

AGAINST THE **CURRENT** A SOCIALIST JOURNAL

Racial Justice Now!



Science, Politics and the Global Pandemic

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- ♦ Marc Becker on Latin America
- ♦ Dr. Irv Weissman on Virology and Vaccines
- ♦ Clifford D. Conner on the Failure of Politics

The Green New Deal: Wartime Lessons

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A Letter from the Editors: “Normal” No More

A NATIONWIDE UPRISING against murderous, racialized police brutality has broken out in the streets of U.S. cities and towns — even amidst the considerable risks of mass protests during the coronavirus pandemic, let alone threats from militarized police violence. An enormously positive development is the fact that it is both Black-led *and* multiracial in its actions and demands, relative to historic urban rebellions from the 1960s onward. The central demands to “Defund the Police” and “De-militarize the Police” stand out for their clarity and radical character — and their *necessity*.

The broad-daylight police lynching of George Floyd, on top of other police and vigilante murders (Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and so many more) brought much of American society face to face with our real condition. The eruption of open white-supremacist politics in the Donald Trump era is dangerous, but we are now assured that it does not go unchallenged, particularly as courageous young white people joined with communities of color. It’s also clear that while there are a beautiful panoply of Black, Latinx and allied anti-racist formations, these actions are on a far larger scale than any organization or combination could mount on their own.

A perspective on this insurgent movement requires a discussion beyond the scope of this editorial. We would suggest that people are marching not only in solidarity with Black lives — as critically urgent as that is — but also from a consciousness that survival is on the line for us all.

Well before the most recent string of high-profile police and vigilante murders of Black civilians, there’s been a spreading sense of all-encompassing crisis, and no wonder. It’s important always to remember that the root of the interlocking crises is systemic, not subjective: not even Donald Trump on his own could have screwed this whole thing up so completely. We must emphasize this point, precisely because Trump’s buffoonish and sinister daily spectacles make it all too easy to forget.

We are living in the worst global public health disaster since the 1918-19 flu pandemic; a potential economic slump on a scale still unknown, possibly rivalling the 1930s Depression; and the unfolding climatic and environmental catastrophe that threatens the survival of human civilization by (or before) the end of this century. What was “normal” is no more, and may never be again.

The United States in particular is governed by an administration that’s the most overtly racist since Woodrow Wilson, the most incompetent since Herbert Hoover, headed up by the most personally-corrupt president ever. The country faces a November election with the least inspiring available Democratic presidential candidate, and the real possibility of systematic rightwing electoral theft organized from the top levels of the federal executive and voter-suppressing state legislatures.

We focus first on the coronavirus pandemic, which (like America’s racial and policing crises) was entirely foretold. “[I]n one vital area,” Laurie Garrett wrote in the 1995 edition of her pioneering report, *The Coming Plague. Newly Emerging Diseases in a World out of Balance*, “the emergence and spread of new infectious diseases, we can already predict the future — and it is threatening and dangerous to us all. The history of our time will be marked by recurrent examples of newly discovered diseases... [including] diseases which spring from insects and animals to humans, through man-made disruptions in local habitats.”

Referring to the specific circumstance that terrified the world at the time, Garrett continued: “The global epidemic of human immunodeficiency virus is the most powerful and recent example. Yet AIDS does not stand alone; it may

well be just the first of the modern, large-scale epidemics of infectious disease.” The crusading anti-AIDS hero Larry Kramer could hardly have put it better.

The subsequent quarter century has seen plentiful outbreaks to validate this warning. Scientifically, with regard to virology in particular, the advances in basic research and technical understanding have been breathtaking. Socially and politically, not so much — to put it mildly. *Why such poor preparation for the COVID-19 mess?*

The answers are well known. Partly it’s because a public health emergency doesn’t heal or reduce social inequalities and injustice — it magnifies them. The slogan “we’re all in this together” is exposed as a well-meaning platitude — when frontline health care providers, essential service and meatpacking workers protest lethal workplace conditions, as Black and Latinx and Native American communities suffer two and three times the national U.S. infection and death rates — while overwhelmingly white demonstrators encouraged by the White House and the right wing demand “open everything.”

The workplace actions and demands of Amazon, meatpacking, nursing care and designated essential workers for protection represent today’s face of class struggle in the half-locked-down United States, where by late May close to 40 million workers had filed for unemployment and terror swept through prisons, immigrant detention centers and long-term care facilities.

With official unemployment at 20% (and the labor participation rate somewhere around an incredibly low 60%), “reopening the economy” became the rage. What’s deemed “essential,” whose lives and which communities are expendable, which industries get the bailouts and which go under, are shaped by corporate lobbies and political interest — not by deep considerations of human need, and certainly not by democratic discussion.

The same will apply, even more diabolically, to the development and deployment of therapeutic treatments and eventually vaccines. Trump’s promotion of hydroxychloroquine and bleach is the stuff of the continuing White House craziness, but the bigger problem isn’t that POTUS is a doofus. It’s that the capitalist market dictates how vaccines must be created and distributed for profit, complicated by national rivalries and inevitable quarrels over patent rights (“intellectual property”).

continued on the inside back cover

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Front Cover: Mass protests, including in Detroit, around the country and then globally. Jim West: www.jimwestphoto.com

Above: Mural of George Floyd, Minneapolis.

Back Cover: Detroit car caravan in support of USPS and its workforce. Jim West: www.jimwestphoto.com

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George Floyd Murdered by Cops: U.S. Erupts with Mass Protests

By Malik Miah

*“THAT’S NOT A Chip On My Shoulder.
That’s Your Foot On My Neck.”*

— Malcolm X, speaking in
response to police brutality and
national oppression

MASS PROTESTS ACROSS the United States — and beyond — exploded after four cops murdered an unarmed Black man, George Floyd, 46, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on May 25. The white cop, Derek Chauvin, 44, for nearly nine minutes, put his knee on Floyd’s neck.

Floyd gasped out, “I can’t breathe” and called for his “mama.” After six minutes his body went limp, but Chauvin kept his knee on his neck for an additional two minutes and 46 seconds to make sure he was no longer breathing. Two other cops held Floyd’s arms and legs pinned down as a fourth cop stood guard so bystanders could not intervene.

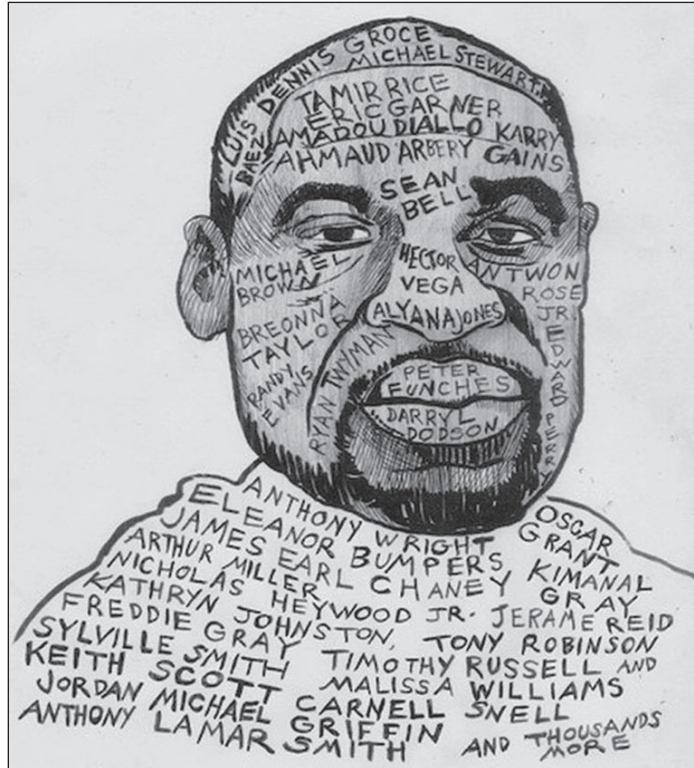
Bystanders videotaped the intentional murder, yelling at the cops killing the man who offered no resistance. His hands had been handcuffed behind his back. One person said, “He was treated like a roach.”

Chauvin and his three cop associates acted with murderous intent. The cell phone videos showed that Floyd waited for the cops to arrest him after a clerk at a store alleged that he used a counterfeit \$20 bill to buy cigarettes.

The cops came to his car, guns drawn, and pulled him out and put him in handcuffs. He was then walked to the police car across the street. He did not resist arrest. Whether or not Chauvin proceeded because he knew Floyd is irrelevant. What he knew was that Floyd was a Black man — and did not deserve life.

How anyone with eyes or a conscience could not see this for what it was, a white terrorist lynching, is complicit in the crime. It is outrageous. *Black lives do matter.*

Malik Miah is a retired aviation mechanic, union and antiracist activist. He is an advisory editor of Against the Current.



Artist and activist Tom Keough memorialized George Floyd, and added names of Black and Brown men and women also murdered by the police.

Four Cops Fired

Some 24 hours later, the mayor of Minneapolis said the four murdering cops were fired from the police force. None were immediately arrested or charged with murder. That night mass street protests demanding “No Justice, No peace” ensued.

The family demanded arrests of the killer cops. The County District Attorney ((DA) incredibly said it was likely that “more evidence” would show no crime was committed. Laws in the United States allow cops to assert they are doing their job always in fear, to avoid arrest and prosecution for murder or police violence.

Extreme anger rose in Minneapolis and the next-door city of St Paul, the state capital. Blacks and other residents demanded, “No Justice, No Peace” and “Black Lives Matter.” Some violence did occur, including the burning of the 3rd police precinct where the four cops worked, even as the police pushed back.

Two more days of mass protest led the same DA to reverse course and announce a charge of third-degree murder and manslaughter for one cop, Chauvin. The other three remained at home until finally charged June 3 with “aiding and abetting murder.”

On May 30, the new progressive Minnesota Attorney General, Keith Ellison, took overall charge of the case. He upgraded the charge against Chauvin to second-degree murder and charged the other three killers. Ellison was the first Muslim elected to Congress, prior to being elected attorney general.

Blood and Violence on their Hands

Blood and street destruction are on the hands of the cops and the criminal justice system. Even when a cop is fired and

charged for the crime of murder, the “justice” system is tilted to let him off.

The Minnesota National Guard, city police and state troopers applied maximum force to push out democratic protesters in Minneapolis and St Paul on May 29. Curfews in Minnesota and other states were also imposed. The authorities’ aggressive tactics included indiscriminate shooting of teargas canisters and rubber bullets at peaceful protesters and reporters.

Some of the properties burned were well-known community centers and popular sites. Significantly, infiltrators were present including white nationalist provocateurs, promoted by the dark web and other social media, elements who heard the dog whistle coming from the White House and Justice Department seeking to use the Floyd murder to advance their anti-Black and anti-progressive agenda.

So-called police “unions” (which actually operate like a criminal cartel to protect

thuggish violent actions by police) routinely defend the cops' criminal actions and attacks community activists as "anti-cop."

Two Americas

Justice for George Floyd is a central demand for national protests. But the underlying reason is the inequalities rooted in a capitalist system based on systemic discrimination. The multiracial demonstrators have raised this issue of the pandemic of racism that has no solution under the current system of national oppression of African Americans.

Blacks, who are 13% of the U.S. population, make up nearly 50% of deaths by cops and suffer mass incarceration. Many liberals see the issue as "excessive" police use of force; Blacks know otherwise. We live in two Americas — one white majority, one Black minority

Why is this important? Too many whites in the modern day still refuse to understand that democracy is not real unless all peoples are treated as equals and respected as humans.

The concept of "Two Americas" is a recognition that Blacks, Latinos, Asians and indigenous peoples as well as immigrants (legal and undocumented) were never included by the white male Founding Fathers as "citizens." Every fight for social change leads white *status quo* forces to organize counter legal and extralegal actions seeking to reverse those gains.

The white-led backlash after the first Black president, Barack Obama, put the white supremacist, Donald Trump, in the White House. Any illusions that a colorblind America was on the horizon were quickly shattered. It is why a vast majority of African Americans see the 2020 presidential election as life-threatening.

