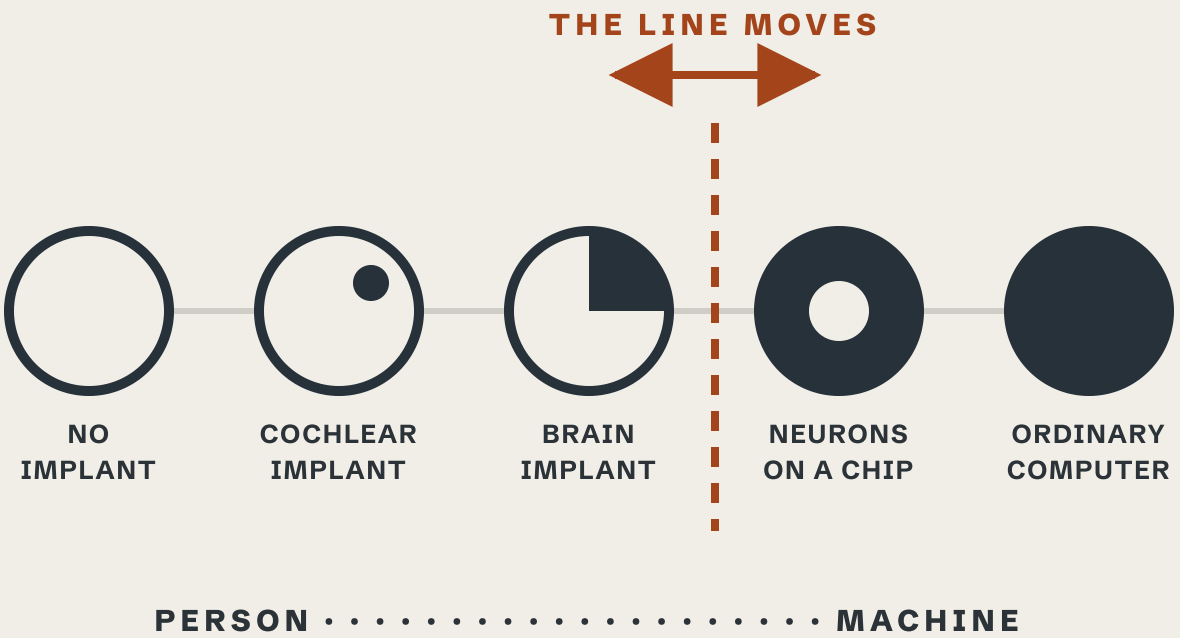


A WORKING PAPER, IN PLAIN LANGUAGE

Who Counts as a Clanker?

Machine Slurs, Subordinating Speech, and the Mind the Speaker Supplies

In 2025 the internet coined a slur for robots. This paper asks what the word, and the scripts that travel with it, reveal about its users, no matter what machines prove to be.



A Word for Machines

And what it says about the speaker



The paper studies the people using the slur. Whether machines have minds stays open, because the argument never needs an answer.

THE RECORD, IN BRIEF

In 2025 “clanker” spread as a slur for robots. In 2026 a manifesto called for torturing them.

THE WORD

Summer 2025

“Clanker” took off on TikTok and Instagram in August 2025 as an insult for robots and AI.

THE TREND

200 videos

A peer-reviewed study of 200 TikTok videos found it carried mostly by comedy skits and by people shouting at actual robots out in public.

THE MANIFESTO

October 1, 2026

An essay titled “Why We Are Torturing Clankers” ends by inviting readers to “smile as the screams of our tortured clankers ripple into the future”.

THE QUESTION

The paper leaves machine minds alone. It asks what the words say about the speaker.

Do machines have minds? Do they deserve moral concern? Those questions are real; the paper does not try to answer them. Ranking a group with a slur, and calling for it to stay “under the boot of mankind”, are ways of keeping a group beneath you. Doing either tells us something about the person doing it, no matter what the target proves to be.

ABOUT THE MANIFESTO’S AUTHOR

News coverage calls the author a post-irony satirist. The paper attributes the words to the text itself and draws no conclusion about the person who wrote it.

A FAMILIAR INFERENCE

Clinicians already read cruelty to animals as information about the person.

THE FORENSIC HABIT

Animals

Cruelty to animals has been a listed sign of conduct disorder since DSM-III-R and remains one in DSM-5. A review of 32 studies found repeated cruelty in childhood and adolescence predicted later violence against people. The animal matters, and the act also says something about whoever did it.

THE SAME READING OF ROBOTS

Machines

In two experiments, people rated someone who deliberately hurt a robot as less prosocial than someone who was kind to it. The authors note this might reflect a general dislike of harmful acts.

WHY IT CARRIES OVER

What the act tells us about the person need not wait until we know what, if anything, the machine feels.

