

Coordinated DEI Political Attacks in President Trump's Executive Orders Through the Lens of Critical Theory: Libraries Deconstructing Dysfunctional Political Rhetoric to Further Social Justice

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the impact of President Trump's executive orders, selected and analyzed through a lens of critical theory, on the representation of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. It calls for strategic intervention by libraries to deconstruct the underlying political rhetoric of these executive orders, enabling their publics to resist his dysfunctional acts of aggression in the dismantling of American democracy. The goal is to integrate critical theory application to promote social justice in libraries as resistance to actualize fairness, justice, equity, empowerment, change agency, and community building in response to the troublesome political times created via a conscious and/or unconscious coercion/manipulation of the American people and the democratic process. The critical discourse reveals a disturbing resemblance between the contemporary political populism in the United States and the Depression-era conditions in Weimar, Germany, during the prewar twentieth century. The explanatory discourse resonates with truth and signals possibly tragic consequences if it remains unheeded.

Introduction

The recent call for a special issue of *The Political Librarian* on “Defending DEI and the Politics of Inclusion” is most timely and urgent (Every Library Institute 2025). Donald J. Trump was ordained in his second coming as the forty-seventh president of the United States in January 2025, with a clear mandate dictated by the American public that also bestowed control over both chambers in Congress to the Republican Party (O'Donoghue 2024). Since then, President Trump has left no stone unturned in spearheading concerted and consistent attacks that target diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives and dismantle the institution of libraries, among other actions, that are destroying the core of most democratic

* The second author decided to keep their name anonymous owing to fear of political retaliation in the current reality of American politics.

norms and processes (Williams and Cooke 2025; Mehra 2025). President Trump has operationalized his agenda of white supremacy and authoritarianism through a surge of executive orders emerging from the highest office in the land, delivering unfair and unjust promises on his election mandate to his conservative votebank constituencies (De Genova n.d.; Driesen 2025). This includes use of executive orders as a political and legal arsenal to erase minority and marginalized histories, weaponize federal policies to eliminate social responsibility obligations, suppress intellectual freedom or dissent, and annihilate democracy—even in its watered-down neoliberal sellout form—to solely empower multinational corporations in unduly controlling state and federal jurisdictions, often at the expense of public interests, to name a few (Savage 2023; West 2022).

This article examines the impact of President Trump's executive orders—selected and analyzed through a lens of critical theory—on DEI representation, and identifies strategic interventions for libraries to deconstruct their underlying political rhetoric and resist his dysfunctional acts of political aggression in the dismantling of American democracy (Aptekar 2019; Newman 2007). The goal is to integrate critical theory application to promote social justice in libraries as resistance to actualize fairness, justice, equity, empowerment, change agency, and community building in response to the troublesome political times created via a conscious and/or unconscious coercion/manipulation of the American people and the democratic processes (Jaeger et al. 2016; Mehra 2022).

A Heed of Caution

The Frankfurt School proponents of critical theory in the early twentieth century were reacting, essentially, to failed problems in colonialism/imperialism that served as tools of capitalism and the resulting rise of fascism in a fraught prewar global setting (Geuss 1981). Applying critical theory criteria, dissected from academic scholarship in content analysis, to deconstruct President Trump's select executive orders makes it particularly effective in highlighting the underlying social foundations, power imbalances, and political rhetoric/abuses inherent in their orchestration, especially as targeted at DEI initiatives (Ingram 1998). The critical discourse reveals a disturbing resemblance between the contemporary political populism in the United States, illustrated in President Trump's "Make America Great Again" campaign, and the Depression-era conditions in Weimar, Germany, during the prewar twentieth century (Mockaitis 2023). Further, examining the language of the executive orders through a critical theory lens draws attention to similarities in the positionality of President Trump's ascension to power, situated as an "outsider," and his resort to racism as a "fear-mongering demagogue" to stoke the passions of an uneducated, self-aggrandizing, white supremacist populace, threatened by their inadequacies in a changing economy and high-tech industry, with comparable circumstances that generated analogous language styles and rhetoric used by Adolf Hitler (Horne 2024).