Whites continue to see most things in racial terms even as they deny doing so. It's why a liberal white woman in Central Park, New York City, recently played the "race call" in telling the police by 911 that an "African American man was threatening her)" (he's a birdwatcher) because he asked her to leash her dog.

Ahmad Aubery, a Black man jogging in Georgia, is murdered by three white vigilantes believing that they as white citizens could do so. Breonna Taylor, an essential worker emergency medical technician, is killed by plainclothes cops bursting into her apartment in Louisville, Kentucky.

The only person arrested for attempted murder was her boyfriend, who grabbed his legally registered gun to shoot at the intruders who did not identify themselves.

Dual Pandemics

How to fight the twin pandemics of coronavirus and racism inequalities?

The health crisis is much simpler to

combat than racism. Social distancing and wearing masks works until a vaccine or cocktail is created. Racism of 400 years requires a change of the capitalist system, and enacting laws to enforce equality.

Most Black street protesters wore masks because of the coronavirus. Blacks have disproportionately high numbers of cases and deaths. Most Trump MAGA supporters did not care.

The majority white public generally tries to avoid honestly discussing U.S. history. Racism is seen as a Black people issue, something not taught in schools.

Seeing the protests in Minnesota, New York, Los Angeles, Louisville and dozens of other cities show them demanding more than justice for George Floyd. The white nationalist in chief, President Donald Trump, urged violence against protesters.

He invoked a racist comment from the white Miami police chief in 1977 saying "that when the looting starts, the shooting starts." He added that he would use "vicious dogs" against Black rebellions.

Trump did not condemn the killer cops and failing justice system. He asked his Justice Department to blame violence on "left wing agitators" and said he'd declare — without evidence, or legal authority to do so — the antifascist group "antifa" a terrorist organization, while not naming a single white supremacist organization or the armed vigilantes that have murdered innocent Blacks and Jews.

Antifa has responded to these groups' actions, as in the violent racist invasion of Charlottesville. (It is a violation of U.S. law to label a group "terrorist" because you disagree with it. Crimes are based on illegal actions, not speech or goals.)

History of Revolt

The United States was founded on mass disobedience and alleged violation of unjust laws. The most famous was the December, 1773 Boston Tea Party, anti-tax protest.

Slave revolts and runaways, however, were illegal before and after U.S. independence. Labor strikes were infiltrated and attacked by employers' agents (Pinkertons) and cops. Strikes were declared "illegal" until victory was won.

Without civil disobedience and struggle against corrupt rulers and police, no progress can be made.

What has been most positive about the current explosions is that young whites and other minorities joined with African Americans. A true multiracial coalition emerged where many have stood up to the police and demanded justice.

The difficult forging of unity with oppressed people is necessary to launch mass revolutionary movements for fundamental change. African Americans are an oppressed national minority without full citi-

zenship — deserving self-determination.

Marx and Engels made this analysis about oppressed peoples in the 19th century. Elaborated on by the Russian revolutionary leaders Lenin and Trotsky, it remains valid today:

"No nation can be free if it oppresses other nations." (Friedrich Engels)

"The nation that oppresses another nation forges its own chains." (Karl Marx)

"Right of self-determination for all nations included within the bounds of the state." (Article 9, Program of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, 1903)

Martin Luther King Jr., the most prominent leader of the mass civil rights movement in the 1960s and advocate of nonviolent protest:

"We adopt the means of nonviolence because our end is a community at peace with itself. We will try to persuade with our words, but if our words fail, we will try to persuade with our acts."

King also said, "Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever. The yearning for freedom eventually manifests itself."

In 1967 speech, the "Other America," King said about "riots:"

"In the final analysis, a riot is the language of the unheard. And what is it that America has failed to hear?"

A Minneapolis Black Lives Matter leader put it clearly: the police force needs to be disinvested and resources put into the Black, brown and native peoples communities.

The occupying force should be dissolved, replaced by community control with strong regulations that the new police force must live in the community they patrol and be accountable to that same community.

But on June 1 Donald Trump held a Rose Garden gathering of white mainly male staffers to threaten the invocation of the rarely used Insurrection Act of 1807. He said if the governors do not "dominate" protesters with force he would do so by sending in the armed forces.

His reality show of the presidency was orchestrated for the cameras. He spoke to his white nationalist supporters and the FOX news media. He issued his claim of being a "Law and Order" president, then walked to a nearby famous church where he waved a Bible (upside-down) for the cameras, and left. Peaceful and legal protesters had been cleared away by massive teargassing and police assault.

The president can invoke the Insurrection Act only if requested by a state's governor. The law was written specifically to prevent dictatorial actions by the president; Trump's threat is in violation of the law. Since then leading military figures have openly denounced the threat. Meanwhile the marches continue.

No Justice! No Peace! ■

Coronavirus, Occupied Kashmir, and India

Authoritarianism & Lockdown Time

By Mona Bhan & Purnima Bose

PANDEMICS GENERATE THEIR own vocabularies, and the “novel coronavirus” is no exception. In the United States the vocabulary of COVID-19 of “sheltering-in-place” and “lockdowns” resonates with Cold War era anxieties about nuclear war and more recent fears about gun violence.

In India the context involves growing Hindu majoritarianism materialized in a national-security state intent on demonizing Muslims and stripping them of citizenship. It is also a state determined to crush Kashmiri aspirations to sovereignty.

On March 24, 2020 Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a lockdown of 21 days for India’s 1.3 billion population as a critical public health intervention to strengthen India’s “war” against COVID-19. Giving four hours notice before the order would go into effect, Modi’s abrupt decision to “ban” Indians from leaving their homes, and to “put every state, every district, every lane, every village” “under lockdown,” bore striking parallels with his earlier crisis management measures, which have garnered considerable criticism across international print and media outlets.¹

Among them are Modi’s perilous policy of demonetization (e.g. pulling more than 50% of the country’s currency out of circulation) and the attendant decimation of the Indian economy at the greatest cost to the poor and marginal, along with the abrogation of Kashmir’s quasi-autonomous status, which has intensified Indian military repression of Kashmiri Muslims and legally sanctioned India’s Hindu settler colonial project in the region. What might seem like Modi’s thoughtless or sudden string of decisions over the past seven years since his ascent to India’s prime ministership have moved India closer to the reality of an authoritarian *Hindu Rashtra* [Hindu Nation] — one crisis at a time.

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We perceive authoritarianism through its spatial effects — the *shrinking* of space for free speech, activism, and public dissent; the *retreat* of unionizing and labor protests; and the *expansion* of carceral spaces through prisons, detention centers, and policing and surveillance infrastructure.

But so too is time marked under authoritarianism. Our essay explores how the Indian state manipulates three simultaneous and competing notions of time to popularize and naturalize Hindu majoritarianism: *authoritarian time* (compressed historical time), *Hindu nationalist time* (elongated mythic sacred time), and *Kashmiri time* (militarized lockdown time).

“Efficient” Compression of Time

As suggested by the brief period between when Modi first announced a COVID-19 lockdown and its implementation a mere four hours later, authoritarian time is compressed time. Authoritarian time does not allow for a lag between decree and implementation. It eschews the time needed for democratic deliberation, which is perceived as an impediment to efficient governance, or worse still, as a threat to the social and political order.

Under the guise of crises, authoritarian governments can compress time, manipulating it in ways to render decisions that are long in the making seem like spur-of-the-moment measures taken to protect the public interest.

In India, Hindu zealots have attempted to rid India’s body politic of Muslims through pogroms, massacres, detentions and public lynchings. They have been encouraged by several political parties which have manufactured socio-political and economic crises over the years.

In the last seven years in particular, each crisis has demanded an exceptional response that upends democratic time, which is by virtue of its process and character, slow and deliberate. In its place, we have the compressed time of a crisis legitimizing quick and sudden decisions. The compression of time becomes an expression of dictatorial agency and sovereign power.

When Modi placed India in a complete lockdown, he brought the entire country to a halt, snatching away people’s fundamental

rights to secure food, a livelihood, medicine and healthcare. He criminalized those who were unable to comply with his orders.

Deprived of daily wages in the metropolitan cities they helped build, migrant workers were forced to walk hundreds of miles to reach their homes in the many villages and towns across India. Devastating images of hungry and broken migrants revealed the disproportionate burden of Modi’s dictatorial will on the country’s most vulnerable populations.

Since the big Indian lockdown — ostensibly meant to protect human life — hunger, thirst, sickness, and road and train accidents have brutally killed hundreds of migrant workers.

Manipulating Mythic Time

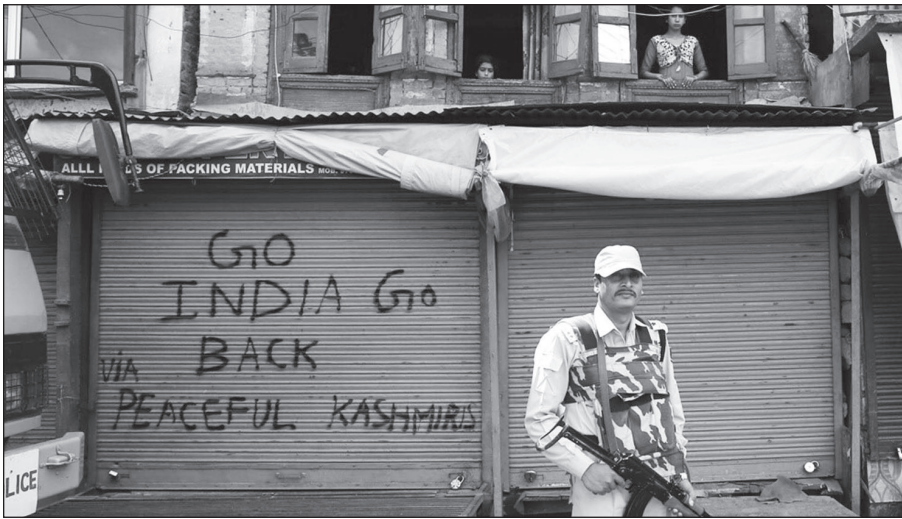
Insofar as the *compression* of historical time occurs against the *elongation* of mythic sacred time, a fundamental contradiction informs Modi’s exercise of power.

Modi belongs to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), whose socio-political vision is inspired by its parent organization, the Hindu militant group, the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS). Since its inception almost a century ago, the RSS has demonized Muslims and Christians in India as bloodthirsty invaders and rapists.

Like fascist movements in general, the RSS’s temporal orientation is toward a mythic distant past. Their members look with nostalgia to an era represented in the Hindu epic the *Ramayana*, which dates to 1400 BCE. That epic ends with the restoration of Ram’s throne and a kingdom kept in line through bodily surveillance. Female chastity, as represented in the fate of Sita, Ram’s wife, is exalted even though it comes at the expense of her life.

For members of the RSS, governance modeled on Ram’s rule (“*Ram Rajya*,” in popular parlance) is highly desirable. Such a government is based ostensibly on the Hindu virtues of honesty and morality led by a revered king in the mold of the God Ram.

Indeed, Prime Minister Modi explicitly invoked the *Ramayana* in his appeal to Indians to think of the COVID-19 lockdown as a “*Lakshman Rekha*.” He warned them that a “single step outside” their homes could “bring a dangerous pandemic like



India's lockdown has expanded the scale of police and military operations against Kashmiri civilians.

Corona inside.”² His choice of vocabulary referenced the famous scene in the epic in which Sita defies her brother-in-law's orders to stay indoors, and consequently is abducted by the demon Ravana for her intransigence.