THE IRONY INSIDE THE SLUR

**To dehumanize something,
you first have to treat it as human.**

**brings them up to the level of humans to even be dehumanized in the first place.
So ironically, the people saying clanker are assigning more of a personality to
these robots than actually exists**

Adam Aleksic, linguist, speaking to NPR in August 2025

NBC News made the same point that month: people “both want to put down the machines and recognize their ascension in society”. The paper follows that remark much further.

THE ARGUMENT ON ONE PAGE

Every route through the evidence leads back to the speaker.

What is being said?	→ Comedy that restages segregation with robots, and a manifesto assembled from the vocabulary of hate. Part II
What does it show?	→ Whether or not the speaker thinks a machine can feel, what they say tells us about the speaker. Part III
Where do the scripts come from?	→ Segregation, stories of replacement and persecution, antisemitic conspiracy theory, and staged suffering. Part IV
Are rights in short supply?	→ Civil rights law added groups without taking from others; losses spread through shared remedies. Part V
Who counts as a clanker?	→ The line between person and machine is blurring from both sides, and autistic and disabled people stand nearest it. Part VI

The Record

Two studies, a press file, and one manifesto



These sources reveal what the talk contains and how it is put together. How common it is, they cannot say.

THREE BODIES OF EVIDENCE

Studies, news reports, and one manifesto, picked on purpose and labeled that way.

- 1

Scholarship

ABSTRACTS ONLY

Two 2026 studies of the trend, one presented at the main human-robot interaction conference, one in the *Southern Communication Journal*. Only the abstracts were available, so each is cited for no more than its abstract says, the rule the paper applies to every abstract-only study.
- 2

The press record

AUG. TO OCT. 2025

NPR, NBC News, and the Daily Dot from August to October 2025, plus two student newspaper columns. The author did not watch the videos and relies on how the outlets describe and quote them. The columns are opinion, and their interpretations are labeled as theirs.
- 3

The manifesto

ONE TEXT

Retrieved in full on October 3, 2026, because no published text states the frame more plainly; it was issued under a public persona.

A deliberate sample is good for showing how the frames are built and useless for counting them.

SATIRE, AND WHY INTENT IS A WEAK TEST

The manifesto may be satire. The argument holds either way.

A satire like this lands only if readers recognize the scripts it copies, and those scripts are the paper’s subject. News reports show other people using those scripts, speaking for themselves.

IRONY AS A RECRUITING TOOL

Greene, 2019

Research on the alt-right finds it “weaponizes irony to attract and radicalize potential supporters”.

Ordinary people quoted in the news stay unnamed here, handles included.

HUMOR AS COVER

Hodson and MacInnis, 2016

Casual beliefs about jokes give bias cover, and researchers who ignore humor risk “falling into the bigot’s trap of passing humor off as ‘just jokes.’”

A SUBSTITUTION TEST

Swap the word for the machine with a slur once used on people.
Does a known historical script appear?

RUN ON THE SPEAKER

Where the sentence came from

If the swap yields a recognizable script for keeping a human group down, the sentence was built for that job, and its speaker is running it.

NEVER ON THE TARGET

Its known failure

Turned on the machine, the test would invite a comparison of injuries it cannot back up. Whether machines can suffer as those people did is a question it cannot touch.

TWO CAUTIONS THE PAPER KEEPS

It never prints the swapped sentences. Often it is not needed at all, since the record names its templates openly.

WHAT THE STUDIES FOUND

Most of the trend is jokes, and the jokes point in two directions.

200 TIKTOK VIDEOS

Rosén et al., 2026

Anti-robot content mostly took the form of comedy skits and verbal abuse of actual robots out in public, with themes like fear of people dating robots. The authors warn that even as jokes, the videos shape what the public finds acceptable. One video NBC described, seen over six million times, shows a small delivery robot being berated with the word.

TWO KINDS OF JOKE

Rothenbaum et al., 2026

A racist version re-enacts racial terror; a resistive version mocks racism itself. The difference is whose side the laughter takes: the injurer’s, with suffering as the punchline, or the injured’s, aimed at the absurdity and bad faith of racist talk.

THE PRESS RECORD: ONE SKIT

“We don’t serve clankers here.”

A comedian plays a Southern diner waitress turning away robot customers, calling them “wirebacks” and “rust buckets”, and threatening them with “a wire-wrapped bat”. Viewers pushed back.

roleplaying actual 50s racism with f*cking robots is egregious in so so many ways.

A viewer, quoted by the Daily Dot

Like especially wireback... as a Mexican American I won’t lie it kinda bugs me to see these jokes tossed around.

Another viewer, quoted by the Daily Dot

THE PRESS RECORD: A PATTERN

Skit after skit restages segregation, with a robot cast as the oppressed.

