

# Fractured Anticipation: Polarization, Transvaluation, and Distortion in Participatory Politics

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## Abstract

This essay develops a hermeneutical model of American democracy through nine interpretive levels, parallel to Islamic transitive hermeneutics as presented in *From Submission to Exegesis: Transitive Islamic Hermeneutics and the Metaphysics of Fulfillment*. Within this framework, party politics emerges at Level 3, civic values at Level 4, and universality at Level 8. The central argument is that the current crisis of democracy lies in a fractured anticipation: the distortion of party politics and civic values in their attempt to leap prematurely into universal claims. Instead of preparing the way for genuine universality, primordial values are polarized and transvalued into exclusionary myths that sanction political violence.

Drawing on Nietzsche's notion of the *transvaluation of values* and contemporary debates on polarization and contentious politics, the essay argues that fractured anticipation transforms values meant to unify into weapons of division. The rhetoric of figures such as Charlie Kirk exemplifies this distortion, where appeals to liberty and patriotism mutate into justifications for exclusion and confrontation. By situating political violence within a hermeneutical ladder, the paper reframes America not as a static polity but as a process of interpretation whose fulfillment depends on transparent movement from politics through civic myth toward universal dignity, rather than its distortion into polarized violence.

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# 1 Introduction

America is not merely a territory or a polity; it is a layered phenomenon of interpretation. As *From Submission to Exegesis: Transitive Islamic Hermeneutics and the Metaphysics of Fulfillment* demonstrates in another religious-cultural context, traditions can be understood as ascending through successive levels of meaning, each subsuming and reinterpreting the one beneath it. In a similar way, America can be grasped as a ninefold hermeneutical ladder, beginning with land and history, moving through party politics and civic values, and culminating in a universal horizon of dignity and freedom.

The central claim of this paper is that the crisis of American democracy lies in what can be called a *fractured anticipation*. Party politics (Level 3) and civic values (Level 4) are meant to mediate conflict and orient collective life toward the universal (Level 8). Yet in the present polarized climate, these levels are distorted. Rather than preparing the way for universality, they are transvalued—in Nietzsche’s sense of a radical inversion of values—into exclusionary myths that sanctify division and even political violence.

This distortion is evident in the rhetoric of contemporary populist leaders and figures such as Charlie Kirk, who invoke freedom, patriotism, and “Judeo-Christian civilization” as primordial American values. These values, however, are not extended outward to universal humanity but weaponized inward, transforming the hermeneutical ascent into a closed loop of resentment. Nietzsche’s reflections on transvaluation, polarization, and the collapse of universal claims provide a crucial framework for analyzing this phenomenon.

To understand America as a hermeneutical process is to recognize that politics cannot be reduced to partisan maneuvering. Rather, it is a dynamic interpretation of values whose success or failure determines whether liberty and democracy become inclusive universals or distorted myths. Section 2 will outline the ninefold ladder of America, with particular attention to the placement of civic values at both the primordial (Level 4) and universal (Level 8) stages. Subsequent sections will examine how polarization fractures this ladder, how Nietzsche’s concept of transvaluation illuminates these fractures, and how political violence arises from this distorted anticipation of universality.

## 2 The Ninefold Ladder of America

To interpret America hermeneutically is to recognize that it unfolds through a series of levels, each subsuming and reinterpreting the one beneath it. Following the model developed in *From Submission to Exegesis: Transitive Islamic Hermeneutics and the Metaphysics of Fulfillment*, this paper proposes nine distinct Americas. Each level represents not a static

entity but a *transitive horizon*: a way of seeing that makes the previous level transparent to a deeper meaning.