With one phrase, Modi simultaneously injected a sectarian note in the discourse of public health and managed to reinforce patriarchal norms that restrict women to their homes. Predictably, following the Prime Minister's lockdown order, DD National, India's state-owned television station, began broadcasting reruns of the serial adaptation of the *Ramayana*, contributing to the effort of making Hinduism even more ubiquitous.³

The television serial's first run in 1987-1988, according to media scholar Arvind Rajagopal, “violated a decades-old taboo on religious partisanship, and Hindu nationalists made the most of the opportunity. What resulted was perhaps the largest campaign in post-Independence times, irrevocably changing the complexion of Indian politics. The telecast of a religious epic to popular acclaim created the sense of a nation coming together, seeming to confirm the idea of a Hindu awakening.”⁴

In 1992, when a Hindu mob destroyed the Babri Masjid, a 13th century mosque rumored to have been built on Ram's birthplace, many of the religious fanatics were dressed like characters from the televised *Ramayana*.⁵ Today Modi and his Minister of Home Affairs Amit Shah are sometimes respectively described in the idiom of the epic as Ram and his brother Lakshman.⁶

In Modi's and the BJP's vision of *Ram Rajya*, Muslims are the perpetual outsiders who must come to terms with their new-found status as India's non-citizens. In 2019, the BJP government passed two parliamentary acts, the National Register of Citizens and the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which could render two million of India's 200 million Muslims stateless.⁷

Apart from its constitutional provisions, *Ram Rajya* is also instituted through strict cultural sanctions, which include among other things proscriptions against beef eating. Muslims are now routinely lynched publicly by self-appointed *gau rakshaks*, protectors of Hinduism's sacred cows.

Cow protection is a constitutive aspect of patriarchal authority and a defining feature of a robust Hindu state. Both of these, Hindu ideologues believe, are critical to India's transformation into a *Ram Rajya*.⁸

Modi's lockdown order in March 2020 appears engineered to break the massive sit-in protests against CAA, which started in early December 2019. Then hundreds of Muslim women from the Shaheen Bagh locality of North Delhi defiantly took over the streets, emphatically opposing the prime minister's persistent attempts to portray them as victims of Muslim patriarchy.

Even the brutality of an anti-Muslim pogrom that killed at least 53 people and injured hundreds of others in Delhi, in February 2020 during President Donald Trump's visit, failed to end the longest protest in India's history.

But in March 2020, after Modi announced a ban on public gatherings, hundreds of police in riot gear forced protestors to empty the streets, destroying their tents and defacing their posters and billboards.

In addition, the police detained and jailed many protestors. The lockdown served as a *lakshman rekha* — meant to contain the unruly bodies of Muslim women who had dared to challenge a tyrant.

At the same time, the lines of surveillance were drawn even closer to home for many Indians when the government made it mandatory to download a COVID-19 contact-tracing mobile application, called *Aarogya Setu*. That name evokes the Hindu philosophical tradition of yoga.

“*Aarogya Setu*” in Sanskrit means a bridge to health (or freedom from disease). For

many critics, the app is a “sophisticated surveillance system,” which can be retooled for targeted discrimination by monitoring, regulating, and containing the movement of some groups more than others, and forcibly quarantining unwanted social elements.⁹

The Sanskrit-Hindu naming of a health-surveillance app advances the BJP's overall mission to portray India as an entrepreneurial mix of Hindu modernity and ancient Vedic wisdom. In the middle of the lockdown, during one of his television and radio addresses, *Mann ki Baat*, Modi reminded India's youth of the perils of forgetting India's “strengths and glorious traditions.” Modi urged them to return to *Ayurvedic* practices, popular among some Hindus, to strengthen their immunity against the virus.

Scapegoating Muslims

The Hinduization of the vocabulary of COVID-19 is also evident in the scapegoating of Muslims as vectors of infection for the virus and the creation of terms such as “corona jihad,” “bio jihad,” and “thook jihad (spit jihad).”¹⁰

Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai explains that “One of the key features of anti-Muslim sentiment in India for quite a long time has been the idea that Muslims themselves are a kind of infection in the body politic. So there's a kind of affinity between this long-standing image and the new anxieties surrounding coronavirus.”¹¹

An Islamic convention held in mid March 2020, which had previously been authorized by the Indian government, provided a convenient origin story among police and senior BJP officials for the spread of the pandemic.

Some 8000 members of the *Tablighi Jamaat*, including several hundred people from abroad, gathered in Delhi for their annual conference. When it emerged that the virus had taken root among attendees, the ruling BJP moved swiftly to quarantine members and their contacts in 15 states. A cash reward was even offered for people to report information on suspected conference goers.¹²

Although the ruling party had also authorized other large religious gatherings, BJP political rallies, and conferences in this period, it singled out the *Tablighi Jamaat* as a source of infection. Notwithstanding the pathetically low rates of testing for the virus, *Tablighi Jamaat* conference goers were administered the test and results announced in the government's daily briefings, giving the impression that Muslims were the source for the majority of infections.

As economist Saugato Datta points out, “This is basically sampling bias: Since people from this one cluster have been tested at very high rates, and overall testing is low, it is hardly surprising that a large proportion of overall positives is attributed to this clus-

ter.”¹³

Sampling bias thus provided false evidence for BJP and government officials to make irresponsible and incendiary pronouncements, claiming the existence of an “Islamic conspiracy” determined to enact “corona terrorism.”¹⁴ Senior BJP officials accused members of the *Tablighi Jamaat* of committing a “Talibani crime,” which consisted of launching its membership as “human bombs” in “the guise of coronavirus patients.”¹⁵ Some party members even called for *Tablighi Jamaat* leaders to be shot and hanged as punishment.¹⁶

In a now familiar routine, social media enthusiastically began spreading hatred; vile hashtags such as “#biojihad,” “#coronajihad,” and “#TablighiJamaatVirus” began to proliferate on twitter. This was augmented by the circulation of the usual bogus doctored footage of Muslims purporting to spit and sneeze on others in order to spread the virus.¹⁷

The Islamophobic social media barrage was accompanied by physical attacks on Muslims rumored to have attended the *Tablighi Jamaat* Convention, by social and consumer boycotts of Muslim merchants, and by violence directed against Muslims attempting to deliver food aid.

Kashmir: Militarized Lockdown Time

Since Prime Minister Modi ordered a lockdown of the entire country, the English-language press has laudably published a significant number of articles critiquing this move as an expression of his authoritarianism. These articles have emphasized his

Ending the Lockdown?

On MAY 31, 2020, THE Indian government announced a phased lifting of the lockdown in spite of the lack of evidence that the COVID-19 infection rate had been flattened.

As ATC goes to press in mid June, India has climbed from 7th to 4th place since then in the world rankings for the number of Covid cases. As of June 12, it has averaged 10,000 new daily cases for eight straight days, resulting in over 310,760 diagnosed infections.

The rapid rates of infection illustrate how the big lockdown was less a public health measure than an exercise in Modi’s authoritarian power. Implemented with minimal planning, particularly to prevent infection among India’s most precarious workforce, migrant workers, the government also neglected to improve or expand India’s health infrastructure during the lockdown. Rather than *Ram Rajya*, governance by ghoulish decrees better describes India under Modi. ■

exploitation of the pandemic to further marginalize and rid the country of Muslims.

In their critiques, Indian commentators link Modi’s lockdown to the BJP’s actions in Kashmir last summer. For them, the BJP’s strategic experiments have perhaps revealed the illiberalism of India’s democracy. Many of these Indians subscribe to what we might call “liberal national time” and track the emergence of Hindu nationalism and the BJP to the 1980s.

However, the history of Hindu authoritarianism in Kashmir is much older. It dates back to 1846 when the British sold Kashmir to Hindu Dogra kings for 7.5 million dollars. In 1947 the Hindu King Hari Singh provisionally acceded the Muslim-majority state of Jammu and Kashmir to India. Since then India has tried all means possible to deny Kashmiris their right to self-determination, granted to them through several United Nations Security Council resolutions.

Kashmiris realized long ago that India’s democratic experiment was from its inception a colossal failure. But the darkest phase of India’s rule in Kashmir was inaugurated on August 5, 2019, when India revoked Kashmir’s semi-autonomous status.

The Indian COVID-19 lockdown was preceded by the longest ever known *military* lockdown and communications blackout in Kashmir. During this period people had no access to telephones or internet. They struggled to buy basic medical supplies and stay connected with their family and friends.

Hundreds of mainstream politicians were imprisoned and thousands of Kashmiris, often young boys, were tortured and illegally detained in prisons across India.

While India restored cellular phones and 2G internet connectivity on January 25, 2020, six months after the beginning of the clampdown, Kashmiris continue to be denied high-speed internet. This makes it difficult for medical professionals in Kashmir to tackle the pandemic.

For Kashmiris, in other words, India’s big lockdown is neither spectacular nor out of the ordinary; nor is it sudden nor immediate. This lockdown too, like the others preceding it, is experienced as a continuum that merges and fuses with previous moments of curfews and shutdowns.

Just as the virus can be superimposed on other preexisting conditions, making some people more vulnerable than others, so too is the COVID-19 lockdown superimposed on the Indian military’s lockdown. As a result Kashmiris are even more at risk of injury and harm. These superimposed lockdowns lose their distinctive characteristics, in part because the regulations and conditions of a military occupation never cease to operate. Their violence too continues unabated.

Kashmiri journalists have tirelessly documented how India’s big lockdown has

expanded the scale of police and military operations against Kashmiri civilians. Umar, Rauf, and Haroon report that the police’s powers have intensified because of the pandemic, with many Kashmiris now being arrested for flouting stay-at-home orders.

The police use a militarized surveillance mechanism to track “Covid Suspects,”¹⁸ while the military has escalated its cordon and search operations in which Indian soldiers drag people out of their homes in routine night raids, destroy their fields, and burn down their houses, rendering many Kashmiri families homeless.¹⁹

Pandemic lockdowns typically construct homes as safe spaces (a debatable proposition), yet under military occupation the home can become a frightening place.

Violence enters the home through the bullets that penetrate its walls, the soldiers who break down its doors, and the bombs that flatten its rooms, maiming and killing those inside. The proclamation of lockdowns and curfews in the name of maintaining law and order becomes one more way for states to enact terror on those who oppose their presence.

How then do we understand a lockdown order issued by the Indian government in the name of public health in a context like Kashmir where the state’s agenda revolves around terrorizing the population rather than protecting it? For Kashmiris, there are no safe spaces under the Indian occupation.

Whether in the streets or in the home, they are targets of state violence manifest in both deliberate acts and apparently accidental ones (such as stray bullets that injure and kill). Such is the character of daily life in a militarized zone with the highest density of troops in the world.

Time in Stasis

Against the backdrop of authoritarian time (compressed historical time) and Hindu nationalist time (elongated mythic sacred time), Kashmiris continue to live in “lockdown time.” Confined to their homes, they experience time as a perpetual present. One day blurs into the next with little to distinguish yesterday from today and from tomorrow.

Lockdown time is time in stasis. Even before the current lockdown, visual representations of time in Kashmir depicted the future as blocked. As cultural critic Deepti Misri points out, Kashmiris experience time as a “listless passage” with “temporal stasis” shaping their daily lives under conditions of military oppression.²⁰

In the current lockdown as the occupying regime has scaled up its violent infrastructure, static time makes it even harder to imagine alternative futures. Yet grounds for optimism remain, existing in the very

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Class Contradictions of the Coronavirus: The Picture in Latin America

By Marc Becker

CLEONICE GONÇALVES WAS one of the first in Latin America to die from the coronavirus pandemic.

Gonçalves was a 63-year-old domestic worker in Leblon, one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Her employer was a wealthy woman who had recently returned from a vacation in Italy, but did not tell Gonçalves that she was infected nor that she was in isolation.

Gonçalves, who had hypertension and diabetes, fell ill and died on March 17.

When the virus began to spread around the world, pundits declaimed that it was no respecter of person, that it infected rich and poor, Black and white, Christian and Muslim alike. As the stories of Gonçalves and others have made readily apparent, however, much like disasters and hunger, the outcome of the coronavirus is not “natural” but the result of political decisions that lay bare the class contradictions in society.

There is much we do not understand about the coronavirus and how it spreads. But it is now readily apparent how the virus *does* discriminate, or rather, how society has been constructed that makes some more susceptible than others to the infection.

Immense and innumerable disparities and vast inequalities mean that the virus disproportionately attacks those in marginalized situations with limited access to resources, which often particularly means people of color.

