

THE INTERFACE TO SOCIETY

Fascist graphic design and the second Trump administration

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Abstract

Within recent years, increasing academic inquiry has been made into whether Donald Trump and his policies can be described as fascist, often comparing his administration to well-established fascist regimes as references. Less often discussed in this discourse, however, are the crucial roles of graphic design and visual language each government uses to articulate its policies. This paper compares the most influential fascist visual language of the Nazis during World War II to the visual language of the second Trump administration to analyze the importance of a harmonizing design and policy in constructing a fascist government. Specifically, it examines the Trump-established National Design Studio (NDS) and its impact on American visual language through advances in web design, social media, and generative artificial intelligence.

Which elements of a visual language are distinctly weaponized as part of an authoritarian rhetoric?

How has this visual language evolved in the digital age, particularly in the United States?

Methodology

The paper employs a comparative historical analysis in two parts. The visual language of the Nazis was first identified by analyzing posters, journals, memos, official documents, and legal policy of Germany in World War II. The visual language of the second Trump administration was then proposed by analyzing manifestos, web design and source code, and social media posts. To compensate for a lack of contemporary journal sources, the study further analyzed the design of 35 government websites under the purview of the NDS to assess the likelihood of official use of generative artificial intelligence in government design.

Acknowledgements

This research was made possible through the generous support of the Laidlaw Scholars Foundation and the University of Toronto. Thank you to my research advisors, my supervisors at the University of Toronto, Elena Shik and Shraddha Prasad, and all the institutions that supported this study between Toronto and my field research in Berlin.

Conclusions

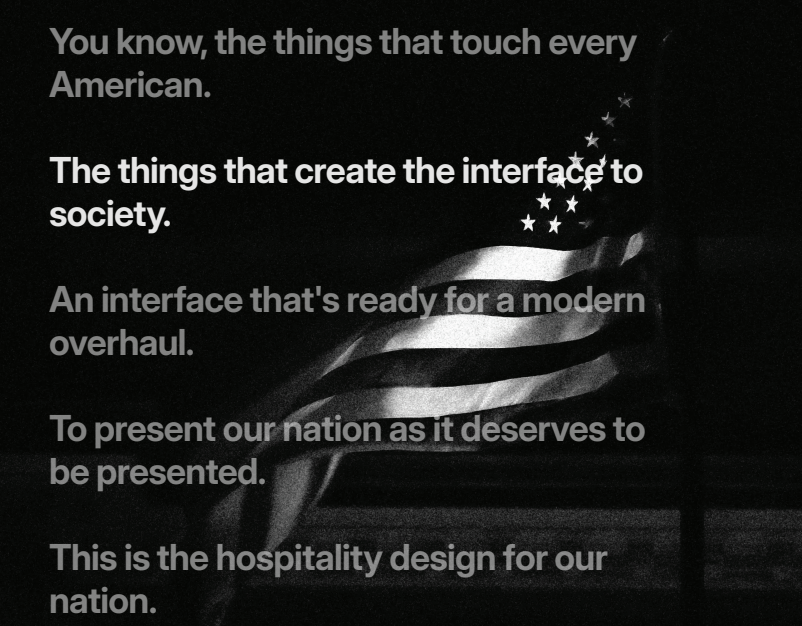
The analysis conducted supports recent scholarly proposals that the second Trump administration is acting under inspiration from fascist rhetoric, but does not draw exact conclusions about these proposals from the policy perspective. Instead, it demonstrates that the establishment of a National Design Studio and its “America by Design” manifesto share many different connections to clearly identifiable authoritarian visual language, each unique in its own right.

Advancements in graphic design have transformed the authoritarian visual language from one that the Nazis revolutionized in the form of posters and film, weaponizing in the context of World War II to justify and seize unprecedented influence in Germany and Europe, to a battle of influence fought on the digital front, as communicated through web content and social media. Note that this study focuses on visual language through the graphic lens. It does not discuss or incorporate fascist architecture due to its already lengthy scholarly interest and discussion in relationship to the second Trump administration. Despite the method by which a visual language is articulated to a populace has changed drastically in the past century, clear patterns emerge when comparing the two governments. **Specifically, this paper concludes the main goal of each design arm of the government is to harmonize the identity of the state with the policy of the state, both enforced by a singular leader who is deemed responsible for the success of both.** Key additional findings revealed that the design aesthetic of the second Trump administration aim to do this through the use of generative artificial intelligence, ranging from images generated in social media posts and in use on official government websites, as well as a primary reliant piece of design infrastructure in “vibe-coding” official government websites. The internal study revealed that out of 35 new government websites redesigned or published under the second Trump administration, 97% included artifacts of “vibe-coding” that suggested the use of generative artificial intelligence in designing and coding the website, either in the front-end and/or back-end.

The National Design Studio and what is referred to in the paper as the “New White House” are both active and evolving entities whose output is incredibly recent. This means they are subject to change based on the goals of the second Trump administration, and have virtually no existing academic literature outside of a handful of news articles. It is therefore incredibly difficult to make definitive statements about whether the visual language of either is necessarily “fascist,” and so, the paper avoids it. However, the conclusions of the paper complement existing debates on the matter from the perspective of graphic design, inviting further academic inquiry on the subject and the discussion of Donald Trump and fascism as a whole.

