

## The Politics of Victimhood: A Dangerous Narrative [Trump] with Michael Bader

So today I want to talk about a really upbeat subject: victimization or victimhood. What it means, how it works, and how I will argue it gets misused and counterfeited in the political sphere today, especially by the right, the MAGA right, and Trump.

Now, to start with, victimization on one level is very simple. It's when somebody or something—something beyond your control, apart from you—is hurting you. And in those very moments, the experience of a victim is that they are innocent. So, innocent victimhood is a very powerful thing,

### Video 2 CLIP 1 Grand Narratives of Victimization

And it's not rare. You know, you could see it in everyday life. I suppose when someone cuts you off on the highway or a surly, unfriendly cashier at the supermarket treats you poorly. Or, of course, there are the grand narratives of victimization that we're all familiar with, which involve discrimination, sexism and racism, homophobia, and war. No one would dispute the fact that Ukraine is being victimized by Russian invaders, right? So, these are objective interactions in which somebody is being hurt and doesn't deserve to be hurt in that way at all.

### Video 2 CLIP 2 Immoral Get-out-of-jail-free Card

Now, the way I see it working in the political sphere is that the belief in our victimization becomes the ultimate rationale for the most heinous types of aggressive, hostile, mean-spirited, retaliatory, vengeful, and cruel action. It's like a get-out-of-jail-free card that enables the victim to perpetrate all sorts of violent action on who that person thinks is victimizing them without any moral compunction. In other words, the get-out-of-jail-free card is that you can do immoral things for reasons that seem moral.

And it's everywhere today on the right, in particular.

### Video 2 CLIP 3 MAGA Victimization Calling Card

The MAGA Trump movement has made victimization into its calling card, its core foundational belief—this sense of grievance. You know, recently I heard Trump talk about America as a garbage can or a dumpster. Can you imagine? We're a dumpster, a garbage can into which other countries and everyone are pouring all their shit. In that case, of course, anything we do to get rid of that shit is legitimate, isn't it? I mean, think about it. If you think that immigrants are stealing your jobs and eating your cats and dogs, then rounding them up and deporting them or separating families and putting kids in jail is completely legitimate. If you think your election's being stolen from you, then January 6th makes perfect sense. Why wouldn't you violently attack a process that is hurting you?

### Video 2 CLIP 4 Powerful Counterfeit Beliefs

But I think these are also powerful counterfeit beliefs because, in fact, the kinds of pressures on everyday people that Trump tries to exploit and stir up have to do with economic stagnation, loss of jobs, loss of community, loss of a moral center in the nation, and crime. They affect everybody—they don't just affect the Republican right-wing population—but it's used as a lever

and a way of transferring all of that pain and suffering into this aggressive, immoral, actually mean-spirited, and violent anti-democratic response.

#### Video 2 CLIP 5 Victimization and License to Compete

Victimization is very complicated at that level. You know, if somebody feels guilty, for instance, about not liking a group of people, then if they gin up a story in their head about how they are really the ones being hurt by that group, it gives them license to compete with and aggressively attack that group.

We all know that, you know, people who were abused as kids become abusers. So, when you're hurt, one of the defenses we use as human beings is to identify with the aggressor. And we know in psychology that that often results in you becoming the thing you most hate, which is some violent, abusive perpetrator.

#### Video 2 CLIP 6 Ginned Up Right-wing Ecosphere

So, I think this is ginned up, as I use that word all the time in Trump's communication strategy, and it's echoed in the right-wing Fox News ecosphere.

For instance, I found a great example of it. It's a couple of years old, but it's totally relevant. And it's the great Tucker Carlson starting one of his shows with a monologue in which he says this—and these are verbatim; this is a verbatim transcript. He says, "There's nothing in the world worse than finding out your deepest fears are justified," says Tucker. "I mean, that's the nightmare scenario—that there really is a zombie in the closet. Let's say you're a kid and you're convinced your parents don't love you. They say they do, but you don't believe them. They're not sincere. And then one Christmas morning," this monologue goes on to say, "suddenly confirmation! You discover they've forgotten to buy you presents. It just slipped their mind, but they spent their time and money buying presents for a kid down the street you don't even know. How would that make you feel?" Tucker asks. Well, he answers, "you'd be crushed, but you'd also be vindicated. You'd know with dead certainty your parents didn't love you. They're not really even interested in you." And that's how Americans felt, he argues, watching the House of Representatives approve another aid package to Ukraine. "Nothing against Ukraine," Tucker says, "but we could probably use a lot of that money right here."

So, I just think about what Carlson's doing here. He's rendering his adult audience into unloved, betrayed, and abandoned children. And these abandoned, neglected, betrayed children are inherently innocent, and they're being hurt by bad adults. And so, those adults that are hurting these innocent children need to be identified, quarantined, hurt, attacked, and in some way defended against

and probably just somehow rendered less powerful or even dead.

#### Video 2 CLIP 7 Political Violence Dangerous to Our Democracy

So, if you have innocent children being persecuted by Kamala Harris and the democratic socialist commie coastal elites, then in the spirit of that definition, that narrative, the victims should fight back—even if fighting back means hurting other people. And that's what I mean by its get-out-of-jail-free card. It shouldn't be, however, because this kind of political violence, which comes from this sense of being chronically aggrieved, always aggrieved, over and over again, is very deadly, dangerous to our democracy, harmful to people, and we need to call it out and, I think, stand up to it.