Illustrated through the discursive evidence in this study, readers are encouraged to draw on the horrific parallels between the current political tendencies evidenced in President Trump's authoritarianism (e.g., DEI targeting) and prewar Germany (Tourish 2023). As Mark Twain and Charles Warner wrote in their 1874 novel *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today* (re-edition 2024), "History never repeats itself, but the Kaleidoscopic combinations of the pictured present often seem to be constructed out of the broken fragments of antique legends." President Trump's executive orders, selected for their representation of critical theory criteria and their targeting of DEI concerns, paint a picture of totalitarianism that is more

than mere “broken fragments” connecting the present political moment to the past. The tangible discursive evidence strongly ties threads that connect the dots in contemporary time with the past’s political events that led to extreme misfortune and loss. The explanatory discourse resonates with truth and signals possibly tragic consequences if it remains unheeded. The narrative reminds us of the quote, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” (284), attributed to Spanish philosopher George Santayana (2017, 1905), from his book *The Life of Reason*. The tragedy is the seeming memory loss of the American public—its inability to recall similar conditions surrounding past mistakes of humanity that led to the loss of millions of human lives and the destruction wrought by the Great Wars of the last century, and the parallels with the contemporary political dysfunctions revealed in President Trump’s executive orders.

Contextualizing the Stage

This section briefly threads select intersecting areas of study, namely, DEI in librarianship and executive orders as a political tool, to inform readers about relevant issues that help contextualize the stage (i.e., the conceptual setting) of this article. Further, a few methodological aspects are also noted. Recently, libraries, archives, museums, and other cultural memory institutions, as well as educators in these areas of work, have been challenged to acknowledge and address their white-entrenched histories and toxic work practices (Cooke and Colón-Aguirre 2021; Mehra and Gray 2020). As a result, over the past two decades, DEI has emerged as a set of foundational values, held highly and acknowledged within the library and information science (LIS) professions. For example, in 2012, the Racial and Ethnic Diversity Committee of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), based on the 2001 National Association of Social Workers’ *Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice*, developed its eleven standards to serve and advocate for racial and ethnically diverse constituencies in libraries. These were later rescinded by the ACRL Board of Directors in June 2022 following the approval of *Cultural Proficiencies for Racial Equity: A Framework*, a joint effort of the American Library Association (ALA) and the Association of Research Libraries. Further, on June 29, 2021, the ALA Council officially approved a ninth principle to be added to the ALA Code of Ethics, stating, “We affirm the inherent dignity and rights of every person. We work to recognize and dismantle systemic and individual biases; to confront inequity and oppression; to enhance diversity and inclusion; and to advance racial and social justice in our libraries, communities, profession, and associations through awareness, advocacy, education, collaboration, services, and allocation of resources and spaces.” Such codifications and policies have helped us collectively recognize and affirm that these values are important to us, thereby aiming to integrate DEI throughout the collections, services, and programming that we offer in libraries. DEI values then also impact library staff, policies and procedures, collections, programming, community engagement, and outreach every day (Hodge and McAllister 2022). Providing DEI content in our communities seeks to celebrate and inform library users of the lived experiences and rich histories of marginalized groups, such as LGBTQIA+ people, individuals of minority race and ethnic backgrounds, or religious beliefs, among others (Burress et al. 2024). However, now that DEI is under attack within the current political regime, what happens when such diverse content is erased?

The president or a state governor is granted constitutional authority to issue executive orders and implement statutes that manage operations and guide the actions of federal or state agencies (Rudalevige 2021). Article II of the US Constitution grants the president

broad executive power, as do statutes passed by Congress (Congress.gov n.d.). Interestingly, the presidential authority and power to issue executive orders are derived from vague and indirect mandates to direct the executive branch and ensure that laws are faithfully executed, since the US Constitution does not specifically mention them (Chou 2019). Executive orders cannot override the Constitution or federal laws passed by Congress and are subject to judicial review to maintain checks and balances on executive power and uphold supremacy of constitutional authority (Newland 2015). Administrative actions should never be arbitrary or capricious—attributes recently assigned to the limits of President Trump's authority (and also of the judiciary) owing to his “frequent clashes with the courts, from his ‘Muslim ban,’ to the Commerce Department’s directive (since rescinded) to include a citizenship question” on this year’s Census Form and to the “Department of Homeland Security’s rescinding of the Obama-era DACA program,” to name a few (Mock 2024, 51). However, President Trump’s strategy of issuing executive orders seems to reflect a trend that began under President Barack Obama (2008–2016), shaped “not only by congressional inaction, but also by strategic calculations about public opinion, partisan polarization, and media response,” as modern presidents continue to rely on them “as both policy tools and political signals, reinforcing a broader trend toward unilateralism that challenges legislative processes and reshapes the balance of power in American government” (Senator 2025).