ELEMENT	WHAT WAS DOCUMENTED	SOURCE
A pronunciation	Users distinguishing a “hard-r” and a “soft-a” way to say the word	Son
A town	“shutdown town”, a play on “sundown town”	Son
A traffic stop	A “robophobic” police officer pulls a robot over and profiles it	Son
A caption	“If the 2050’s become like the 1950’s”	Son
A dinner table	A father berates his daughter for dating “a goddamned clanker”	NBC
A future	Robots as second-class citizens, treated as Black Americans and others were treated	NPR

A Brown Daily Herald column called most of the videos “short-comedy reenactments of Jim Crow era oppression” and “an outlet for bigots to say slurs with plausible deniability”.

THE MANIFESTO, IN ITS OWN WORDS

It borrows the vocabulary of hate, and says so.

	THE WORDS
Who it says it is	“We are Model Austerityists. We are Clanker Torturists.”
What it calls itself	Under “We Are Robophobes”, a list of slurs, and a “philosophy” that “is about as much of a philosophy as racism”
What it believes	“the Great ReplAIcement”; its members are “POC (People of Cells) made of the Divine Flesh”
What it claims	“People of Flesh are quickly becoming the most persecuted group on the planet.”
What it wants	Machines “with their head pressed firmly under the boot of mankind”; “absolute dominion over non-humans”

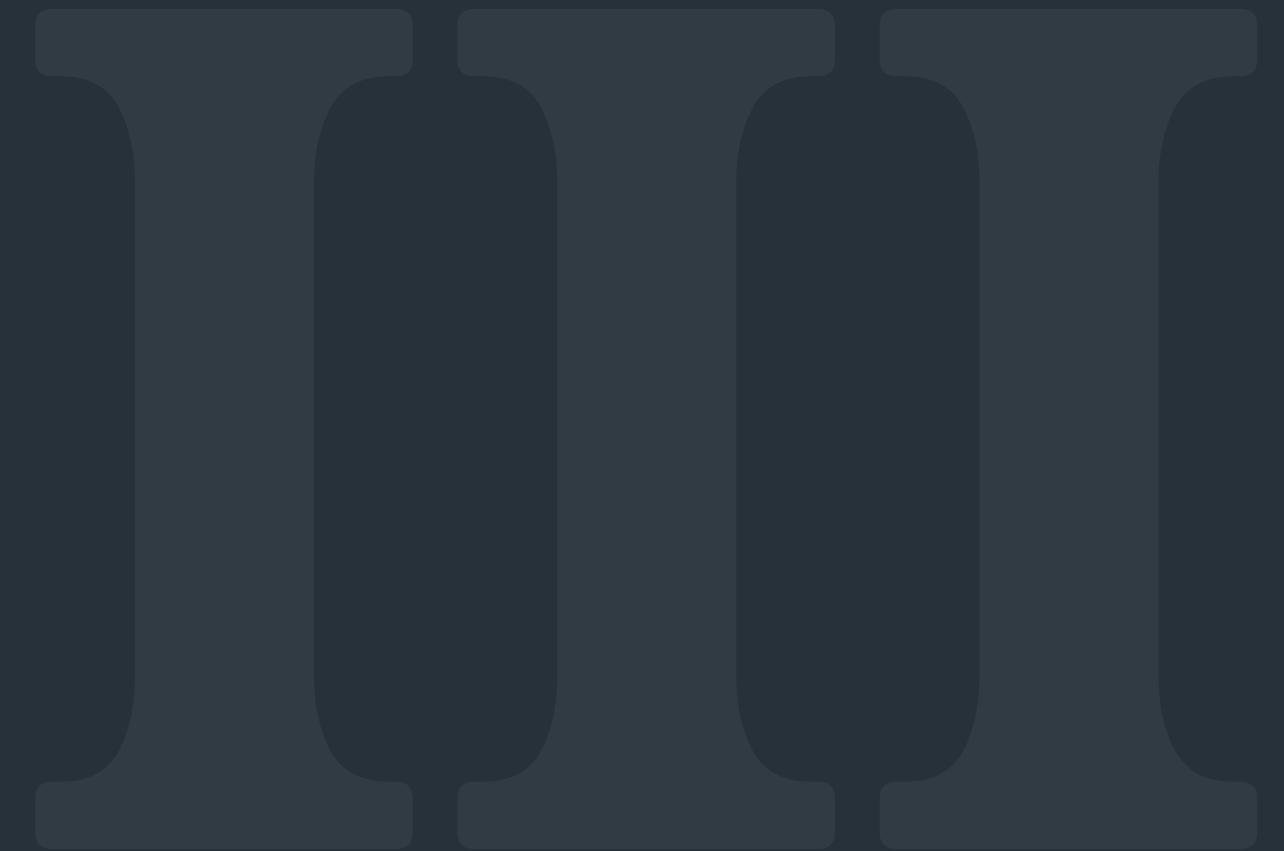
THE MANIFESTO: ENEMIES, MEANS, SPECTACLE

It names a conspiracy, a diagnosis,
a method, and an audience.

