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Public Bullying and Democratic Culture, or, The Politics of Abject Subjecthood in U.S. Daily Life

I wish to propose a theoretical paper on the surge in psychological and physical intimidation that has come to shape public life in the U.S. over the last thirty years, especially in the arenas of the workplace (with corporate restructuring and privatization), media (the rise of macho populism), and politics (including the war on terror and the state of exception). I argue that along with the more commonly examined cases of schools and family life, these arenas operate as so many multiple but convergent sites of bullying in U.S. public life that link the most subjective, individual experiences with those of collective life itself. Drawing on comparative empirical scholarship and the work of Corey Robin, Wendy Brown, Slavoj Žižek, and Brian Massumi as well as on French debates on “moral harassment” and the managerial revolution, I propose that bullying creates an open-ended field of preemptive aggression based on an economy of excess that strives to impress upon both actual and potential targets its literally *boundless* character that exceeds all possible imaginings and logic. In this way does bullying engage in a politics and epistemology of affect that conjures up at once a dreaded fate and ungraspable future.