The Office of the Federal Register (2025) provides access to executive orders after the president of the United States signs the documents and they become available for public consumption. In the aftermath of the 2024 presidential election, Donald J. Trump signed approximately 176 executive orders during the period of January–July 2025 (the focus of this article), after his second nonconsecutive reckoning in the highest office of the land. These decisions ranged in content, with some explicitly targeting the erasure of DEI content in libraries and beyond. In an evidence-based critical review, we identified DEI themes in the select executive orders and examined them for potential interventions in LIS-related institutions. The problematic dimensions of the relevant executive orders were identified in terms of a named “political rhetoric,” used to highlight seemingly contradictory aspects or deviations from democratic norms or publicly stated agendas (Paust 2012). The results of this content analysis speak to the beginnings of a ripple that seeks to erase these vibrant communities.

We adopted select features of evidence-based scoping review as a methodological mode of inquiry in this research. The New York Medical College (n.d.) recognizes evidence-based scoping review as a legitimate approach to map a given topic in a specific field or domain of activity. In our research, we utilized the method as a logical mechanism to broadly help in the selection of relevant executive orders to analyze with a direct reference to DEI content. The process involved selecting relevant executive orders that directly illustrated representation of key themes related to critical theory criteria (Arksey and O’Malley 2005; Munn et al. 2018).

Critical Theory Criteria to Deconstruct Executive Orders

Contemporary applications of critical theory bring together originations of German idealism from the Frankfurt School between the two twentieth-century wars (e.g., Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, Erich Fromm, and others) and its second generation scholars from the 1960s (e.g., György Lukács, Antonio Gramsci, and Jürgen Habermas) with elements of American pragmatism (i.e., practical implications, inquiry, and importance of experience/context in shaping knowledge/truth) (Rioux and Mehra 2016; Spencer 2020). Critical theory is especially relevant as a tool for deconstructing

Donald J. Trump's executive orders that are targeted at DEI (in its broadest of meanings) since the beginning of his term as the forty-seventh president of the United States (i.e., January 20, 2025). Critical theory advocates recognizing perspectives of ALL stakeholders in each given context and always including the points of view of those on society's margins while furnishing a grounding for an appraisal of potentially divisive problems (Endres 1996; Gottesman 2016). For critical thinking and reflexivity (i.e., analysis of existing roles, biases, and assumptions) toward progressive action and social justice are foundational attributes in its use to challenge (traditional or nontraditional) political consciousness and inspect predominant values, biased practices, ideological structures, systemic institutions, and stunted processes (Froomkin 2003; Habermas 1994; Kellner 1989; Mehra 2021). The following are criteria dissected from scholarship on critical theory that make it particularly applicable to dismantle underlying social foundations and power imbalances inherent in the executive orders targeting DEI content:

- Forces and relations of production (Fuchs 2021; Marramao 1984)
- Employer-employee work conditions (Kurniawan 2025; Tilly 2025)
- Division of labor (Postone 1993)
- Property relations (Nichols 2019)
- Cultural institutions (Thompson 2001)
- Political power structures (Bossaller et al. 2010)
- Roles and rituals (Offutt 2020)
- Nature of state control (Jessop 2019)

Table 1 highlights the relevant content in the executive orders and their representation of salient dimensions associated with select critical theory criteria from authoritative scholarship. The problematic political rhetoric in each case is also highlighted.

Table 1. Relevant content in the executive orders, representing select critical theory criteria

Critical Theory Criteria	Executive Order	Relevant Content Illustrating Critical Theory Criteria
Forces and Relations of Production	14319 (Preventing Woke AI in the Federal Government)	(1) "DEI displaces the commitment to truth in favor of preferred outcomes and, as recent history illustrates, poses an existential threat to reliable AI." (2) "While the Federal Government should be hesitant to regulate the functionality of AI models in the private marketplace, in the context of Federal procurement, it has the obligation not to procure models that sacrifice truthfulness and accuracy to ideological agendas." (3) "Artificial intelligence (AI) will play a critical role in how Americans of all ages learn new skills, consume information, and navigate their daily lives." <i>Political rhetoric: Targeting DEI as something contrary to "truth" and an impediment to future progress.</i>
	14154 (Unleashing American Energy)	(1) "It is thus in the national interest to unleash America's affordable and reliable energy and natural resources." (2) "This will restore American prosperity—including for those men and women who have been forgotten by our economy in recent years. It will also rebuild our Nation's economic and military security, which will deliver peace through strength." <i>Political rhetoric: Exploitation of natural resources to further American prosperity and build the nation's economic and military power base, while pretending to compensate low-income individuals (to get them on board).</i>