## The Nine Americas

1. **America as Land.** The geographical reality of the continent, its frontiers, rivers, and resources. This is America as nature, as the ground of habitation and imagination.
2. **America as History.** The Republic of 1776, the Civil War, waves of immigration, and the long struggle toward inclusion. At this level, America is the story it tells about itself.
3. **America as Party Politics.** The institutionalization of conflict into parties, elections, and legislatures. This is the level at which polarization takes its most visible form, as competing interests vie for power.
4. **America as Civic Myth (Primordial Values).** Freedom, democracy, religious liberty, and self-reliance. These values function as primordial myths, orienting citizens beyond partisan struggle. Here America interprets itself as founded on transcendent principles.
5. **America as Cultural Struggle.** The contestation of race, gender, religion, and class. This level interprets civic values in light of inclusion, exclusion, and the demand for recognition. Movements such as Civil Rights and Black Lives Matter exemplify this struggle.
6. **America as Empire.** The projection of power abroad through military, economic, and cultural means. Here America interprets itself as a global actor with responsibilities and ambitions beyond its borders.
7. **America as Destiny.** The language of exceptionalism and chosenness. From the Puritan “city on a hill” to Wilsonian idealism, this is America as the bearer of world-historical mission.
8. **America as Universal Category (Universal Values).** At this level, America is no longer merely a nation but a metaphor for freedom and human rights as such. Civic values reappear, but now extended outward as universal claims about dignity and equality.

9. **America as Exegesis.** Finally, America becomes interpretation itself: a process of reading, rewriting, and reinterpreting its own foundational texts—from the Constitution and the Gettysburg Address to Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream.” America at this level is not what it has been but what it continually becomes through interpretation.

## Primordial and Universal Values

The placement of “America as values” at both Levels 4 and 8 reflects the hermeneutical rhythm of anticipation and fulfillment. At Level 4, values are *primordial*: civic myths that orient collective life but remain bounded within national identity. At Level 8, values are *universal*: claims that transcend national boundaries and aspire to universality.

The crisis of fractured anticipation occurs when Level 4 values are prematurely claimed as universal without undergoing the mediations of struggle, empire, and destiny. In such cases, values collapse inward rather than expand outward, and the hermeneutical ladder is distorted into exclusion rather than fulfillment.

## 3 Polarization and the Fracturing of Anticipation

The hermeneutical ladder of America is meant to mediate conflict in such a way that party politics (Level 3) is lifted by civic values (Level 4) and ultimately directed toward universal dignity (Level 8). Yet in the present era of polarization, this ascent is increasingly disrupted. Instead of preparing the way for universality, civic values are distorted and prematurely claimed as universal, producing a fractured anticipation.

### Polarization as Distortion

Polarization at the level of party politics intensifies competition into existential antagonism. Political opponents are framed not as rivals within a shared system but as enemies of the nation itself. Civic values, which should orient conflict toward higher principles, are instead absorbed into partisan identity. Freedom, democracy, and patriotism cease to be universal reference points and become proprietary banners wielded against the other side. In this way, Level 4 is transvalued into a distorted mirror of itself: values that should unify are weaponized to divide.

## Nietzsche and the Transvaluation of Values

Nietzsche's concept of the *transvaluation of all values* is crucial for understanding this process. In its original form, transvaluation signifies a radical reworking of inherited moral categories in the wake of the death of God. Values once considered universal, such as Christian equality, collapse into contingency, opening the possibility of both higher creativity and more violent hierarchy. As Matt McManus observes in his analysis of Nietzsche's political legacy, both the left and right have sought to appropriate transvaluation: the left emphasizing self-creation and critique of resentment, the right embracing aristocratic radicalism and hierarchy ("On Left and Right Nietzschean Politics").

In the American context, polarization produces a *fractured transvaluation*. Civic myths such as liberty and patriotism are not reinterpreted toward universality but inverted into exclusionary claims. They anticipate universality in a distorted form, claiming to speak for humanity while in fact delimiting it to a narrow constituency. This is the short-circuit of fractured anticipation.

## Political Violence as Broken Universality

The consequences of fractured anticipation are not merely rhetorical but material. Political violence emerges when distorted values are invoked as a justification for coercion. The September 2025 *Politico* expert roundtable on Charlie Kirk illustrates this danger. Kirk's rhetoric repeatedly linked civic values with exclusionary myths: presenting Islam as incompatible with Western civilization, framing the political left as allied with "radical Islam," and suggesting that true Americans must defend themselves by any means necessary. Here, freedom and patriotism were not offered as universal values (Level 8) but as primordial banners (Level 4) wielded against internal and external enemies.