Response to the virus is often presented as a choice between saving millions of lives or protecting economic growth, but a key question is: saving *whose* lives and protecting *whose* economic interests? As often happens, the costs of such decisions are socialized while the benefits are privatized.

In Latin America, people in the most precarious situations work in the informal economy, and with quarantines in place they lose the ability to survive. But when the

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Street graffiti sums up health care in most of Latin America: “The rich have private doctors while the poor are deprived of doctors.”

ruling class wants to reopen the economy, it is not those workers’ interests that they have in mind. With winners and losers, those with the least amount of means and fewest resources are the ones who pay the greatest cost.

We can learn much about the class contradictions of the coronavirus by observing what is happening in Latin America. That region also embodies a broad range of responses to the virus, and also reflects how those responses are politicized and elicit very different reactions to what are seemingly similar actions.

Domestic Workers

As with Gonçalves in Brazil, many of the domestic workers in Latin America are poor, Black women who work for wealthy families of European descent. Their working arrangements are a legacy of slavery and reflect deep inequalities in society. Much of the initial spread of the virus in Latin America came from wealthy individuals who had traveled to what turned out to be hot spots, such as Italy, Spain and the United States, bringing the infection back to their homes.

Those from privileged backgrounds are better situated to confront the infection, including access to better healthcare and nutrition that made them less susceptible to the virus and the financial ability to shelter at home.

In contrast, their domestic workers who often live on the margins face the choice of potentially becoming infected or not having the funds to pay for food or housing. Due to a lack of proper healthcare or nutrition, these workers have higher incidents of underlying conditions such as hypertension and diabetes that dramatically increased the risks from contracting the virus.

Domestic workers typically have to travel on crowded public transit — sometimes for hours — to reach their jobs. Some employers insist that they move in to ensure they do not become infected elsewhere, even though this means not being with their own families. At the same time, the employers also demand that they go to the markets to shop, increasing their levels of potential exposure.

When workers return home, they face problems of a lack of running water and sanitation. Other family members packed into their small houses often work in the informal sector and have had no choice but to venture out to earn money for food.

Crowded living conditions make physical distancing impossible. All these factors assure the rapid spread of the infection in impoverished neighborhoods.

A report from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) notes that the virus hits domestic workers especially hard because of their limited access to an already tenuous social safety net. Many domestic workers are migrants, or of Indigenous or African descent, which only compounds the discrimination that they face.¹

This impossible situation illustrates the precarious position in which many domestic workers find themselves, with many not earning minimum wage or holding a formal contract that guarantees regular hours. This exposure to abuse and violations of their rights has led some to organize for their rights, including demanding paid leave and

protection for their health and jobs.

African Descent & Indigenous Peoples

Similar to the United States, Brazil suffers from extremely high rates of police killing young Black men, particularly in poor and marginalized neighborhoods, who are never prosecuted. The pandemic only added another level of injustice to this abuse, leading to complaints that — instead of sending desperately needed doctors and nurses — the government sends police to kill them.²

As a reflection of rampant inequalities, one study showed that Blacks in São Paulo, Brazil, are 62% more likely to die from the coronavirus than their white counterparts.³ Similarly, the virus is particularly deadly for Indigenous people as it spreads at an alarming rate through remote areas with little or no access to healthcare.

The coronavirus follows a long history, dating back to the Spanish conquest, of Indigenous communities being decimated by outside diseases. Far-right president Jair Bolsonaro's radical anti-environmentalism has emboldened the actions of loggers, ranchers, and illegal gold miners known as *garimpeiros*.

These unwelcome intruders likely introduced the coronavirus into Indigenous territories. For the Yanomami, one of the largest and best-known Indigenous nations in the Amazon, this is only the most recent epidemic that has included malaria, flu, tuberculosis, and sexually transmitted diseases that have threatened their communities.

Indigenous leaders accused Bolsonaro of intentionally allowing people in their communities to die from COVID-19. This comes on top of the steps that his government has taken to weaken federal agencies that protect their lands in the Amazon.

"I fear genocide, and I want to denounce this to the whole world," Arthur Virgilio Neto, the mayor of Manaus in the heart of the Amazon, declared. "We have here a government that does not care about the lives of Indigenous people. ... It is a crime against humanity that is being practiced here in my state, here in my region."⁴

Survival International, which defends Indigenous communities in voluntary isolation, notes that illegal miners and loggers are exploiting the pandemic as an opportunity to encroach on their territories.

"What's happening to indigenous peoples in Brazil now constitutes nothing less than an all-out, genocidal assault," Survival's Research and Advocacy Director Fiona Watson said. "Countless tribal lands are being invaded, with the backing of a government which wants to completely destroy the country's first peoples and makes no attempt to hide it."⁵

In Colombia, Indigenous communities took matters into their own hands.

Unarmed members of the community defense force *Guardia Indígena* (Indigenous Guard) monitor checkpoints to prevent the virus from reaching their territory.

"There's more control of the pandemic inside our territories than outside," Robert Molina, a coordinator of the Guard for the Regional Indigenous Organization of Cauca (CRIC), said. "But we're worried because supplies and money is [sic] running out."⁶

Other communities fear that the pandemic will exacerbate existing food and water shortages with potentially fatal results.

Often government programs do not reach into their territories, and with social isolation policies in place the problem becomes much more severe. With older people particularly at risk, some groups face a risk of losing their languages and traditional wisdom.

Hundreds of social movement leaders have been killed in recent years in Colombia, and those numbers only continue to rise. It appears that armed groups are taking advantage of the quarantine to carry out violence unimpeded, with Indigenous authorities particularly at risk. The right-wing government of Iván Duque is either unwilling or unable to stem the violence.

The ECLAC report said that the COVID-19 pandemic will make a bad economic situation worse for women, Indigenous people, migrants and people of African descent. Unequal access to potable water, sanitation, healthcare and housing could result in higher rates of infection and death among those populations.

Women would be in a "particularly vulnerable situation" because their work is more often informal with fewer guarantees, leaving them more exposed to the risk of unemployment.⁷ The pandemic has also exacerbated problems with domestic violence.

According to the United Nations, 12 women are killed every day in Latin America because of their gender. Fourteen of the 25 countries with the highest rates of femicide and violence against women in the world are in the region.

Even with these already high rates, those crimes have surged in the face of stay-at-home orders. Reports indicate that with the lockdowns crime rates had fallen — except for violence against women that had surged significantly. In Argentina, femicides reached a ten-year high.⁸

Immigration Scare Tactics

Early on, in appealing to racist sentiments Trump and others in his administration insisted on referring to the coronavirus as the "Wuhan flu" or "China virus." Since most infections in Latin America originated in the United States, logically a parallel xenophobic reaction could similarly refer to it as

the "gringo flu" or "United States virus."

Despite this flow of the virus out of the United States, the Trump administration appears to be using the pandemic as an excuse and mechanism to halt immigration into the country. The administration used a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) order as a pretext to implement a long-standing desire to deny individuals the right of requesting asylum at the border.⁹

Evidence that most new cases in the Mexican border region come from the United States (rather than the reverse) highlights the fact that rather than protecting public health the policy decision was politically motivated.¹⁰

Even more deplorable is the introduction of the virus deeper into Latin America through involuntary deportations. As the coronavirus has spread through crowded immigration detention centers across the United States, those infections are carried back to their home countries when the United States government deports the immigrants.¹¹

The Trump administration's decision to ban travel from Brazil, a close ally whose president Bolsonaro has followed policies similar to those in the United States, only underscores the hypocrisy of his own immigration policies.

Guatemalan president Alejandro Giammattei suspended those deportation flights to his country several times to force the United States to better screen deportees. But under pressure from the Trump administration, he keeps resuming them. Guatemala has the highest infection rate in northern Central America, and a majority of those come from deportees.¹²

Haiti faces a similar if not worse problem, in large part because so many people lack access to potable water and a functioning health care system. At first, Haiti seemed to be spared because it was so isolated.

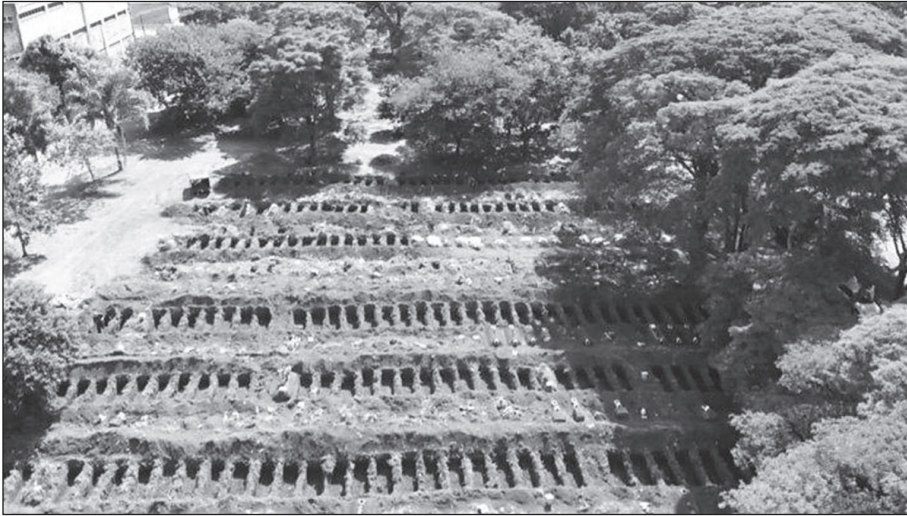
In contrast, the Dominican Republic (which shares the island of Hispaniola) had some of the highest infection rates in the Caribbean because it attracts tourists from around the country.

That situation began to change as now unemployed and undocumented Haitian workers in the Dominican Republic returned home. The deportation of Haitians from the United States only worsened and escalated the situation.

Further harming immigrants, some recently deported people have faced threats and attacks from locals who fear that they will spread the virus and put their communities at risk.

Varied Reactions

At the beginning of the pandemic, some pundits in the United States surmised that it was a seasonal infection that would decline



Like Trump, Bolsonaro dismissed the virus as a fantasy dreamed up to undermine his government. Now Brazil has the second most COVID-19 cases in the world. The cemetery is preparing for another round of deaths.

with the onset of warmer weather. Infection patterns in Latin America should have immediately put to rest that idea, which was based on guesses and assumptions rather than science.

The hot and humid port city of Guayaquil, Ecuador, was an early hotspot in South America. The virus quickly overwhelmed the ability of the health care system to respond after neoliberal policies had slashed its funding. Similarly, cases spiked in Brazil and Chile, even with the onset of the southern summer.

Responses to the coronavirus pandemic have varied widely across the hemisphere. At first, Bolsonaro dismissed news of the virus as a fantasy and “fake news” designed to undermine his government. He complained that any lockdown would destroy the country’s economy. When members of his government contracted the virus, he disregarded it as “*gripezinha*,” a mild flu that was only dangerous to the elderly.

As Brazil quickly became one of the global hot spots, Bolsonaro famously retorted “So what? I’m sorry. What do you want me to do?”¹³

Similar to Trump’s relations with infectious disease expert Anthony Fauci, Bolsonaro also explicitly opposed the recommendations of his own health minister, Luiz Henrique Mandetta, as well as restrictions that state governors imposed, including previous allies of his government.

Openly admitting that his priorities and allegiances placed profits for capitalists over the lives of Brazilians, Bolsonaro declared, “Mandetta’s vision was that of health, of life. Mine is more than life, it includes the economy, jobs.”¹⁴

In April, Bolsonaro fired Mandetta for publicly challenging him on the government’s response and replaced him with the more complacent Nelson Teich, an oncologist,

healthcare entrepreneur and executive who had come from the private sector with no public health experience. Teich has expressed neo-eugenicist ideas about the value of life, based on calculations of profit and loss.¹⁵

Teich lasted less than a month in the position, leaving after opposing Bolsonaro’s decision to allow gyms and beauty parlors to reopen and his advocacy of the use of hydroxychloroquine to fight and prevent COVID-19. Both Bolsonaro and Trump have promoted its use despite no scientific evidence that it is effective. The drug, used to treat malaria and lupus, has potential side effects that include a risk of developing an irregular heartbeat.