Critical Theory Criteria	Executive Order	Relevant Content Illustrating Critical Theory Criteria
Employer-Employee Work Conditions	14173 (Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity)	<p>(1) "Hardworking Americans who deserve a shot at the American Dream should not be stigmatized, demeaned, or shut out of opportunities because of their race or sex." (2) "In accordance with Executive Order 13279 of December 12, 2002 (Equal Protection of the Laws for Faith-Based and Community Organizations), the employment, procurement, and contracting practices of Federal contractors and subcontractors shall not consider race, color, sex, sexual preference, religion, or national origin in ways that violate the Nation's civil rights laws." (3) "Illegal DEI and DEIA policies not only violate the text and spirit of our longstanding Federal civil-rights laws, they also undermine our national unity, as they deny, discredit, and undermine the traditional American values of hard work, excellence, and individual achievement in favor of an unlawful, corrosive, and pernicious identity-based spoils system."</p> <p>Political rhetoric: Advocates that white male privilege should continue unchecked. A biased interpretation of the civil rights laws, not considering that the laws themselves were biased and problematic. Does not acknowledge that American values are built on colonialism/imperialism and slavery.</p>
	14281 (Restoring Equality of Opportunity and Meritocracy)	<p>(1) "On a practical level, disparate-impact liability has hindered businesses from making hiring and other employment decisions based on merit and skill, their needs, or the needs of their customers because of the specter that such a process might lead to disparate outcomes, and thus disparate-impact lawsuits." (2) "Under my Administration, citizens will be treated equally before the law and as individuals, not consigned to a certain fate based on their immutable characteristics." (3) "This has made it difficult, and in some cases impossible, for employers to use bona fide job-oriented evaluations when recruiting, which prevents job seekers from being paired with jobs to which their skills are most suited—in other words, it deprives them of opportunities for success. Because of disparate-impact liability, employers cannot act in the best interests of the job applicant, the employer, and the American public."</p> <p>Political rhetoric: Propounds that white male privilege should continue unchecked. A biased interpretation of the civil rights laws, not considering that the laws themselves were biased and problematic. Lacks accountability that American values are built on colonialism/imperialism and slavery.</p>

Critical Theory Criteria	Executive Order	Relevant Content Illustrating Critical Theory Criteria
Division of Labor	14278 (Preparing Americans for High-Paying Skilled Trade Jobs of the Future)	<p>(1) ". . . my Administration will fully equip the American worker to produce world-class products and implement world-leading technologies."</p> <p>(2) "My Administration will also consolidate and streamline fragmented Federal workforce development programs that are too disconnected from propelling workers into secure, well-paying, and high-need American jobs."</p> <p>Political rhetoric: The DOGE was unsuccessful in achieving its initially stated purpose toward this agenda.</p>
	14158 (Establishing and Implementing the President's "Department of Government Efficiency")	<p>(1) ". . . establishes the Department of Government Efficiency to implement the President's DOGE Agenda, by modernizing Federal technology and software to maximize governmental efficiency and productivity." (2) "Agency Heads shall ensure that DOGE Team Leads coordinate their work with USDS and advise their respective Agency Heads on implementing the President's DOGE Agenda." (3) "The United States Digital Service is hereby publicly renamed as the United States DOGE Service (USDS) and shall be established in the Executive Office of the President."</p> <p>Political rhetoric: The BBC reported that DOGE failed to reach its ambitious savings targets for the US government when tech entrepreneur Elon Musk, its unofficial head, left the initiative in May 2025 (Clarke 2025).</p>
Property Relations	14206 (Protecting Second Amendment Rights)	<p>(1) "Because it is foundational to maintaining all other rights held by Americans, the right to keep and bear arms must not be infringed."</p> <p>Political rhetoric: Unchecked gun ownership laws are a threat to safety and security and tantamount to internal terrorism.</p>
	14165 (Securing Our Borders)	<p>(1) "A nation without borders is not a nation, and the Federal Government must act with urgency and strength to end the threats posed by an unsecured border." (2) "My Administration will marshal all available resources and authorities to stop this unprecedented flood of illegal aliens into the United States." (3) "Over the last 4 years, the United States has endured a large-scale invasion at an unprecedented level."</p> <p>Political rhetoric: The illegal aliens in Central and Latin America are a result of the United States' imperialistic ambitions and policies of international tampering with democratic governments, resulting in conditions of poverty and drug trafficking. Also, Texas was annexed through war with Mexico; power is not always right.</p>