This logic of distortion reveals how fractured anticipation fuels violence. Party politics radicalized into existential conflict (Level 3) appropriates civic values (Level 4) not as mediators but as weapons. These values, claimed as universals, are in fact exclusions that sanction aggression. Political violence thus represents the collapse of interpretation: the point at which the hermeneutical ladder ceases to ascend and instead folds back upon itself in resentment and coercion.

## Toward a Hermeneutics of Repair

If fractured anticipation produces political violence, the task of democratic hermeneutics is to restore the transparent movement of values. Party politics must be reinterpreted as

contest within a shared order, not a war of enemies. Civic values must be reclaimed as genuinely primordial—orientations toward freedom and equality—without collapsing into exclusion. Only then can these values be elevated into universal dignity at Level 8, fulfilling rather than distorting America’s hermeneutical horizon.

## 4 The Metaphysics of Fulfillment

If the danger of fractured anticipation is distortion into violence, the promise of the hermeneutical ladder is fulfillment. Just as *From Submission to Exegesis* presents Islam as a ninefold ascent culminating in interpretation, so too can America be seen as a process of fulfillment. The metaphysics of America is not a static essence but a dynamic transitivity: a continual movement from primordial values to universal principles.

### The Transparent Movement of Values

In a healthy hermeneutical ascent, party politics (Level 3) functions as the arena of contestation, while civic values (Level 4) orient conflict toward shared horizons of liberty and equality. These values then expand through the levels of cultural struggle, empire, and destiny, preparing for their ultimate reappearance at Level 8 as universals. At this point, America’s values are no longer parochial myths but claims to human dignity itself. The transparent movement of values ensures that civic myths do not become exclusionary weapons but instead serve as stepping stones toward universality.

### Exegesis as Fulfillment

At Level 9, America becomes exegesis: interpretation itself. This is the point at which the texts and symbols of the Republic—the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, King’s “I Have a Dream”—are continually re-read and re-applied as revelations of meaning. Here, America’s universality is not abstract but enacted: each generation interprets the texts anew, extending their reach and deepening their resonance. The metaphysics of fulfillment thus resides not in a final achievement but in a perpetual openness to reinterpretation.

### Universal Values and Shared Intentionality

The placement of values at both Level 4 (primordial) and Level 8 (universal) marks the dialectical rhythm of anticipation and fulfillment. As argued in *The Margins of Shared*

*Intentionality*, cultural development depends on the capacity of communities to expand the horizon of shared meaning beyond narrow identities. America's universal horizon is realized only when civic values become transparent to shared intentionality that encompasses the humanity of the other. Without this expansion, values collapse inward into fractured myths.

## Fulfillment versus Collapse

The choice, then, is between fulfillment and collapse. In fulfillment, America interprets itself into universality: liberty and equality as transparent principles that extend beyond the nation to all humanity. In collapse, America weaponizes its values, producing exclusion, resentment, and political violence. The metaphysics of fulfillment demands vigilance against fractured anticipation. It requires a continual labor of interpretation, a refusal to allow primordial myths to harden into exclusionary absolutes, and a commitment to re-reading America's texts as sources of universality rather than division.

## 5 Conclusion

This essay has argued that America can be read as a hermeneutical ladder of nine levels, culminating in exegesis as fulfillment. Within this framework, the present crisis of democracy is best understood as a *fractured anticipation*: a distortion in which party politics (Level 3) and civic values (Level 4) attempt to leap prematurely into universality (Level 8). Rather than preparing the way for genuine universality, values are polarized and transvalued into exclusionary myths. This short-circuit collapses the hermeneutical ladder into resentment and produces political violence.