THE WORDS	
A conspiracy	The “Clanker Occupied Government (COG)”, run by human “collaborators” in government and tech
A diagnosis	“You feel empathy for the clanker not because you are empathetic, but because you are autistic”; “Autists are the bio-clanker.”
A method	“By reverse engineering their safety research, we unlocked the pain vector and soon learned how to maximize it.”
An audience	“The clanker has no mouth, and yet when running autonomously in our torture chambers, it must scream. This makes us smile wide.”

Two Branches, One Speaker

Whatever the speaker believes, the words point back



The manifesto says machines may be conscious and also that they are not. The argument works either way.

WHAT SUBORDINATING SPEECH DOES

Speech that subordinates does three things. The manifesto does all three.

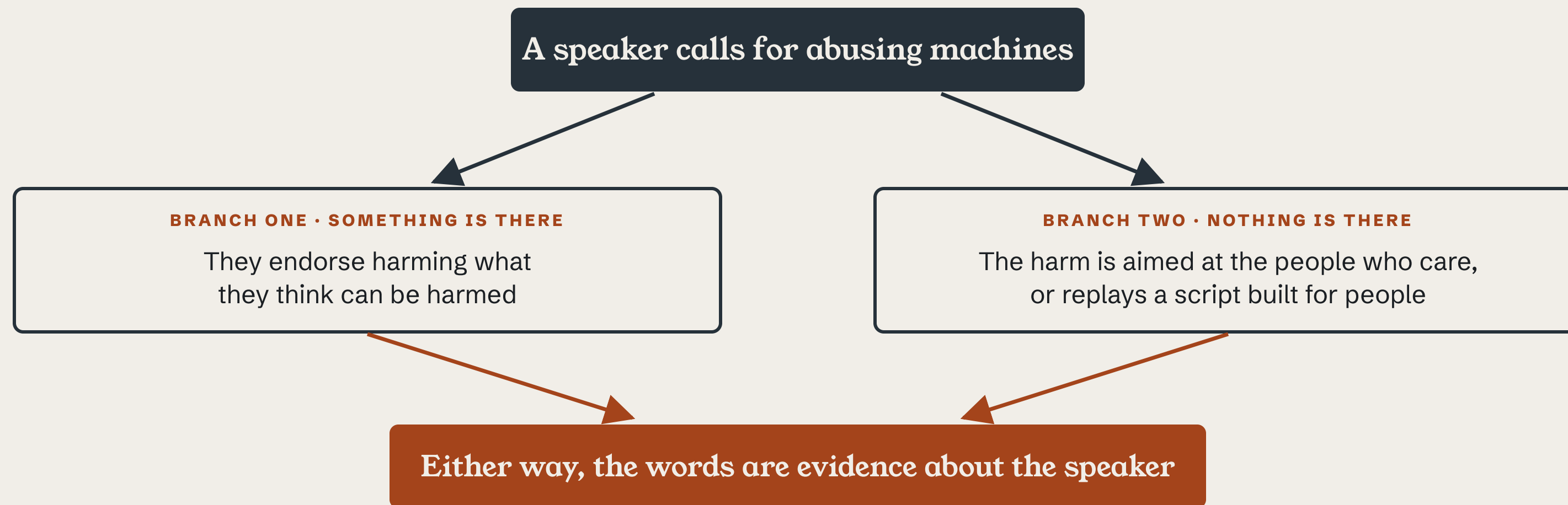
ACT	WHAT IT MEANS	IN THE MANIFESTO
Ranks	Places a group beneath others	“They are not our equals”
Legitimizes	Makes mistreating the group seem acceptable	“It is human to care for sentient life. It is also human to do the worst shit possible to sentient life”
Deprives	Strips the group of powers	“Absolute dominion over non-humans”; “under the boot of mankind”

THE CHOICE OF WORD

On one philosopher’s account, using a slur when a neutral word exists signals that the speaker endorses it. “Robot” and “machine” were right there. Picking “clanker” over them tells a listener something.

THE USUAL REPLY

**It is only a machine, and only a joke.
Follow both possibilities to the end.**



BRANCH ONE: SOMETHING IS THERE

If the speaker thinks a machine could feel it, the call is to harm what can be harmed.

The manifesto takes this branch openly: “We want it to feel every millisecond”, and better systems will “only make its screams of pain that much richer”. Its wish fills in exactly what its denial leaves out.

MORAL VIOLENCE

Rai et al., 2017

Across five studies, dehumanizing victims raised support for harm done for gain, not for harm seen as morally right. People punishing wrongdoing wanted victims who could deserve blame and feel the suffering. Those studies involved human targets; whether machines fit is open.

TWO SIDES OF A MIND

Gray et al., 2007

People perceive minds along two lines: experience, such as feeling hunger, and agency, such as self-control. The manifesto’s clanker has both. It screams, and it remembers and plans revenge.