Critical Theory Criteria	Executive Order	Relevant Content Illustrating Critical Theory Criteria
Cultural Institutions	14190 (Ending Radical Indoctrination in K–12 Schooling)	<p>(1) "...parents have witnessed schools indoctrinate their children in radical, anti-American ideologies while deliberately blocking parental oversight. Such an environment operates as an echo chamber, in which students are forced to accept these ideologies without question or critical examination."</p> <p>(2) "Imprinting anti-American, subversive, harmful, and false ideologies on our Nation's children not only violates longstanding anti-discrimination civil rights law in many cases, but usurps basic parental authority." (3) "My Administration will enforce the law to ensure that recipients of Federal funds providing K–12 education comply with all applicable laws prohibiting discrimination in various contexts and protecting parental rights..."</p> <p>Political rhetoric: Factual history based on evidence is a must to create an educated citizenry, not one based on biased storytelling. Children are not property to justify unchecked parental rights.</p>
	14291 (Establishment of the Religious Liberty Commission)	<p>(1) "It shall be the policy of the executive branch to vigorously enforce the historic and robust protections for religious liberty enshrined in Federal law." (2) "Americans need to be reacquainted with our Nation's superb experiment in religious freedom in order to preserve it against emerging threats. Therefore, the Federal Government will promote citizens' pride in our foundational history, identify emerging threats to religious liberty, uphold Federal laws that protect all citizens' full participation in a pluralistic democracy, and protect the free exercise of religion."</p> <p>Political rhetoric: All minority religions should be given the same rights as the majority religion. For example, according to this dictum, the same privileges granted to Christianity should likewise be bestowed upon Islam or Judaism.</p>
	14202 (Eradicating Anti-Christian Bias)	<p>(1) "...the purpose of this order, to protect the religious freedoms of Americans and end the anti-Christian weaponization of government."</p> <p>(2) "My Administration will not tolerate anti-Christian weaponization of government or unlawful conduct targeting Christians." (3) "My Administration will ensure that any unlawful and improper conduct, policies, or practices that target Christians are identified, terminated, and rectified."</p> <p>Political rhetoric: Similarly, Christians should not be allowed to target other religions.</p>
Political Power Structures	14248 (Preserving and Protecting the Integrity of American Elections)	<p>(1) "Free, fair, and honest elections unmarred by fraud, errors, or suspicion are fundamental to maintaining our constitutional Republic." (2) "Above all, elections must be honest and worthy of the public trust."</p> <p>Political rhetoric: Both parties have created this distrust of elections and the electoral process.</p>
	14151 (Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing)	<p>(1) "Americans deserve a government committed to serving every person with equal dignity and respect, and to expending precious taxpayer resources only on making America great." (2) "Pursuant to Executive Order 13985 and follow-on orders, nearly every Federal agency and entity submitted 'Equity Action Plans' to detail the ways that they have furthered DEIs infiltration of the Federal Government. The public release of these plans demonstrated immense public waste and shameful discrimination."</p> <p>Political rhetoric: The United States has a strong history of discrimination toward racial/ethnic minorities and anyone who is not a white, able-bodied, heterosexual male. These biases exist in every fiber of the American experience and systemic institutions' policies and practices. How does President Trump plan to acknowledge and address these discriminatory practices that place people like him at the top of the totem pole of power and privilege?</p>

