a variety of investigative practices such as the use of undercover and confidential informants (ACLU 2017).

of "public secrets" about policing and democracy at large (Taussig 2006, 166; see also Goldberg 2012).

Alienated from the actual world, one can take refuge in this alienation by styling oneself as someone who resists assaults on what one knows and feels to be normative. As many January 6 participants showed, they desired to be seen as ordinary folks who do not possess an agenda or an ideology (unlike the enemies on the left) and who simply want things to be the way they ought to be. Trump's slogan "Make America Great Again" simply tapped into an existing desire for an ordinary life in a just and fair social order. Nevertheless, this desire could only be fashioned because politics and policy conjured justice and fairness for the ordinary citizen out of social exclusion and an economy of violence toward those marked as unbelonging and undeserving. The MAGA slogan was never simply about nostalgic desires for the restoration of a golden age. Rather, it opened a political space for people to create and participate in a movement that asserts the existence of a normative social order that respects ordinary folks (and that does not label them as deplorables or racists). It opened a field of practices—and participation in politics—between the fiction of a normative social order that is just and the facticity of the actual world. Right-wing political identities gain practical expression in the gap between this phantom world where one is innocent and an ordinary person, and the actual world of social struggles and democratic ruptures.

When a common reality is denied, the very rhetorical practices that constitute democracy become destructive. Agonistic practices, such as deliberation and persuasion, through which the demos constitutes itself, devolve into rhetorical fallacies and opinionated shouting matches for the purpose of "owning" and "destroying" the enemy. These prefabricated opinions are deployed to protect one's identity and preferred social order against the encroaching alien reality. Public space, which is constituted to *publicize* and thus contest that which is considered normative, becomes a place where normativity is celebrated. Thus, public space is made hostile to the condition of possibility of democracy, namely heterogeneity. When the arrestees claim a right to self-defense against an amorphous and impersonal Antifa or BLM, or more recently against "groomers," it is not a stretch of the imagination to argue that behind this claim lies a desire to rid public space of its capacity to publicize and politicize democratic claims for justice and equality. Researchers have documented how the Proud Boys normalized violence as an ordinary social practice by making self-defense their strategic claim (Campbell 2022). By understanding such practices as part of the development of dynamic antidemocratic cultures, we have sought to highlight the very ordinariness of January 6 to riot participants as the most normal thing that could happen despite its place as an extraordinary and shocking event in our imagination.

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