Image gallery & key references

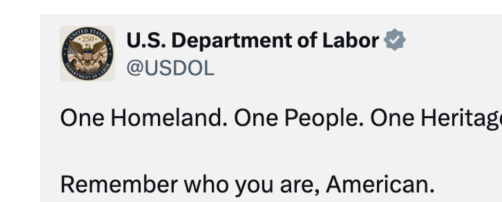
It's time to continue what he started...
for the digital age.



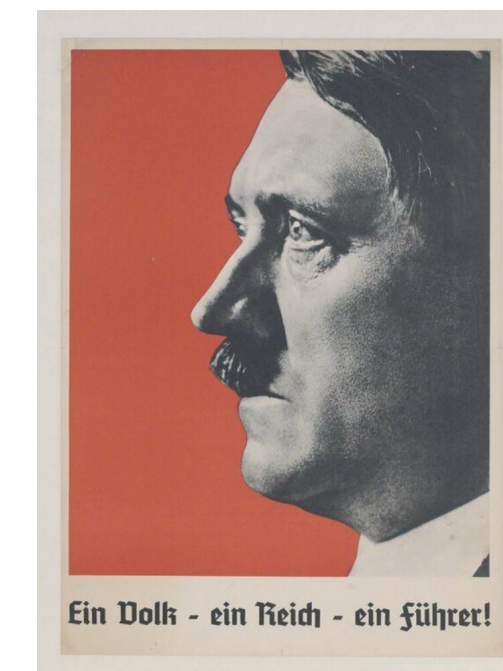
This is President Trump going bigger
than President Nixon.

This is America by Design.

Excerpts from the “America by Design” manifesto
of the Trump-established National Design Studio
americabydesign.gov



“Ein Volk – ein Reich – ein Führer” poster
(One people, one empire, one leader) set
in Fraktur type, featuring profile of Hitler
Steven Heller, *Iron Fists: Branding the 20th
Century Totalitarian State* (2011)



```
#search-box {
  font-size: 0.7rem;          /* keep your existing text size */
  line-height: 1.4;          /* helps vertical centering feel better */
  padding: 0.5em 0.8em;      /* add some breathing room */
}

/* Make the required asterisk white as well */
.whitehouse-form__required {
  color: white !important;
}

display: block !important;    /* makes margin work */
position: relative !important;
padding-left: 1.0em !important; /* space for the bullet */
margin-bottom: 0.1em !important;
line-height: 1.6 !important; /* + this is your spacing between lines */
}
```

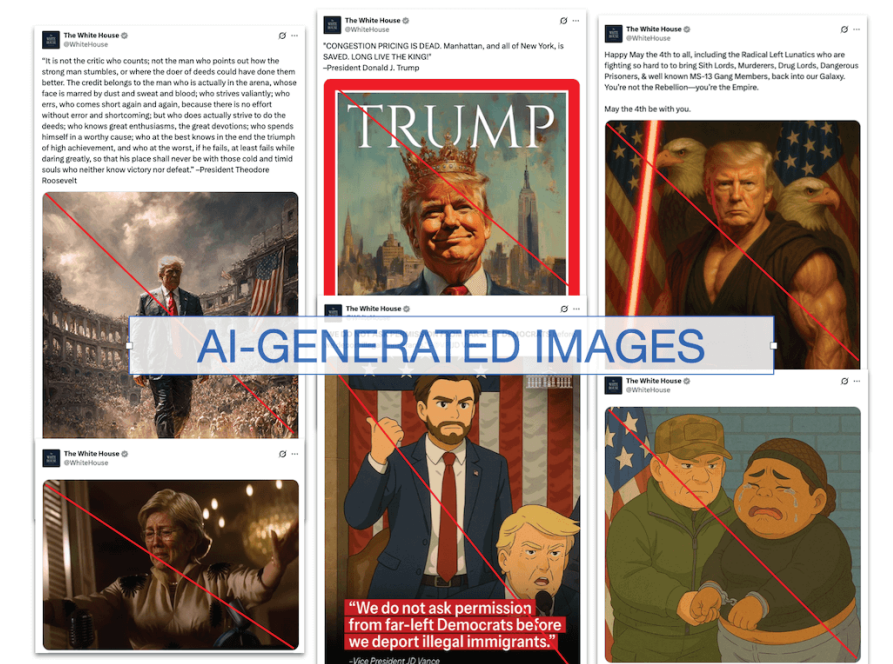
Code comments that reveal artifacts of code generated by
artificial intelligence, likely by asking ChatGPT to code
whitehouse.gov (selections from /aliens)



Screenshot from the home page of the million-dollar “Trump Gold Card” visitor visa
trumpcard.gov



Deutsches Reich stamps featuring profile of Hitler
Steven Heller, *Iron Fists: Branding the 20th
Century Totalitarian State* (2011)



“Heroic leader” images of Trump generated by artificial
intelligence posted by the White House Twitter account
The Poynter Institute (poynter.org)



Poster referenced by chief Nazi graphic designer
Erwin Schockel in his internal branding guide
Das politische Plakat with swastika logo insignia
Calvin University (research.calvin.edu)