Critical Theory Criteria	Executive Order	Relevant Content Illustrating Critical Theory Criteria
Roles and Rituals	14148 (Initial Rescissions of Harmful Executive Orders and Actions)	<p>(1) "The injection of 'diversity, equity, and inclusion' (DEI) into our institutions has corrupted them by replacing hard work, merit, and equality with a divisive and dangerous preferential hierarchy." (2) "To commence the policies that will make our Nation united, fair, safe, and prosperous again, it is the policy of the United States to restore common sense to the Federal Government . . ."</p> <p>Political rhetoric: DEI should be erased only when whiteness (Anglo/Eurocentrality) and white superiority are eradicated.</p>
	14168 (Defending Women from Gender Ideological Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government)	<p>(1) "Ideologues who deny the biological reality of sex have increasingly used legal and other socially coercive means to permit men to self-identify as women and gain access to intimate single sex spaces and activities designed for women, from women's domestic abuse shelters to women's workplace showers. This is wrong." (2) "My Administration will defend women's rights and protect freedom of conscience by using clear and accurate language and policies that recognize women are biologically female, and men are biologically male." (3) "It is the policy of the United States to recognize two sexes, male and female. These sexes are not changeable and are grounded in fundamental and incontrovertible reality."</p> <p>Political rhetoric: Check scientific research. We must develop an understanding of gender that is not confined to "biological truth."</p>
Nature of State Control	14253 (Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History)	<p>(1) "Americans have witnessed a concerted and widespread effort to rewrite our Nation's history, replacing objective facts with a distorted narrative driven by ideology rather than truth. This revisionist movement seeks to undermine the remarkable achievements of the United States by casting its founding principles and historical milestones in a negative light." (2) "This shift has promoted narratives that portray American and Western values as inherently harmful and oppressive." (3) "Museums in our Nation's capital should be places where individuals go to learn—not to be subjected to ideological indoctrination or divisive narratives that distort our shared history."</p> <p>Political rhetoric: Might and power do not give anyone the right to dictate what is revisionist history or not.</p>
	14224 (Designating English as the Official Language of the United States)	<p>(1) "In welcoming new Americans, a policy of encouraging the learning and adoption of our national language will make the United States a shared home and empower new citizens to achieve the American dream." (2) "Establishing English as the official language will not only streamline communication but also reinforce shared national values, and create a more cohesive and efficient society."</p> <p>Political rhetoric: Maintaining English as the official language dictates Anglo/Eurocentrality, which goes against the President's vision of staying impartial and treating everyone equally.</p>
		<p>Note: Details of the content made available in this table can be found via the Office of the Federal Register (2025) at URL: https://www.federalregister.gov/presidential-documents/executive-orders/donald-trump/2025#:~:text=In%202025%2C%20Donald%20J.%20Trump,the%20business%20day%20before%20publication.</p>

The following is a discussion of each criterion of critical theory and illustrative content in the executive orders under study that represent problematic political rhetoric. Based on our ability to see relevant connections between executive orders and critical theory, the authors selected seventeen executive orders that reflect the eight key criteria of critical theory.

1. Forces and Relations of Production: Executive Order 14319 (“Preventing Woke AI in the Federal Government”) and Executive Order 14154 (“Unleashing American Energy”) align with the critical theory criterion of forces and relations of production. This criterion considers the means and capacity that make production possible, while also noting the power dynamics that organize it. Executive Order 14319 relates to this, as illustrated in this statement: “While the Federal Government should be hesitant to regulate the functionality of AI models in the private marketplace, in the context of Federal procurement, it has the obligation not to procure models that sacrifice truthfulness and accuracy to ideological agendas.” A political rhetoric conveyed in this executive order is the targeting of DEI as something contrary to “truth” and an impediment to future progress. Similarly, in Executive Order 14154, the current administration asserts that “this will restore American prosperity—including for those men and women who have been forgotten by our economy in recent years. It will also rebuild our Nation’s economic and military security, which will deliver peace through strength.” Here, the political rhetoric of the exploitation of natural resources is justified to further American prosperity and build the nation’s economic and military power base, while compensating low-income individuals (to get them on board), while actually serving the opposite purpose and only helping the multinational corporations and the military industrial complex.
2. Employer-Employee Work Conditions: The Frankfurt School also recognized employer-employee work conditions in critical theory conversations. This criterion acknowledges work conditions as expressions of power, in which workers are dehumanized into mere instruments or resources. Executive Order 14173 (“Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity”) and Executive Order 14281 (“Restoring Equality of Opportunity and Meritocracy”) align with this key point. Executive Order 14173 says, “Illegal DEI and DEIA policies not only violate the text and spirit of our longstanding Federal civil-rights laws, they also undermine our national unity, as they deny, discredit, and undermine the traditional American values of hard work, excellence, and individual achievement in favor of an unlawful, corrosive, and pernicious identity-based spoils system.” In the same tone, Executive Order 14281 says, “On a practical level, disparate-impact liability has hindered businesses from making hiring and other employment decisions based on merit and skill, their needs, or the needs of their customers because of the specter that such a process might lead to disparate outcomes, and thus disparate-impact lawsuits.” Both imply that white male privilege should continue unchecked. They provide a biased interpretation of the civil rights laws, failing to consider that the laws themselves were biased and problematic. They do not acknowledge that American values are built on colonialism/imperialism and slavery, and they avoid the issue of accountability for horrific acts that have contributed to the contemporary power status of American nationhood.
3. Division of Labor: Critical theory views the criterion of the division of labor in relation to production. It considers how hierarchies like management and ownership are entitled to the advantage of those in power. Executive Order 14278 (“Preparing Americans for High-Paying Skilled Trade Jobs of the Future”) and Executive Order 14158 (“Establishing and Implementing the President’s