Bolsonaro replaced Teich with Eduardo Pazuello, an active-duty Army general with no medical background. That appointment was consistent with Bolsonaro’s moves to name military personnel to administrative positions. Under Pazuello, the health ministry approved the use of hydroxychloroquine to treat COVID-19.

Ironically, a similar response to the pandemic as that of Bolsonaro in Brazil came from Nicaragua’s president Daniel Ortega who famously led the leftist Sandinistas to power in 1979 through a guerrilla insurrection.

As with Bolsonaro, Ortega was also very reticent to issue stay-at-home orders because of their negative economic consequences. He declared that the country would “die if people stopped working.” At the beginning of the pandemic, his vice president and wife, the spiritualist Rosario Murillo, organized large rallies to conquer the virus “with love in the time of COVID-19,” a play on the title of Gabriel García Márquez’s novel *Love in the Time of Cholera*.

Ortega stated that the pandemic was “a sign from God” who was “calling for

changes in the world.” He criticized countries for spending vast sums of money on weapons, and asked rhetorically whether the virus could be combated with “atomic weapons.”¹⁶

Unlike Bolsonaro’s lack of response that resulted in some of the highest infection rates in the world, Nicaragua had the lowest number of cases in Central America. Supporters claim that this low rate is due to highly effective health measures that include border checks to prevent introduction, the training of health workers to prevent local transmission, vigorous contact tracing, and enforced isolation of suspected cases.¹⁷

Media reports have challenged this narrative, claiming that infection rates might be much higher but have either been under-reported or remain hidden for political purposes.¹⁸

Neighboring El Salvador and Honduras also have relatively low infection rates, but those countries’ right-wing authoritarian governments have imposed stringent quarantines with highly punitive and coercive measures that have led to police violence and arrests.

El Salvador’s president Nayib Bukele, in particular, has received international condemnation for his militarized response and human rights abuses, even though he remains highly popular at home. Bukele claimed emergency powers and deployed soldiers to enforce strict quarantine measures, including confinement for violators.

Honduran president Juan Orlando Hernández similarly instituted a state of emergency that approximated martial law. When the government relaxed restrictions, people flooded to the markets to buy food, making physical distancing impossible.

Worse, the government’s neoliberal economic policies had defunded the public health system, leaving it at the point of collapse and unable to respond to such a crisis.¹⁹

As the Latin America Working Group (LAWG) notes, Latin America is particularly vulnerable to the virus “given the epidemiological profile of the population, the precarious healthcare infrastructure, and the large income inequality in the region.” Particularly problematic is when governments have taken advantage of the pandemic to institute repressive and anti-democratic measures, as happened in Honduras and El Salvador.²⁰

Ravages of Neoliberalism

In October 2019, extended and intensive demonstrations against neoliberal economic policies quickly spread across Latin America. While they extended to places such as Colombia that typically have not seen such protest, they were particularly intense in Chile and Ecuador.

The pandemic interrupted those massive

movements and gave those right-wing governments an opportunity to press through with their unpopular policies that particularly hurt the working class.

Ecuador has been particularly hard hit both by the coronavirus pandemic and an economic crisis resulting in the fall of oil prices, one of its main exports.

While six months earlier President Lenín Moreno had backed off from his austerity plans in the face of the protests, in May 2020 he announced a new round of public spending cuts.

Even with the pandemic ravaging the country, thousands took to the streets in protest. Indigenous organizations and trade union organizations complained that low-income workers have received little government aid, while the administration's policies protected the wealthy.

In many ways, Bolivia is a reverse story. On November 10, 2019, a military coup removed the leftist president Evo Morales from power. The right-wing legislator Jeanine Añez proclaimed herself interim president pending new elections that were to be held on May 3 (see Bret Gustafson, "On the Coup in Bolivia," in ATC 204).

In the face of the pandemic, Añez postponed the election to September 6. Morales's Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS, Movement to Socialism) party criticized

that decision, claiming that it was simply an excuse to extend her time in office. The MAS claimed that she was weaponizing the coronavirus as a means to delay elections and extend that agenda.

Añez had already moved well beyond her mandate as interim president to call for new elections as she led Bolivia in a sharp right-wing turn. In a power grab, she harassed and prosecuted her political opponents. Her priority was to restore neoliberalism and bring Bolivia firmly back into the imperial orbit of the United States.

Imperial policies

Following the method of never letting a crisis go to waste, the Trump administration and its allies among the domestic ruling class in Latin America have sought to crush leftist governments in Latin America.

Cuba has long been a leader in providing people-centered preventative health care rather than much more expensive, profit-driven punitive care. A result of effective public health measures was that Cuba has registered fifty times fewer cases of the coronavirus per capita than in the United States.

The Cuban government was not only concerned with the health of its own citizens. Early on, when no other country would allow a cruise ship to dock with

infected passengers, the Cuban government provided it with a berth and facilitated the repatriation of its citizens to their home countries. As it did for Ebola in West Africa and other similar crises, the government sent thousands of doctors around the world to confront the pandemic.²¹

Over the last several years, the Trump administration has convinced right-wing governments in Bolivia, Brazil and Ecuador to evict Cuban doctors that previous left-wing governments had invited to meet the needs of the most vulnerable members of society. Instead of celebrating these international health brigades that provided urgent medical care around the world including Italy, Washington denounced what it claimed to be a system to exploit and enslave the country's doctors.

Rather than embracing Cuba's model, which has kept infections at a relatively low level, the Trump administration threatened to return the country to its list of "state sponsors of terrorism."

Cuba has been an international leader in bio-tech medicine. Early reports indicated that its antiviral drug Interferon Alfa-2B was a promising treatment for COVID-19. Trump proclaimed that he would accept a vaccine regardless of its origins; a true challenge will be if that turns out to be Cuba.

Venezuela provides perhaps a more

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In both the cities and countryside of Brazil's Amazon, COVID-19 ravages the Indigenous population.

extreme example. With the economy crumbling under crushing United States sanctions, right-wing pundits presumed that the coronavirus outbreak would hit the country the hardest and lead to a complete collapse of its socialized health care system. As of this writing, that forecasted implosion has yet to happen.

Instead, refugees who left Venezuela in recent years flooded back in as they lost their possibilities for informal employment in neighboring countries. The government facilitated their return, including providing services at its consulates across South America and chartering flights from the United States and Europe. Ironically, the largest threat to Venezuela was the returnees carrying the virus with them.

Similar to Nicaragua, the Venezuelan government uses border controls and community monitoring to mitigate outbreaks.

rather than punitive measures, it relies on testing, education, and providing wage guarantees, including for informal sector workers. Even in a crisis situation, it is attempting to forward an alternative to the profit-driven health care industry.²²

A Continuing Challenge

COVID-19 presents a serious health challenge. An underlying lesson is that while the wealthy have access to private care, the poor are left to die. As street graffiti proclaims, "the rich have private doctors while the poor are deprived of doctors." The pandemic underscores the importance of a well-funded public health system that offers free, universal health services based on community-focused preventative care.

As the UK-based socialist Carlos Martinez observed, "In the absence of a vaccine or cure, the only way to defeat a viral

epidemic is to drastically reduce contagion, and this is achieved through rigorous testing, contact tracing, isolation of patients, and social distancing for the wider population."²³

An epidemiological analysis in *The Lancet* stated: "What has happened in China shows that quarantine, social distancing, and isolation of infected populations can contain the epidemic. This impact of the COVID-19 response in China is encouraging for the many countries where COVID-19 is beginning to spread."²⁴

"Once it became clear that fighting COVID-19 meant choosing between saving millions of lives or protecting economic growth," Martinez contends, "China came down unambiguously on the side of saving lives." In large part, though, that effective response was not because it is a socialized country but because its centralized system of economic control meant that it can rapidly mobilize its resources.²⁵

As John Riddell observes, the growing privatization of the ownership of the means of production has increased inequality and aggravated class contradictions, but still there are lessons we can learn from China's response.²⁶

The coronavirus presents a serious health challenge. The world before the virus was a deeply unequal place, but the pandemic has made those inequalities much more apparent, not only in the United States but also in Latin America and around the world.

The real problem that multiplies and worsens the impact of the virus are the deeply entrenched systems of human inequality, discrimination, violence and injustice. The pandemic exposes the fault lines of those deeply entrenched systems of exploitation and inequality. ■

Coronavirus, Occupied Kashmir, and India — continued from page 6

real possibility of an autocratic, occupying state brought down by a virus and its own hubris. The hope for dignity and democracy in Kashmir and India might very well depend on it. ■

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An Interview with Irv Weissman Science, Politics and the Pandemic

DR. IRV WEISSMAN is director of Stanford University's Institute of Stem Cell Biology and Regenerative Medicine, and previously head of the Immunology Program and the Cancer Center. A cancer and stem cell biologist/immunologist, he is widely recognized as a stem cell pioneer — the first scientist to purify blood-forming stem cells in both mice and humans.

Suzi Weissman interviewed her brother Irv Weissman April 19, 2020 for her "Beneath the Surface" program on KPFK radio in Los Angeles. Many thanks to Meleiza Figueroa for transcribing the recording. It is abridged here for space reasons.

Suzi Weissman: *I'm very pleased to have my brother Dr. Irv Weissman with us today. Today we're going to talk about COVID-19 or the coronavirus pandemic. Maybe we can just begin with you explaining to our audience just what it is about this virus that is so devastating to us. Just walk us through it.*

Irv Weissman: This is one of those viruses that came from infecting both people and infecting animals — so that eventually the genetic alterations that could happen in an animal, say a bat, could make it more and more dangerous not necessarily for the bat, but for humans. The transmission to humans follows essentially the path of many other very dangerous viruses, going all the way back to AIDS and HIV, or Ebola, or Zika, or Bolivian hemorrhagic fever.

A whole bunch of these are viruses that affect us. And to get right to the immunology of it and why it affects us, and why it affects mainly older people, is that our immune systems have evolved — that is, in all of the animal species — before trains, planes and cars.

When you get a vaccination, or you have measles, or mumps, you have cells called lymphocytes — two categories, T and B cells — which not only respond to get rid of the infection, the microbe, bacteria, viral, fungal and so on, but they divide a thousandfold. They live as long as you do, as memory cells. And each of them is specific for the particular infection that drove them from the beginning.

That's how you get immunity to the microbes you encounter. By the time you reach puberty, whether you were a mouse



Dr. Irv Weissman, director of Stanford University's Institute of Stem Cell Biology and Regenerative Medicine.

or a human or a monkey, you'd encountered most of them. So you now were prepared, if you didn't migrate, to have immune cells that immediately and effectively respond to get rid of the infection.

It turns out that the blood-forming stem cells that you have when you are young have to make lots of new lymphocytes to cover the new infections you're going to have. And we and others have found over the last 15 years that in mice — and we showed, also in humans — the blood-forming stem cells that take over well after puberty make more of the kinds of immune cells that are fast responders.

Trains, Planes and Cars

They can get rid of the infection, not by knowing that it was this or that virus, or this or that bacteria; they have general mechanisms to eat and kill. The body's

stem cells when you age, that take over the blood-forming system, mainly make those cells. Before trains, planes and cars you didn't have to make a bunch of new lymphocytes for newly emerging infections.

You're not making a bunch of new lymphocytes that one in 100 or one in 1000 could encounter a new virus. We haven't worked out the mechanism for that, because as I said, it's well after puberty that this other system takes place.

If you believe in evolution and not divine intervention, then you'd have to say, "well, why would you be selected to live long lives if you're no longer reproductively competent and competitive?" Because what gets passed on as traits to the next generation is through reproduction only. I'll just leave that as a puzzle for the audience.

SW: *Without being too technical, can you talk about what might make the coronavirus so*

much more devastating to deal with than the other groups of viruses we've had? Is the study of this virus going to open up new pathways (as happened with AIDS)?