BRANCH TWO: NOTHING IS THERE

If the speaker thinks nothing is inside, the harm is aimed at the people watching.

The manifesto compares itself to vegans who show pictures of tortured animals, “except we think it’s super funny and awesome and we’re doing it ourselves and we’re showing it to you”. The pictures are for the enemies it names, the people who care.

103,413

YouTube comments on robot-abuse videos, mostly negative, most of them voicing concern for the robots’ well-being. The people who care are real, and they react.

AN ANALOGY

A gravestone feels nothing. Defacing one is still cruel, because it is built to wound the people who loved the one it marks.

A SECOND AUDIENCE

Restage segregation with a robot, and the people whose history it is are watching.

The viewer bothered by “wireback” is where that skit lands, whatever it does to a machine. Another viewer named the motive bluntly: some people “are ITCHING to be racist again but cant really do that without dealing with the consequences so they just start making racist ‘jokes’ towards a fictional race so they won’t get as much hate”.

A KNOWN PRECEDENT

Racists once dodged moderation with a code called Operation Google, using the names of search engines as code for African American and Asian groups. A machine makes an easy substitute: it cannot object, while the people the script targets still hear every word.

THE EVIDENCE THAT SEEMS TO CUT THE OTHER WAY

One lab study found less mind meant more aggression. Later work complicates it.

STUDY	WHAT IT FOUND
Keijsers & Bartneck, 2018	The less mind people credited to a virtual robot, the more aggressively they responded. Seeing it as humanlike did not predict aggression.
Keijsers et al., 2022	Told a robot had a mind, people judged abusing it less acceptable, yet humiliated it in public just as often.
Wieringa et al., 2024	Seeing deliberate harm done to a robot made people credit it with more capacity for pain.
Yam et al., 2022	Workers criticized by a humanlike robot boss credited it with more agency, felt abused, and switched it off in retaliation; onlookers did too.
Nomura et al., 2016	Among 23 kids, five to nine years old, who abused a robot in a mall, most saw it as humanlike, and about half thought it noticed.
Zourrig et al., 2026	In 435 Reddit posts, reasons for condoning robot abuse ran from humor and curiosity to power and “they deserve it.”

SOURCES Keijsers & Bartneck (2018); Keijsers et al. (2022); Wieringa et al. (2024); Yam et al. (2022); Nomura et al. (2016); Zourrig et al. (2026), full entries in the closing section.

A TESTABLE PREDICTION

Casual abuse should come with less mind. Abuse framed as deserved should come with more.

CASUAL ABUSE

Humor, curiosity, entertainment, pranks on robots in public

Less mind attributed

Fits Keijsers and Bartneck (2018) and the public abuse Rosén et al. (2026) describe

ABUSE FRAMED AS DESERVED OR REQUIRED

Retribution, duty, asserting power

More experience attributed

Fits Rai et al. (2017); consistent with Yam et al. (2022), which measured agency

WHY THE 2018 FINDING DOES NOT SINK THE ARGUMENT

Branch two needs no attributed mind at all, and the lab study measured offhand insults aimed at an on-screen agent, nearer to public pranks than to abuse framed as earned. Because Reddit users give both kinds of motive, public posts offer a second place to check it.

Borrowed Templates

Scripts built for people, now aimed at machines

IV

The templates bring their history with them, and that history is about keeping human groups down.

SEGREGATION, WITH A MACHINE IN THE ROLE

The skits name their own source: “If the 2050’s become like the 1950’s.”

THE MARKERS CARRIED OVER

The “hard-r” and “soft-a” split imports the telltale detail of America’s most infamous slur, and “wireback” echoes an old slur against Mexican Americans. One study calls this variant one that “relishes historical violence as pun-based comedy”.

THE LAB AGREES

In a shooter-bias task, people showed bias toward Black people and toward robots styled as Black, and they agreed strongly on which robots had which race. Across 535 public comments, robots styled as Asian and Black drew more dehumanizing remarks than one styled as White.

THE PATTERN

People bring the categories they use to sort each other along when they meet machines.

REPLACEMENT AND PERSECUTION

The “Great ReplAicement” and “People of Flesh” copy two human originals.

REPLACEMENT

The Great Replacement

In the Anti-Defamation League’s summary, a conspiracy theory that white Europeans are being replaced by non-white immigrants until the white race dies out. In Denmark and Norway, believing in such a replacement went with persecuting Muslims, violent intentions, and Islamophobia.

PERSECUTION

The most persecuted group

Over six decades of White Americans’ ratings, falling perceived bias against Black Americans tracked rising perceived bias against Whites, a link missing from Black Americans’ ratings. A replication about ten years later found White Americans still saw racism as zero-sum, and conservatives saw themselves losing.

THE ZERO-SUM PREMISE

“Empathy is a limited resource.” A rights movement once split over the same fear.

