

By rights, tonight's post should be a picture, but Trump's behavior today merits a marker because it feels like a dramatic escalation of the themes we've seen for years. Please feel free to ignore—as I often say, I am trying to leave notes for a graduate student in 150 years, and you can consider this one for her if you want a break from the recent onslaught of news.

Yesterday, Trump ranted at the press, furious that the American legal system had resulted in two jury decisions that he had defamed and sexually abused writer E. Jean Carroll. He was so angry that, with his lawyers standing awkwardly behind him, he told reporters: "I'm disappointed in my legal talent, I'll be honest with you."

Today, Trump held a rally in Mosinee, Wisconsin, a small city in the center of the state, where he addressed about 7,000 people. A number of us who have been watching him closely have been saying for a while that when voters actually saw him in this campaign, they would be shocked at how he has deteriorated, and that seems to be true: his meandering and self-indulgent speeches have had attendees leaving early, some of them bewildered. In today's speech, Trump slurred a number of words, referring to Elon Musk as "Leon," for example, and forgetting the name of North Dakota governor Doug Burgum, who was on his short list for a vice presidential pick.

But today's speech struck me as different from his past performances, distinguished for what sounded like desperation. Trump has always invented his stories from whole cloth, but there used to be some way to tie them to reality. Today that seemed to be gone. He was in a fantasy world, and his rhetoric was apocalyptic. It was also bloody in ways that raise huge red flags for scholars of fascism.

Trump told the audience that when he took office in 2017, military officers told him the U.S. had given all the military's ammunition away to allies. Then he went on a rant against our allies, saying that they're only our allies when they need

something and that they would never come to our aid if we needed them. This echoes the talking points put out by Russian operatives and flies in the face of the fact that the one time the North Atlantic Treaty Organization invoked the mutual defense pact in that agreement was after the attacks of September 11, 2001, in support of the U.S.

He embraced Project 2025's promise to eliminate the Department of Education and send education back to the states so that right-wing figures like Wisconsin's Senator Ron Johnson can run it. He reiterated the MAGA claim that mothers are executing their babies after birth—this is completely bonkers—and again echoed Russian talking points when he said these executions are happening—they are not—but “nobody talks about it.” He went on: “We did a great thing when we got *Roe v. Wade* out of the federal government.”

He reiterated the complete fantasy that schools are performing gender-affirming surgery on children. “Can you imagine you're a parent and your son leaves the house and you say, Jimmy, I love you so much, go have a good day at school, and your son comes back with a brutal operation. Can you even imagine this? What the hell is wrong with our country?” Trump's suggestion that schools are performing surgery on students is bananas. This is simply not a thing that happens.

And then he went full-blown apocalyptic, attacking immigrants and claiming that crime, which in reality has dropped dramatically since President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris took office after a spike during his own term, has made the U.S. uninhabitable. He said that “If I don't win Colorado, it will be taken over by migrants and the governor will be sent fleeing.” “Migrants and crime are here in our country at levels never thought possible before.... You're not safe even sitting here, to be honest with you. I'm the only one that's going to get it done. Everybody is saying that.” He urged people to protest “because you're being overrun by criminals.”

He assured attendees that “If you think you have a nice house, have a migrant enjoy your house, because a migrant will take it over. A migrant will take it over.

It will be Venezuela on steroids." He reiterated his plan to get rid of migrants. "And you know," he said, "getting them out will be a bloody story."

He went on to try to rev up supporters in words very similar to those he used on January 6th, 2021, but focused on this election. "Every citizen who's sick and tired of the parasitic political class in Washington that sucks our country of its blood and treasure, November fifth will be your liberation day. November fifth, this year, will be the most important day in the history of our country because we're not going to have a country anymore if we don't win."

He promised: "I will prevent World War III, and I am the only one that can do it. I will prevent World War III. And if I don't win this election,... Israel is doomed.... Israel will be gone.... I'd better win."

"I better win or you're gonna have problems like we've never had. We may have no country left. This may be our last election. You want to know the truth? People have said that. This may be our last election.... It'll all be over, and you gotta remember.... Trump is always right. I hate to be right. I'm always right."

Trump's hellscape is only in his mind: crime is sharply down in the U.S. since he left office, migrant crossings have plunged, and the economy is the strongest in the world.

Then, tonight, Trump posted on his social media site a rant asserting that he will win the 2024 election but that he expects Democrats to cheat, and "WHEN I WIN, those people that CHEATED will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the Law, which will include long term prison sentences so that this Depravity of Justice does not happen again. We cannot let our Country further devolve into a Third World Nation, AND WE WON'T! Please beware that this legal exposure extends to Lawyers, Political Operatives, Donors, Illegal Voters, & Corrupt Election Officials. Those involved in unscrupulous behavior will be sought out, caught, and prosecuted at levels, unfortunately, never seen before in our Country."

Is it the Justice Department indictments that showed Russia is working to get him

reelected? Is it the rising popularity of Democratic nominees Kamala Harris and Tim Walz? Is it fury at the new grand jury's indicting him for his attempt to overturn the results of the 2020 election and install himself in power? Is it fear of Tuesday's debate with Harris? Is it a declining ability to grapple with reality?

Whatever has caused it, Trump seems utterly off his pins, embracing wild conspiracy theories and, as his hopes of winning the election appear to be crumbling, threatening vengeance with a dogged fury that he used to be able to hide.