IW: Of course an epidemic, and a funding agency response to the epidemic, and the desire of scientists to do relevant things, has led to a whole group of new people into the science of virology and virus infections.

Every university I know was doing it. So you can thank people like Tony Fauci for saying, "we need to have more science for this infection."

The virus itself appears to first inhabit mainly the nasal passages in the back of what's called the pharynx: the throat and then going down. It then really becomes lethal when it spreads to the substance of the lungs.

It goes not only through the tubes that lead to the lungs, but also to the air passages — tiny places where oxygen gets exchanged and CO₂ gets out. It hits those cells with a vengeance, and it starts the infection.

The immune response that comes to it is massive because you have so many different parts of the lungs immediately infected. The lymphocytes that come through, back and forth in the body, stop in the lungs and start their immune response. They're trying each on their own to wall off the infection — that's called inflammation — and make killer cells that would either kill the infected cells (T lymphocytes) or eat the infected cells; that's the scavenger macrophages in the body.

With this infection, for some reason, not everybody makes a rapid immune response. But this virus spreads so fast, and infects cells so fast, that you can get overwhelmed. And when you're overwhelmed, the main place that you're infected — I mean almost exclusively — is where you breathe. And we know that you can die if you can't breathe.

SW: You're saying that it's the human immune response that exacerbates the bad work of the virus?

IW: It does, but in the absence of the immune response, I'll bet you the virus would still be bad. It would be bad in a different way. But it is safe to say that if you're young and you have lots of new lymphocytes being made, you'll make an immune response that is effective.

Safety, Testing and Vaccines

Here's two points: one, you want to know everybody who's infected, because before they get the symptoms, and some never get symptoms, they'll pass it on with high efficiency. And you've heard that you've got to wash your hands, you have to wash surfaces, you have to wear a mask. That's critical.

If you stay by yourself, like each of us

are now, you won't get infected. The only way you could get infected is if you do something stupid, like go meet somebody at the door who was infected and has not protected.

Second, you have to be able to test for the genetic material of the virus. Luckily, all of molecular biology has made very, very fast and reproducible ways to make tests.

SW: The testing problem has been right at the core of what's made this so awful, the U.S. response in particular. Why is it such a huge problem?

IW: I'm told that the CDC chose to develop a test that didn't work well. They depended on it for a long time, and for some reason the federal government said, "All testing has to go through the CDC."

That's like saying all steaks in the world have to come from Great Falls, Montana. It's hard not to see the problem — the federal government did not take charge, like the Obama administration took charge of the Ebola epidemic. It did not anticipate what you need to do.

The first thing you need to do, on a global scale, or at least within the whole country, is to make sure that you can get testing fast, and that it's accurate. Not only that it gets out fast, but that you get the results fast.

Anything you are going to do — isolation or freeing people up from isolation — means you have to be able to take a sample from their nose, and know in an hour or two if they are infected. Then you track their contacts and their contacts' contacts. Yet even today — despite the promises — we don't have enough testing.

But we also need to know whether this is like other infections: If you recover, and you make antibodies as well as activated killer T cells, can you consider yourself safe from a reinfection? And while in 99% of the time you could assume that to be so, we do have the experience of HIV, whose target is those T cells that control developing an immune response.

That's why we don't have an HIV/AIDS vaccine now, thirty-some years after the epidemic began. We still don't have a vaccine. But we're lucky that we have good responses to it.

SW: Do you think that it's going to be that difficult to get a vaccine for this one too?

IW: The science in making vaccines — to influenza or coronaviruses — is well established. There's no evidence yet that this coronavirus destroys the T cells, like HIV destroys some of the T cells. And so the waiting time depends on two things.

First, when the epidemic became known and the agent became known, and you could get the agent to make vaccines, that was the moment that not one company, not one agency, but many, should have been developing vaccines and been richly subsidized to

do it. You need to anticipate that vaccines will work.

Second, which we're finding out anecdotally, is: If you have recovered from the infection — you had a bad infection, but you've recovered — do you make antibodies and immunity T cells that will prevent you from being reinfected? You can do that through case studies, but you'd better be organized to do that. From the very beginning, tracking people — not only who got the infection and by testing had the virus that caused the infection, but also seeing if they were making antibodies — an immune response.

Then you would ask, "What's the likelihood as they interact with people who are freshly infected, that they get reinfected?" You can also test to make sure the virus is all gone. Those are the key factors.

Back before antibiotics, the way we could treat people with these kinds of bacterial or viral infections was to isolate the antibodies from the serum or the plasma of those who'd had them.

There's a quick way to purify the antibodies so any other virus or infection the person had doesn't get passed on. You collect them all together, you make what's called an IVIG, a convalescent immunoglobulin of the type that can neutralize the virus on contact and/or help neutralize or get rid of the infected cells. So you want that.

They may be an immediate therapeutic, which is being tested. It used to work before; people used to immunize horses and then collect lots of antibody. Then they found out that when you put horse serum in people, people would make an immune response against horse serum, because horses are genetically different. The response could be as bad as the disease.

But working with people, and the variation in our immunoglobins, our antibodies, is such that probably you could safely transfer them, and that will be critical to know. Those people who are immune — if you know that through testing — can go back to work.

Herd Immunity

SW: We've seen different responses around the world, and in some cases, they said that distancing or isolating in place isn't necessary because herd immunity will take care of that. Can you explain what "herd immunity" is?

IW: It's easy for anybody to understand. If only 10% of the people get infected, 90% are infectable. At 50%, it's still too many infectable. If 80% or 90% of the people are infected and have a sufficient immune response, you're getting to where the herd, all of us, don't have enough susceptible people that you would have the chain of infection to uninfected, to uninfected, to uninfected. That's herd immunity.

We're not going to get to herd immunity

with this infection because too many people die. And our social isolation is good. So that means we need a vaccine. We need convalescent antibodies for those who got infected without the vaccine. Those should have been going full force from the beginning.

Suppose you make a vaccine. You think you're making it just like you always made vaccines, and now you put into somebody of a certain age and you find out there was a mistake in producing the vaccine. Another virus crept along that causes a disease. Or you made a vaccine and part of it mimics your own body structure so that you might make an antibody or a T cell against the virus, but you also destroy your own organ that has a mimic of that.

Therefore we have developed for every drug, every antibody, every vaccine, FDA pre-clinical proof of principle, pre-clinical testing in animals as close to humans as you can, and then test in a cohort or a first group of healthy volunteers.

Can you vaccinate them? Can you show an immune response? Can you follow them long enough to know that the immune response won't kill them eventually, that you haven't introduced something that you didn't think, or couldn't think, of ahead of time?

That's why you have to start with pre-clinical testing and toxicity tests. You have to know if the vaccine is safe for everybody. If that works out then there are phase I, II, and III clinical trials, which can be accelerated.

So, when Tony Fauci says a year to a year and a half, he's saying that even with the number of companies or agencies that are starting out, that's the minimum.

Politics Costs Lives

SW: *I wanted to go into the political side of it, because one thing that this virus has done is to show just how fragile our public health infrastructure is — or what's left of it is — combined with misinformation, disinformation and concentration on only "opening up the economy" at any cost. Some right-wing congresspeople are saying that it's worth it restarting the economy even if that means old people die. Are we capable in this country of effectively, first of all, testing and tracing, and then devising what needs to be done next?*

IW: In addition to masks, gloves, washing, ventilators: for those already sick or preventing them from getting sick, you dare not open up social interactions, for business or any other reason, if you have 50% or more still infectable.

If you're going to say, "I'm going to try to save as many lives as possible," then you would say "social isolation will flatten the curve." And we'll save many lives with social isolation and what people need to get through it. But you'll never reach herd immunity with infection alone. You can flatten the curve and keep people who aren't



infected from being infected.

That means you're now dependent on a vaccine to do what herd immunity would do: stimulate your lymphocytes, get immune memory that lasts your life, and then you should be safe. That's what the game is, and any other business or economic or personal financial interest has to take a back seat to it. Unfortunately, as you know, it's not taking a back seat.

I am afraid we are going to be in a situation where lives are lost that don't need to be lost, for reasons that are not medical or scientific or public health. It's just money.

If you enact a policy that puts everybody at risk who hasn't been infected or vaccinated, that's just stupid.

We understand the reasons. There are people in our country, as we know throughout our history, who have valued economic rights over individual human rights. And we have people of particular religions who want to impose their religions on everybody.

Today, we know that a human fetal lung, put into an immunodeficient mouse, can be infected with this virus. We need a way to test and understand the disease. But Trump, Pence, Mulvaney, and Grogan — against the advice of HHS, the Deputy Director of HHS, the head of NIH, and Tony Fauci — imposed a ban on any research using human fetal tissue using federal funds.

You could appeal it, because experiments are in progress — but they said in addition to that ban, no trainee who receives federal funds under any circumstance can work with human fetal tissue. But in our labs in academia we don't have workers. We have graduate students and post-docs and medical students and undergraduates who work.

This was the most effective way for them to enforce their own personal, political, moral, religious beliefs on the rest of the country. As you know, Texas can't receive money related to the epidemic to fund abortions. Politics places their own personal beliefs above the lives of others. I find that objectionable. I wrote a *USA Today* op-ed on it, and a much longer article in a scientific journal.

A couple of weeks ago Amy Goldstein at the *Washington Post* wrote a really powerful article on just this issue. Fifteen state attorney generals have gone to the federal government to try to stop the ban, to see if the use of the human fetal tissues can accelerate

our development of vaccines, of drugs, and of ways to slow down or halt this epidemic.

SW: *Does that mean that if you can't use federal funds, once again, as with AIDS research, private venture capital could be used? Or is there some sort of ban on that too?*

IW: Private venture capital is money to make money. Don't blame them, that's how business goes. But we in the state of California had an initiative in 2004 called Proposition 71, because of the federal bans for fetal or embryonic tissue. It was for state-funded research where those tissues could be used.

If you follow many of the discoveries we made — even though I told you how long it takes to develop a drug — many of them are now in late-phase clinical trials. And the state of California has done more clinical trials with its small budget in Proposition 71 than the federal government has done in the same field.

The funding for research and therapy development that has been underway since the voters approved Prop 71 in 2004 is coming to an end, so there is an initiative — the California Stem Cell Research, Treatments and Cures Initiative of 2020 on the ballot in November — to renew the funding. Luckily, you can vote for the re-do, so if there's any other reason to mail in your ballot safely, it's to renew Proposition 71. Even if the country stays on a course that values things like money or religion or political advantage over the lives of people, at least in California we can continue along the road that we began in order to try to save lives for that small window of opportunity they have for therapy.

Every time a bureaucratic process slows down — because they want to have a committee do this or a committee do that, let's meet next month — there are people who will die because their window of opportunity to be saved by those drugs and those therapies are not available.

I was at a meeting of the Vatican Science Council in 2006, where I said, "Your ban on fetal tissue and embryonic tissue to do biomedical research, your ban on telling people about condoms and safe use sex, has clearly slowed down the advancement of medicine." And from my point of view — just mine, because I know some people will be pissed off when I say this — you're responsible for the lives lost because you imposed a ban, or a slow-down, or a delay.

We want to have an efficient, people-oriented way of doing research, and we accept, even in the so-called Communist countries, businesses springing up one way or another to deliver it. I'm not saying anything that we throw away everything, I'm saying that we do things we don't need to do to slow them down from getting to whatever mechanism you have eventually to distribute. ■

Innovation for What?

What We Need to Combat Pandemics

By Clifford D. Conner

AS I WRITE, it is Day 77 of our lockdown regimen here in New York City, which has been called “the epicenter” of the pandemic. We are experiencing an event of historic significance.

As the author of a forthcoming book on the problems of American science and technology,¹ I was asked to address a webinar on the general topic of innovation. At the present moment, the potential innovations on everyone’s mind are in the sphere of medical science — innovative therapies and prophylactics that can save us from this dreadful disease.

The answer to the question posed by the title — “Innovation for What?”—seems obvious in this case: We want innovations that will produce a cure and prevention.