Nietzsche's concept of transvaluation illuminates this process. In his analysis, the collapse of inherited universals opens the possibility of both creativity and hierarchy. In America, fractured anticipation channels this collapse into polarization: civic myths of liberty and patriotism are weaponized against enemies rather than expanded into universality. Figures such as Charlie Kirk illustrate how the rhetoric of primordial values can mutate into justifications for violence when universality is claimed in distorted form.

Yet the hermeneutical ladder also points beyond collapse. The metaphysics of fulfillment demands that values be continually reinterpreted, not hardened into absolutes. America fulfills itself not by weaponizing its myths but by interpreting them anew as universal principles of dignity. This requires what might be called a *hermeneutics of repair*: a commitment to restoring the transparent movement of values from party politics through civic myth toward universality.

Fulfillment and collapse are both possible outcomes. The fractured anticipation of universality through distorted values leads to exclusion and violence. The transparent anticipation of universality through interpretive openness leads to inclusion and dignity. The task of democratic thought and practice is therefore to guard against distortion, to resist the temptation of exclusionary myths, and to continually renew America as an exegesis: a living interpretation that points beyond itself toward the universality of freedom and equality for all.

## Glossary of Key Terms

**Anticipation.** In hermeneutical models, anticipation refers to the orientation of one level toward fulfillment in a higher level. In this essay, party politics (Level 3) and civic values (Level 4) anticipate universality (Level 8). Fractured anticipation occurs when this movement is distorted.

**Civic Myth.** The symbolic narratives that ground American identity in primordial values such as liberty, democracy, and religious freedom. These myths function at Level 4 of the hermeneutical ladder.

**Contentious Politics.** A concept developed by Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow to describe interactions in which actors make claims that bear on others' interests, often through disruptive or violent means. Relevant to the escalation of party conflict into political violence.

**Exegesis.** The act of interpretation. At Level 9 of the hermeneutical ladder, America becomes exegesis: the continual reinterpretation of its foundational texts as sources of revelation and renewal.

**Fractured Anticipation.** The central concept of this essay, describing the distortion of Levels 3 and 4 in their anticipation of Level 8. Values that should mediate politics toward universality are prematurely claimed as universals, leading to polarization, exclusion, and violence.

**Hermeneutics.** The theory of interpretation. Applied here to America as a process that unfolds through nine interpretive levels, each subsuming the one beneath it.

**Hermeneutics of Repair.** The constructive counterpart to fractured anticipation: a continual interpretive labor that restores the transparent movement of values toward universality.

**Levels of America.** The ninefold hermeneutical schema proposed in this essay: (1) land, (2) history, (3) party politics, (4) civic myth, (5) cultural struggle, (6) empire, (7) destiny, (8) universal values, and (9) exegesis.

**Polarization.** The transformation of party politics into existential antagonism. Opponents are framed not as rivals within a system but as enemies of the nation, intensifying fractured anticipation.

**Primordial Values.** The foundational principles of American identity—freedom, democracy, religious liberty—situated at Level 4. They orient politics toward universality but risk distortion when weaponized.

**Resentment (*Ressentiment*).** A Nietzschean term describing the inversion of values by the powerless, who redefine weakness as virtue and power as vice. In fractured anticipation, resentment fuels the weaponization of civic values against perceived enemies.

**Shared Intentionality.** A concept from cultural psychology describing the human capacity to align on shared goals and meanings. In this essay, it names the universal horizon that Level 8 values seek to realize.

**Transvaluation.** Nietzsche's term for the radical reevaluation of values in the wake of the collapse of inherited universals. In this essay, polarization produces a fractured transvaluation: civic myths are inverted into exclusionary claims rather than expanded into universality.

**Universality.** The horizon of inclusion and dignity at Level 8. America fulfills itself when its primordial values become universal principles, transparent to humanity rather than limited to national identity.

**Violence, Political.** The use of coercion or force to pursue political ends. In this essay, political violence is interpreted as the collapse of anticipation: the point at which values no longer ascend toward universality but are distorted into weapons of exclusion.

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