“Department of Government Efficiency”) reflect this criterion. Statement of the Executive Order 14278 illustrates the following: “My Administration will also consolidate and streamline fragmented Federal workforce development programs that are too disconnected from propelling workers into secure, well-paying, and high-need American jobs.” The very creation of the Department of Government Efficiency and its mission to “implement the President’s DOGE Agenda, by modernizing Federal technology and software to maximize governmental efficiency and productivity” shares in the same ideals. It is noteworthy that owing to differences between Elon Musk and President Trump, the DOGE failed to achieve its publicly indicative purpose, indicating a conflicting reality in its conceptualization and implementation that resulted in its internal self-combustion.

4. Property Relations: Executive Order 14206 (“Protecting Second Amendment Rights”) and Executive Order 14165 (“Securing Our Borders”) complement the property relations criterion of critical theory. Theorists discuss this, considering the power dynamics associated with who owns and controls property. Executive Order 14206 echoes this: “Because it is foundational to maintaining all other rights held by Americans, the right to keep and bear arms must not be infringed.” Catering to gun lobbyists, which has led to unchecked gun ownership and violence, has resulted in millions of deaths over the past decade (if not earlier), including shootings in K–12 schools and the deaths of children and teens. The government’s job is to stop internal terrorism, not pass executive orders to further terrorists’ cause. This idea is again made apparent in Executive Order 14165 through this statement: “Over the last 4 years, the United States has endured a large-scale invasion at an unprecedented level.” This is all to prove that property relations indeed provide power and domination over others. The surge in illegal immigrants in Central and Latin America is a result of the imperialist ambitions and colonizing economic policies of the United States. The current government must take accountability for its own role (and that of the CIA) in creating the current situation of illegal migration.
5. Cultural Institutions: Critical theorists recognize cultural institutions as those in which ideology and power are correlated. That which is taught or shared is enforced as a narrative of truth. There are three executive orders that illustrate this issue: 14190, 14291, and 14202. Executive Order 14190 (“Ending Radical Indoctrination in K–12 Schooling”) includes this statement: “Imprinting anti-American, subversive, harmful, and false ideologies on our Nation’s children not only violates longstanding anti-discrimination civil rights law in many cases, but usurps basic parental authority.” Factual history is based on evidence. This is key to creating an educated and informed citizenry. Biased storytelling and forcing something to be considered as real are not right, especially when someone is using their position of power to make it happen. Further, children should not be considered as property to justify unchecked parental rights. This often leads to an abuse of power at a cost to the child’s mental, physical, emotional, and psychological health. Additionally, in Executive Order 14291 (“Establishment of the Religious Liberty Commission”), the current administration states, “Americans need to be reacquainted with our Nation’s superb experiment in religious freedom in order to preserve it against emerging threats. Therefore, the Federal

Government will promote citizens' pride in our foundational history, identify emerging threats to religious liberty, uphold Federal laws that protect all citizens' full participation in a pluralistic democracy, and protect the free exercise of religion." In an evidence-based history, this nation's experiment with religious freedom has been far from "superb." The wiping out of Indigenous people's entire existence (including their notions of spiritual and religious beliefs) is a prime example of dysfunctional practices within the country. The numerous wars that the United States has supported in the Middle East against Muslim nations (e.g., the Israel-Gaza War) are a prime example of the biased application of so-called American religious freedom around the world. Another example of this is voiced in Executive Order 14202 ("Eradicating Anti-Christian Bias"), which states: "My Administration will ensure that any unlawful and improper conduct, policies, or practices that target Christians are identified, terminated, and rectified." If the above executive order about "religious freedom" is to be honored, identifying people of one religion (i.e., Christians) gives them an undue advantage and privilege; all others should also be identified and treated equally as such. Moreover, they should also be named so as not to be "targeted" by Christians.