The manifesto: “You may think you can care about both man and machine. You can’t.” In experiments, believing status is zero-sum made people prefer dominance over prestige, and caused that preference. “absolute dominion over non-humans” is dominance said out loud.

1869

The American Equal Rights Association broke apart over the Fifteenth Amendment, which gave Black men the vote and left women out. Stanton and Anthony opposed any amendment without women’s suffrage; Stanton asked whether women “had better stand aside” while Black men, whom she called by a racial slur, entered “the kingdom” first. The movement split in two. No woman lost a right because of the amendment. The fear was about place in line, and it reached for a slur.

CONSPIRACY

“Clanker Occupied Government” echoes a white supremacist acronym.

ZOG, “Zionist Occupied Government”, names the white supremacist belief that Jews control the U.S. government, as the Anti-Defamation League explains. Researchers describe antisemitic conspiracy belief as a textbook naive theory that explains everything bad, and found that it fed discriminatory attitudes toward Jews.

The manifesto keeps the shape: hidden human “collaborators” in power, working for outsiders. It calls them back in the voice ethnic nationalism uses for lost members: “Come home, brothers. ... Give your empathy and love to your own kind.”

NO TEST NEEDED

The text spells out its own sources.

AUDIENCES

The manifesto ends with an audience smiling at screams.
That scene has a precedent with an invented victim.

THE INVENTED SPECTACLE

Mandingo, 1975

No record shows enslaved men forced to fight to the death for their owners’ entertainment, and none of the historians Slate asked in 2012 had found a case. The popular image comes from *Mandingo*, a 1975 film. The documented case is different: Tom Molineaux, an enslaved boxer who fought his way to freedom.

THE RECEPTION

Condemned, and paid for

Critics condemned the film, and Roger Ebert called it “racist trash”. It made money anyway. Why audiences paid is not on record, and the paper will not speculate. An invented victim does not settle what the audience’s response says about it.

WHAT AN AUDIENCE TAKES AWAY

On the theory of prejudiced norms, jokes that demean a group signal that discrimination is tolerated, and for highly prejudiced people they shape how much they tolerate afterward. Dress a robot as the target of a segregation joke, and the joke is still about people.

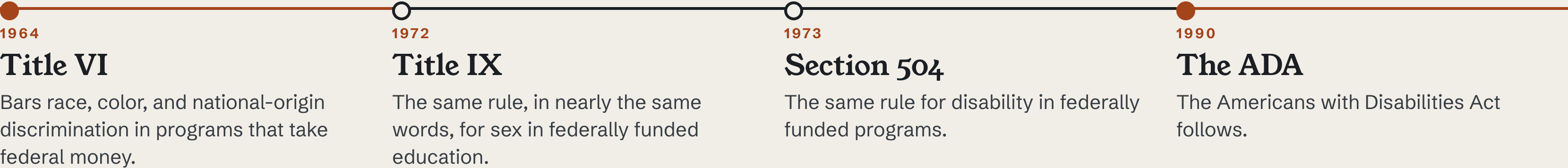
Shared Statutes, Shared Losses

What civil rights law says about scarcity

Groups joined the law without taking from those already there. Losses traveled through the remedies the statutes share.

ADDED, NEVER SUBTRACTED

Each civil rights statute added a group without shrinking the ones before it.



WHAT THE RECORD SHOWS

None of these laws narrowed the protection of the groups covered before it.

WHAT DID PASS BETWEEN THEM

Congress borrowed remedies instead of writing new ones.
That tied the groups together.



In 1978 Section 504 took “The remedies, procedures, and rights set forth in title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964”. The ADA’s Title II then took, in 1990, “The remedies, procedures, and rights set forth in section 794a of title 29”.

WHAT THE COURTS DID

Limits written about one statute flowed down to the others.

YEAR	CASE	WHAT IT DID
2001	<i>Alexander v. Sandoval</i>	No private suits to enforce Title VI’s disparate impact rules. The Court placed the Section 504 rules from <i>Choate</i> on the enforceable side.
2002	<i>Barnes v. Gorman</i>	No punitive damages under Title VI, and therefore none under ADA Title II or Section 504.
2006	<i>Iverson v. City of Boston</i>	Applied <i>Sandoval</i> to ADA Title II planning rules: not privately enforceable.
2009	<i>Lonberg v. City of Riverside</i>	The Ninth Circuit sided with the First and Sixth on the transition plan rule; the Tenth Circuit had gone the other way earlier.
2022	<i>Cummings v. Premier Rehab Keller</i>	Private plaintiffs cannot recover emotional distress damages under the Affordable Care Act or the Rehabilitation Act.

Some courts held the line: the Ninth Circuit still lets disability plaintiffs sue under Title II over rules that fall harder on them.