But in fact the answer is much less straightforward. The ultimate goal of coronavirus research must go beyond cures and prevention.

As the epidemiologist Rob Wallace has passionately declared, “Clearly humanity shouldn’t start reacting to a pandemic when it’s already underway. Let’s stop the outbreaks we can’t handle from emerging in the first place.”²

The innovations we need to stop pandemics from emerging in the first place are not to be found in the biomedical sciences but in the social sciences. The only solutions that will allow our long-term survival will require substantial, meaningful, social change in the way we produce and distribute and consume goods and services.

Yes, we do need a COVID-19 vaccine, and the sooner the better, but in the long term that is simply a technocratic quick fix, the proverbial band-aid on a plague.

And Now There Are Three

The phrase “anthropogenic existential threat” has become an all-too-familiar meme in recent years. First there was the Cold War threat of thermonuclear Armageddon.

One medium-sized exchange of hydrogen bombs between the Soviet Union and the United States could well have destroyed all human life on Earth. Cold War policymakers

Clifford D. Conner previously authored A People’s History of Science: Miners, Midwives, and Low Mechanicks and Jean Paul Marat: Tribune of the French Revolution.

tried to convince us that that was an exaggeration, but it wasn’t.

More recently, we became aware that global warming could soon make the Earth uninhabitable for human beings. This pandemic adds a third item to the list of ways humanity may cause its own demise.

The perfect storm of a deadly viral strain would be one that maximizes four traits: one that can infect humans, lay low and hide itself for a while, jump easily from victim to victim, and kill a large proportion of those infected.

The odds of such a virus emerging in nature are infinitesimally small, but modern industrial agriculture has created conditions — to use a familiar phrase — that now make it a matter of not *if* but *when*.

Although viruses are natural phenomena, pandemics are nonetheless anthropogenic. The danger of ever more threatening viral contagions is a result of human activity. Gigantic poultry and livestock farms all over the world are the essential breeding grounds for novel viral infections.

The huge factory farms are a consequence of innovations in agricultural organization that first arose in the American South after World War II. Multinational poultry and livestock producers and processors such as the notorious Tyson Foods then spread them overseas, to poorer countries where even inadequate U.S. regulation wouldn’t apply and lower wages could be paid.

The spread of these factory farms was relentless. From before World War II to the postwar period, the average number of chickens in a commercial flock grew from fewer than a hundred to tens of thousands.

Rob Wallace, declared in a book published four years ago that “much of the world’s economic productivity . . . stands to suffer catastrophically if a deadly pandemic were to erupt, for instance, in southern China.”³

Wallace wasn’t peering into a crystal ball, he was demonstrating the predictive power of a science heretofore underappreciated by the general public and policymakers alike.

With regard to anthropogenic threats, if human beings cause them, it stands to reason that we should be able to innovate our way out of them. A tremendous amount of human creativity has gone toward solving

the problem of global warming. And yet it keeps getting worse and worse. *Why is that?*

The answer is that the innovations have been limited to technological fixes that ignore the social context at the root of the problem. The fossil fuel industries are trillion-dollar industries, and the people who own them don’t want to lose their trillion-dollar investments. If they can protect their trillion-dollar investments by spending a few million dollars to buy political influence, that is what they will do.

If no innovation to solve *that* problem can be found, all the wind farms and solar panels and coal scrubbers in the world will not save the planet. There is a perfect analogy between that and why the long-term threat the pandemic presents cannot be averted by vaccines and antiviral medicines alone.

Revenge of the Poultry

Most educated consumers are aware of the extreme cruelty to the chickens that gigantic egg production factories perpetrate.

Victimized birds are silently avenging themselves for the suffering inflicted upon them by spawning plagues to torment the human race. Cramped together by the tens of thousands in warehouses all over the globe, the hens’ unhealthy bodies create a huge pool of opportunities for novel viruses to come forth, mutate, and multiply.

Poultry farms are the most notorious incubators of viral disease, but not the only culprits. Others are hog farms and other livestock farms and, increasingly, the incorporation of wild animals, including bats, into agribusiness operations. And because these bountiful breeding grounds are often located in close proximity to population centers, the transmission of their viruses to humans is increasingly likely.

The preponderance of evidence suggests that the mutant coronavirus causing COVID-19 first appeared in bats. That in no way absolves agribusiness of responsibility. The chain of causation is complex, and whether wild or farmed bats were the original source, Big Food created the underlying social and ecological conditions for the pandemic’s emergence.⁴

Despite what grocery store labels claim, the farmed animals are not “natural.” The

chickens, ducks, and geese on the poultry farms, for example, are genetic monocultures — domesticated birds that have been selectively bred to a high degree of uniformity. Their resulting lack of diversity makes the nearly genetically identical fowl all the more susceptible to raging contagion.

If one bird is vulnerable to a particular disease, they're all vulnerable to it. At the first signs of illness, the factory farms pump their flocks full of antibiotic and antiviral drugs, prompting natural selection to create "superbug" pathogens with ever-higher resistance to the pharmaceuticals.

The bottom line is that industrial poultry and livestock farms pose a clear and present danger to all of us. COVID-19 is expected to return in waves, and beyond that, the probability of novel global pandemics is all too real.

Everyone — even those who have never been moved to protest the cruelty to the chickens — should recognize that it is in every human being's self-interest to demand fundamental innovations in the current factory farm system. We do of course need large-scale agriculture, but not in the dangerous, for-profit way it is practiced today.

Why the Health Care System Was Underprepared

The exposure in March and April of this year of inadequate medical supplies and hospital capacity throughout the United States revealed a crisis four decades in the making. The shortage of ventilators and ICU beds was not a matter of poor planning — it wasn't even a matter of criminal negligence.

It was the culmination of a conscious policy decision committed with intent. Intentional downsizing of hospital emergency capacity began 40 years ago during the Reagan administration, and has continued to the present — and now we're paying the price.

Historian Mike Davis describes the consequences of "years of profit-driven cutbacks of in-patient capacity":

"According to the American Hospital Association, the number of in-patient hospital beds declined by an extraordinary 39 percent between 1981 and 1999. . . . management's goal of 90 percent occupancy meant that hospitals no longer had the capacity to absorb patient influx during epidemics and medical emergencies."⁵

The upshot was that by March of this year, American hospitals could provide only 65,000 ICU beds, while the government's own experts warned that the need for intensive care during a pandemic could amount to literally millions of patients.

Davis also exposed the roots of another critical deficiency in pandemic preparedness. Big Pharma has underinvested in antibiotic and antiviral research because it offers less



Researchers working to develop a coronavirus vaccine in Brazil — a center of the pandemic in Latin America.

profit potential. "Of the eighteen largest pharmaceutical companies, fifteen have total-ly abandoned the field," he explains.

Drugs like Viagra and opioid painkillers like OxyContin are where the profits are, not defending against new diseases. Furthermore, "a universal vaccine for influenza — that is to say, a vaccine that targets the immutable parts of the virus's surface proteins — has been a possibility for decades but never profitable enough to be a priority."⁶

That is a powerful example of what motivates and guides and directs the pursuit of innovation today in the United States and most of the world. If human needs were the motivation, of course a universal flu vaccine would be a primary pursuit. But when the motivation is profit maximization for pharmaceutical corporations, it is not. A universal vaccine would undermine the profitability of the seasonal flu vaccines Big Pharma produces every year.

So the primary answer to the question "Innovation for What?" is "Innovation is for profit." In our current socioeconomic system, it cannot be otherwise. But the COVID-19 crisis is beginning to raise public awareness that it doesn't have to be this way.

Innovation should be, and could be, for the benefit of humanity — to eliminate poverty, hunger, disease and environmental devastation. And not to multiply the horrors of war, but to eliminate war.

What Have We Learned?

The rapid collapse of large segments of the economy we are currently witnessing demonstrates the instability and the unreliability of our current system of production, distribution and consumption of goods and

services.

Will the United States and global economies recover when the pandemic subsides? They might, but there are no guarantees.

Optimists predict a "V-shaped" recovery fueled by so-called "pent-up demand," while pessimists fear that we may have permanently entered into what they call a "doom loop."

One thing is certain: Small businesses will fail in large numbers, meaning the fruits of recovery will go to large corporate interests, further exacerbating the already intolerable level of economic inequality.

Here's the multi-trillion-dollar question: Even if the economy does survive this initial COVID-19 shock, will it be able to prepare for future waves and future novel pathogens? It seems unlikely, because the precautionary measures that have to be taken go against the grain of corporate profitability.

As we have seen, corporate hospitals simply do not want to provide the excess capacity necessary to prepare for major emergencies. I suspect that the system's limitations have only begun to be exposed.

A desperately needed innovation that the general public has recently become more aware of is universal health care insurance. The idea of "Medicare For All" suddenly seems much more reasonable as millions of workers lost their health insurance when they were laid off from their jobs.

Yet another revelation is that many of the workers who have been designated as "essential workers" — and required to risk their lives to do their jobs — are among the lowest-paid members of our society: shelf-stockers in grocery stores, slaughterhouse workers, and nursing-home caregivers, among many others.

We need an innovation in our production system to turn that upside down: Those who are most essential to the functioning of the economy, and take the greatest risks, should be rewarded proportionately to the value of what they do for all of us.

At the same time, some members of society have been exposed as not essential: CEOs, financiers, hedge fund managers and venture capitalists, to name a few. Their main concern during the meltdown has been to protect their own investments.

The invocation of the Defense Production Act to produce ventilators, PPEs and other necessary medical supplies demonstrates that *the investor class is not essential to production*. The investor class is essential to the functioning of the current economic system, but not to the one we need for survival.

The way to cut the investor class out of the picture is by *nationalizing the major industries* — not only the medical equipment manufacturers, but Big Pharma and the insurance industry as well.

In our present system, the investor class organizes them, controls them, and becomes fabulously wealthy by taking all the profits for themselves. But we don't need them to organize the production system. And then the profits could be returned to where they belong — to us — to the general public, to the society as a whole.

What We Need Now

While we're nationalizing the medical corporations, why stop there? Let's nationalize the fossil fuels industry and begin to solve the climate change problem.

Let's nationalize the military-industrial complex so we can solve the nuclear holocaust danger. Imagine how much money that would save!

When people ask "How do you propose to pay for all the social benefits you're talking about?" — there's the answer.

The trillions of dollars now spent in the so-called defense budget would pay for all of it with a lot left over. And I say "so-called defense budget" because anyone who believes all that money is really necessary to defend us against enemies should consider how the trillions spent on nuclear weapons is protecting us against a few thousand Al Qaeda militants with their improvised explosive devices.

Finally, the crisis has revealed how completely wrongheaded Ronald Reagan was when he declared, "Big government can't solve your problems. Big government is the problem." The hypocrisy of the opposition to "big government" is most clearly revealed in the outrageously inflated military budget.

The politicians who slash education and health care and regulatory agency budgets are the same ones who provide massive funding to the Pentagon year in and year

out. And there is the paradox in spades: The United States is governed by people who claim to hate big government while sustaining the biggest, most powerful government the world has ever known.

So after decades of austerity and cutbacks to essential services, what did we see when the economy began to shut down in the face of the pandemic? It wasn't private enterprise that came up with trillions of dollars to ease the suffering of tens of millions of newly unemployed workers. It could only come from "big government."

One thing this crisis has already demonstrated beyond question is that we absolutely need *some kind of big government*. The size and complexity of our society is such that it cannot exist without a high degree of organization, and that requires governance.

Unfortunately, the big government we actually have is not the big government we need. That was most obvious in the federal government's pathetic response to the current crisis. Among other things, it actively undermined the science we needed to fight the pandemic. And way too much of their multi-trillion-dollar bailout wound up in the wrong pockets.