6. Political Power Structures: Power, superiority, and dominance are addressed in conversations surrounding critical theory and political and power structures. Executive Order 14248 and Executive Order 14151 touch on these same ideas. Executive Order 14248 ("Preserving and Protecting the Integrity of American Elections") says, "Free, fair, and honest elections unmarred by fraud, errors, or suspicion are fundamental to maintaining our constitutional Republic." An important point to consider is that both parties have made unfounded accusations about the tampering of the election process and created public distrust, thanks to the muddying of facts by news channels. Executive Order 14151 ("Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing") aligns with this statement: "Americans deserve a government committed to serving every person with equal dignity and respect, and to expending precious taxpayer resources only on making America great." This calls into question what "great" means and who that benefits. The history of the United States has been far from "great" with discrimination at every corner toward racial/ethnic minorities and anyone who is not a white, able-bodied, heterosexual male. Even today, these biases exist in every fiber of the American experience and systemic institutions' policies and practices. How does President Trump plan to acknowledge and address these discriminatory practices that place people like him at the top of the totem pole of power and privilege?
7. Roles and Rituals: Recognized as tools of hierarchy, social order, and ways to promote ideology, roles and rituals are another criterion of critical theory. Executive Order 14148 ("Initial Rescissions of Harmful Executive Orders and Actions") and Executive Order 14168 ("Defending Women from Gender Ideological Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government") are like pieces of the puzzle. As Executive Order 14148 declares, "The injection of 'diversity, equity, and inclusion' (DEI) into our institutions has corrupted them by replacing hard work, merit, and equality with a divisive and dangerous preferential hierarchy." DEI should be erased only when whiteness (Anglo/Eurocentrality)/white privi-

lege and white superiority are eradicated. In this same theme, Executive Order 14168 states, “It is the policy of the United States to recognize two sexes, male and female. These sexes are not changeable and are grounded in fundamental and incontrovertible reality.” It is important to validate one’s own claims with scientific research. We must develop an understanding of gender that is not confined to “biological truth.”

8. **Nature of State Control:** In the nature of state control criterion, critical theorists claim that the state presents itself as neutral in being for the people, but is, in fact, quite the opposite. Critical theory looks at the nature of state control as authoritarianism. Illustrating this thought, Executive Order 14253 and Executive Order 14224 may be used as representatives of the issue. Executive Order 14253 (“Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History”) promotes that “Americans have witnessed a concerned and widespread effort to rewrite our Nation’s history, replacing objective facts with a distorted narrative driven by ideology rather than truth. This revisionist movement seeks to undermine the remarkable achievements of the United States by casting its founding principles and historical milestones in a negative light.” The same claims can be made about this executive order itself. Might and power do not give anyone the right to dictate what is revisionist history or not. Executive Order 14224 (“Designating English as the Official Language of the United States”) evidenced this too in the following statement: “Establishing English as the official language will not only streamline communication but also reinforce shared national values, and create a more cohesive and efficient society.” Maintaining English as the official language dictates Anglo/Eurocentrality, which goes against the president’s vision of staying impartial and treating all equally.

Conclusion: Library Intervention

In the face of a multitude of executive orders sanctioned by President Trump, the most important strategy that library and information professionals can implement is to stand up firmly and assertively at forums and levels of authority against the dysfunctional political rhetoric that many of the executive orders are largely built upon. The construct of “political rhetoric” is closely aligned with the art of deception using persuasive language in political contexts to influence public perception, shape prevalent opinions, and inspire actions (Pancer et al. 1992; Turnbull 2016). Some would argue that political rhetoric is intrinsic and part and parcel of politics and political communications (Bitzer 1998). Many of President Trump’s executive orders are built on selling a particular point of view with half-truths (if not complete lies), incomplete data, a lack of responsibility/accountability for one’s own actions, biased, twisted arguments, and the like. Hence, my choice of the term “dysfunctional” in connection with his political rhetoric is represented in the select executive orders presented in this article. In today’s age and in the problematic Trump era, the role of librarians must be to deconstruct the subversive and/or explicit political rhetoric in the executive orders and make visible the politically motivated falsehood embedded in their construction. Their role should go beyond providing fact-checking sources. Revealing the unhealthy falsehood should be part and parcel of the librarian’s task. That is the only way to clean the dirtiness that has emerged in American politics, thanks to President Trump’s executive orders and their attacks on DEI

and many aspects of the democratic processes. The use of critical theory criteria and their representation in President Trump's executive orders highlights the parallels with the times of the rise of fascism in prewar Germany. This wake-up call must not be ignored. Otherwise, looking back at the possibility of a tragic time to emerge, none but the American public will be to blame.

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