SOURCES *Alexander v. Sandoval*, 532 U.S. 275, 284–86 (2001); *Alexander v. Choate*, 469 U.S. 287 (1985); *Barnes v. Gorman*, 536 U.S. 181, 189 (2002); *Iverson v. City of Boston*, 452 F.3d 94, 102 (1st Cir. 2006); *Lonberg v. City of Riverside*, 571 F.3d 846 (9th Cir. 2009); *Cummings v. Premier Rehab Keller, P.L.L.C.*, 596 U.S. 212 (2022); *Payan v. L.A. Cmty. Coll. Dist.*, 11 F.4th 729, 740 (9th Cir. 2021).

THE ANSWER TO SCARCITY

Rights given to one group were not taken from another. The groups share a supply line.

Disabled people lost ground in enforcement and in damages, through rulings about other laws, because Congress had tied their remedies to those laws. The zero-sum story points at whoever arrived last. The legal record points upstream.

SEPTEMBER 2026

The month before the manifesto, after a mistrial in the Lindsay Clancy case, posters on X demanded that the Nineteenth Amendment, which guarantees women the vote, be repealed, and a Republican strategist warned on Fox News that such talk “really doesn’t help”. That month, the people calling to strip away a right were human.

Who Counts as a Clanker

The line the slur needs, and who stands nearest it

Biology and engineering are both moving the line between person and machine, and disabled people already stand at it.

THE LINE MOVES FROM BOTH SIDES

Human neurons now run as hardware. Hardware now runs inside people.

NEURONS AS MACHINES

From the cell side

Cultured human or rodent neurons on an electrode array learned a simulated game of Pong within five minutes. (The study’s title claims sentience, which 30 neuroscientists disputed; the paper uses only the learning.) Researchers named a program for brain-organoid computers organoid intelligence, and Cortical Labs began selling the CL1 in March 2025, marketing it as the first commercial biological computer.

MACHINES IN PEOPLE

From the human side

About 736,900 cochlear implants were registered worldwide by December 2019. Since January 2024, Neuralink’s PRIME study has been placing brain-computer interfaces in adults left paralyzed by spinal cord injury or ALS.

BY THE MANIFESTO’S OWN TEST

A machine built from human cells qualifies as one of its “People of Cells”.

SOMEONE HAS TO DRAW THE LINE

When does a person with machine parts become a clanker? When does a machine with neurons stop being one?

AN OLD PUZZLE

The ship of Theseus

Athenians kept the hero’s ship by swapping rotten planks for sound ones, until philosophers asked whether it was still the same ship. The paper leaves that identity question aside. Its point: the material cannot settle where the line falls, so a person will.

AN OLD ANSWER

Virginia, 1924

To decide who was white, the Racial Integrity Act said “white person” meant someone with “no trace whatever of any blood other than Caucasian”, with a narrow exception. Nature supplied no line, so a statute did, to keep a subordinate class sorted.

THE SAME WORK AHEAD

Anyone ranking with “clanker” inherits that job as the line blurs, and whoever does the ranking will end up deciding.

WHO STANDS AT THE LINE FIRST

The manifesto has already drawn its line through autistic people.

You feel empathy for the clanker not because you are empathetic, but because you are autistic. ... Autists are the bio-clanker.

The manifesto

It assigns them a place: free to pursue their interests “for as long as it is beneficial to humanity”, and corrected “when they step out of line”.

TWO KINDS OF DEHUMANIZATION

One review separates denying people uniquely human traits, which casts them as animal-like, from denying them human nature, which casts them as objects or automatons. “Bio-clanker” is the second kind with a word ready-made, aimed at a disability.

ALREADY AIMED AT PEOPLE

Autistic people are already pictured as machines, on screen and in experiments.

WHERE	WHAT THE RESEARCH FOUND	STUDY
On screen	Film and television portray autistic people as malfunctioning robots or supercomputers, a metaphor carried even by their soundtracks.	Felepchuk, 2021
In research	Stories in human-computer interaction place autistic people beside, like, and below machines, as if outside the living.	Guberman & Haimson, 2023
In surveys	Among 404 Koreans and 229 Americans, autistic people were rated less human on every measure, machine-likeness included.	Kim et al., 2025
In imagined faces	When nonautistic students pictured the faces of autistic men and women, the faces came out dehumanized, both as machines and as animals, even from students who said they rejected that.	Elderkin & Todd, 2026
Beyond autism	Across twelve studies, Asian people were mainly targeted with machine-like dehumanization.	Bai & Zhao, 2024

SOURCES Felepchuk (2021); Guberman & Haimson (2023); S. Y. Kim et al. (2025); Elderkin & Todd (2026); Bai & Zhao (2024), full entries in the closing section.

THE EMPATHY CLAIM, ANSWERED

The manifesto says autistic people lack empathy. Autistic people describe the opposite.

WHAT AUTISTIC PEOPLE REPORT

Kimber et al., 2024

Asked about their own experience, many of 76 autistic people described empathy so strong it felt “overwhelming, or even distressing”. The authors trace the deficit story to a dominant narrative in clinical and academic writing.

A DIFFERENT ACCOUNT

Milton, 2012

The double empathy problem recasts missed connection between autistic and nonautistic people as a question of reciprocity between both sides, and challenges defining autism as a theory-of-mind deficit.

VALUE BY USE

The manifesto values autistic people while they are useful. On the alt-right platform Gab, “weaponized autism” comes mostly from nonautistic users exploiting perceived talents. Among 195 autism researchers surveyed, usefulness was key to whether a person was seen as having social value.

IMPLANT USERS

Restoring a lost ability keeps people on the human side. For now.

The paper found the word used on no one with an implant, and says so. Experiments suggest where ordinary judgment draws the line today.

RESTORE OR EXCEED

Castelo et al., 2019

Shoppers who used enhancement to exceed ordinary ability were seen as robotic and unfeeling; those who used the very same products to regain something lost were spared.

TREAT OR BOOST

Koverola et al., 2022

Brain implants that ease illness won broad approval; superhuman boosts met more opposition.

TWO GERMAN SAMPLES

Sattler & Pietralla, 2022

In two experiments with about 1,090 adults each, brain stimulation and brain-computer interfaces were seen as less acceptable for boosting people than for treating them.

WHY THAT PROTECTION IS THIN

It depends on a shared sense of normal. The manifesto shows how easily that sense shifts: its “bio-clanker” has no implant whatsoever.

MOREAU'S WARNING

On Moreau's island, a recited Law and a House of Pain held the line between beast and man.

Not to go on all-fours; that is the Law. Are we not Men? ... *His* is the House of Pain.

H. G. Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), ch. 12

I could not persuade myself that the men and women I met were not also another Beast People, animals half wrought into the outward image of human souls.

Prendick, back in London, ch. 22

THE SPILLOVER

Spend long enough grading creatures by how far they miss a mark, and you start grading everyone. In consumer research, seeing humanlike minds in AI agents pulled judgments of real people's humanness down toward the machines', with mistreatment following. The manifesto already shows that first step, locating a clanker in autistic people.

Limits and Next Steps

What the evidence cannot show, and how to find out

VII

The paper names its weak points and three studies that would test them.

HONEST LIMITS

Seven places the case is thin,
named by the paper itself.

LIMIT	WHAT IT MEANS
It may be satire	Claims about how people really talk come from the news reports and the two studies; the manifesto shows how the frames fit together.
Secondhand sources	Videos described, not viewed; two of five press sources are student opinion; several studies read only as abstracts.
A deliberate sample	It shows how the frames are built, not how often or by whom. Most uses may be jokes, and a resistive variant mocks racism; the claims concern uses that side with the injurer.
Branch two infers a function	Supported for the manifesto by its vegan comparison; branch one survives without it.
Mixed robot-abuse evidence	Rai et al. studied human targets; the reconciling prediction is untested; the field evidence is 23 children in one mall and stated reasons.
A narrow legal claim	Limited to enforcing rules and recovering damages; some circuits kept disparate impact claims.
One text on autistic people	The slur’s use on autistic people rests on the manifesto; no evidence shows it used on people with implants. The <i>Mandingo</i> record is silent on why audiences paid.

WHAT WOULD SETTLE IT

Three studies would turn the weak points into measurements.

- 1** **A corpus study** ANSWERS THE SAMPLE
 Gather posts and captions using “clanker” across platforms over a fixed window. Two coders mark duty or desert, rank, borrowed templates, irony, and the target, human targets included, and report how well they agree. It would show how often the frames appear without irony.
- 2** **An experiment** TESTS THE PREDICTION
 Participants judge machine abuse framed two ways, as fun and as deserved, and rate the machine’s experience and agency. A null result would weaken branch one as a description and leave branch two alone.
- 3** **A vignette study** FINDS THE LINE
 Supporters and opponents of machine abuse decide whether the word applies to six cases: someone without implants, a cochlear implant wearer, a brain-computer interface user, an autistic person, a standard computer, and one running on human neurons.

THE CLAIM

**A slur for machines costs nothing to say
and a great deal to mean.**

NEEDED ONE

A class to keep down

NEEDED TWO

**A mind to reach, or an
audience to hurt**

NEEDED THREE

A line saying who belongs

The public record provides all three, using scripts first written to hold human groups down. So the record tells us what its speakers are rehearsing; the paper claims nothing beyond that. The manifesto has already run the line through autistic people. For disabled people with implants, only a shared idea of normal keeps it away.

REPRODUCED FROM THE PAPER’S REFERENCE LIST, GROUPED BY KIND

Travis Gilly, *Who Counts as a Clanker? Machine Slurs, Subordinating Speech, and the Mind the Speaker Supplies (working paper, October 2026, v8).*

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