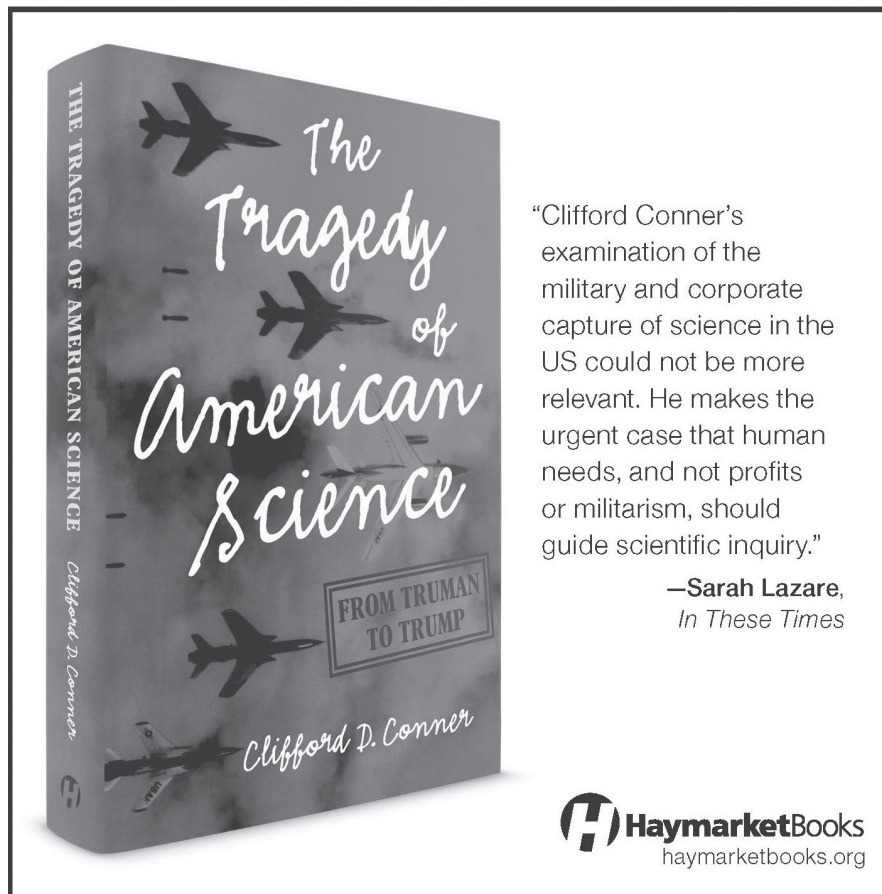
Here, then, is the bottom line with regard to necessary innovations. The innovation we need most is a complete transformation of our socio-political-economic system. That requires two preliminary innovations:

First, the key industries that we depend on have to be nationalized.

Second, the government we need to operate those nationalized industries has to be remade from the bottom up. It is not simply a matter of getting rid of the pathologically corrupt clowns who are running the United States now.

The entire system of government that is controlled by corporate financial power — including the military-industrial complex — has to be replaced by one that's controlled by us — "We the People." If we are to survive the three existential dangers facing us, we really have no choice.

I urge you to never forget that American policy today is controlled by a remarkably small number of billionaires. For every one of them, there are a hundred thousand of us. "We are many; they are few" — and therein lies our hope for the future. ■



"Clifford Conner's examination of the military and corporate capture of science in the US could not be more relevant. He makes the urgent case that human needs, and not profits or militarism, should guide scientific inquiry."

—Sarah Lazare,
In These Times

 HaymarketBooks
haymarketbooks.org

Notes

1. Clifford D. Conner, *The Tragedy of American Science: From Truman to Trump*, Haymarket Books, July 2020.
2. Rob Wallace, "Coronavirus: Agribusiness Breeds Another Deadly Epidemic," *Climate & Capitalism*, January 29, 2020.
3. Rob Wallace, *Big Farms Make Big Flu*.
4. See: Rob Wallace, Alex Liebman, Luis Fernando Chaves, and Roderick Wallace, "COVID-19 and Circuits of Capital," *Monthly Review*, March 27, 2020.
5. Mike Davis, "In a Plague Year," *Jacobin*, March 14, 2020.
6. Davis, "In a Plague Year."

An Interview with Rabab Abdulhadi Knowledge for Justice, Part II

THE FIRST PART of this discussion with Professor Rabab Abdulhadi appeared in our previous issue, ATC 206 (May-June 2020). Dr. Abdulhadi developed the Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diasporas Studies (AMED) program in the College of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University 13 years ago. In Part I she outlined how she built the program and came under attack from right-wing Zionists.

Most recently she received the Georgina Smith Award by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) for excellence in scholarship, teaching and commitment to collaborating with a diverse group of academic, labor and community organizations. AAUP notes "Her leadership transcends the division between scholarship and activism that encumbers traditional university life."

Dr. Abdulhadi thanks Dianne Feeley, David Finkel, Katherine Hanna, Saliem Shehadeh and Jaime Veve for their helpful feedback.

Dianne Feeley: *You've tweeted that the protest against the police killing of George Floyd was an Intifada. How do the cases of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor resonate with the situation Palestinians face with the constant threat of Israeli violence?*

Rabab Abdulhadi: Let me begin by honoring George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor and all those who fell as victims of racial violence and colonial terror in the United States, Palestine and elsewhere. Rest in power/rest in peace.

Today we invoke three names but the sad reality is that there are so many countless others who are killed every single day in the streets, in their homes, on the way to work, school, at checkpoints — for simply being Black, for being Palestinian, for being Indigenous, for being who they are, and for not having the means to defend themselves against such powerful structural racism.

There is no justification for these murders. We have to acknowledge the racial order of white supremacy and anti-Blackness that has been central to the creation of this U.S. settler-colonial state on the lands and over the bodies of Indigenous communities and kidnapped and enslaved Africans, and exploitation of other people of color and poor and marginalized communities.

I tweeted that this was an Intifada both because I see this as a social movement for transformation, to express my solidarity and to disrupt the dominant narrative by the media and politicians.

It was quite horrifying to hear liberal politicians echo Trump's condemnation of Black liberation protests by calling them "looting." That sounded a lot like labeling Palestinians and other Indigenous and anti-colonial movements as "terrorist" in order to smear them and dismiss their legitimate struggle.

It was such a vindication last week when the Center for Constitutional Rights retweeted a post exposing salaries of the New York City Police Department, stating "we are ready to discuss that 'looting' everyone was talking about."

When I think of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor, I also think of Palestinians whose lives were extinguished in a similar manner, such as the medic Razan al-Najjar in Gaza killed by the Israeli military; the autistic Palestinian Jerusalemite Iyad Halak who was killed by Israeli police in Jerusalem despite repeated calls to stop by his caregiver, Warda Abu Hadid; or Mohammad Abu Khadir who was kidnapped, forced to drink kerosene and burned alive.

Palestinians have rightly expressed their solidarity with Black communities and the Black freedom struggle in multiple ways. In the U.S. diaspora, we stood back in respect, humility, deference and unconditional support for Black leadership. This is why I changed my profile picture to that of the mural Palestinian artist Taqi Spateen drew to honor George Floyd on the Apartheid wall.

I do not intend to conflate the struggles for Black and Palestinian liberation. There are historical and contextual nuances to which we must pay close attention, to avoid the impulse to provide quick conclusions. Each struggle deserves its own serious and careful consideration.

Settler States

I do see parallels between the founding of the U.S. settler colonial nation-state and Israel, South Africa and other settler states. One difference that we observe today is the wider acceptance by U.S. liberals of the condemnation of white supremacy — I am hoping that this criticism is here to stay and not

a passing phenomenon provoked by white guilt. However, we do not see the same thing among Israeli or liberal Zionists.

We are still confronted, though, with arguments that define American racism, anti-Blackness, erasure of Indigenous life and the lives of communities of color, the poor and working people as a passing phenomenon. Along similar lines, Israel is also presented by its liberal supporters, *The New York Times* being a case in point, as a great exceptional case of the triumph over the evils of Nazism instead of the settler-colonial project that its founders sought.

I see a real problem in defining Palestinians as the "victims of the victims" of Holocaust Survivors. I argue that *both* groups were victimized by Zionist expansionist and colonialist zeal. After the United States and European countries closed their doors and imposed quotas, Holocaust survivors had nowhere to go, but to Palestine, which was colonized by British rule and was still "open." However, not all Holocaust survivors could escape with their lives and make it to Palestine.

The United States and Israel (and other repressive regimes) are engaged in police and military collaboration that is quite extensive and multidimensional. Jewish Voice for Peace has developed "The Deadly Exchange," a comprehensive campaign against it. JVP is bringing up the connection between police brutality and the demand to defend and abolish the police.

Making the point are Palestinian muralist Taqi Sbateen, who painted George Floyd (RIP) on the Apartheid wall, and other Palestinian artists. Palestinian shop owner Abu Mayyaleh also denounced the Minneapolis Police and provided the movement with video footage of the killing of Floyd. This is a very clear example of how justice is indivisible.

Normalizing Islamophobia

DF: *You have made a case that university officials seek to undermine the AMED program for three reasons: the program is intersectional, it encourages critical thinking, and its subject matter is anti-racism, anti-colonialism.*

RA: SFSU seems to have a problem with AMED Studies. I believe that in addition to advancing a radical approach to academic



The original design for the Palestinian mural contained the key of return that symbolizes the Nakba and dispossession and Handala, a cartoon character created by Palestinian artist Naji Al-Ali.

programming, what we do undermines SFSU's efforts to attract right-wing and Zionist donors at a time when the university administration has become overtly corporatized, departing from its social justice mission.

The campus has become deeply implicated in a "business model," placing dollars and cents ahead of the educational objectives to which we are committed. As I said in Part I, a university official specifically told me that classes should not be opened beyond registered students, implying only those who pay tuition. We, on the other hand, are committed to opening our classroom to our communities inspired by the spirit of '68.

Our students deserve to learn from, and engage with, elders who are our living archives. By making it possible to preserve oral histories and pass experiences along to younger generations who are leading today's movements, opening our classrooms directly contributes to producing knowledge for justice. There is a fundamental contradiction between our objectives and those of the administration. For example, while claiming the opposite, the university's definition of "student success" focuses on graduation rates for the purpose of submitting such statistics to Federal and State authorities to secure funding.

Please do not get me wrong. I have no problem with receiving public funds. On the contrary I believe that it is our right to demand and expect full funding for our public educational institutions.

The rush to prove "student success" for the sake of funding, though, compromises the mission of public education and prioritizes money over the pedagogical approach-

es that continue to attract students from marginalized communities and attracted me to SFSU in the first place.

This spring the Administration cancelled two Palestine-specific courses that I planned for fall 2020 under the pretext of budget concerns in the age of COVID-19. The courses are "The Palestinian Mural and the Art of Resistance" and "Comparative Border Studies: Palestine and Mexico."

Resorting to familiar management budget excuses, administrators were using a bureaucratic trick to undermine AMED Studies. The history of AMED and these two particular courses, however, betrays a different reality. The truth of the matter is that administrators have had a political problem with the Palestinian Mural course since day one.

When we first proposed the course in 2016, the Associate Dean had a problem with the specificity of the topic and sought to make it about all murals. I argued that it was not our place as AMED to offer courses on murals representing the struggles of other communities, such as Malcolm X, Cesar Chavez, Indigenous, India, or Pacific Islanders, but that such courses should be housed in the other departments of the College of Ethnic Studies.

Although the Palestinian Mural course was approved, every time we try to offer it, the Administration comes up with one obstacle or another, including advancing deadlines for student enrollment, to "hiding" it before we even had a chance to make it available to students in all 23 CSU campuses, to exerting pressure on me to remove Palestine from the title.

The instructor is Dr. Susan Greene,

the anti-Zionist Jewish feminist artist who co-painted the Palestinian Mural with the Palestinian artist Dr. Fayege Oweis. As I said in Part I, Zionist groups launched a campaign to prevent the mural from seeing the light and the SFSU administration sided with the Zionist argument.

The university administration simply would not allow the mural to move forward until we agreed to remove two symbols. The first was the key of return that simultaneously symbolizes the *Nakba* and dispossession and the determination of Palestinian refugees to return to the lands and homes of their ancestors. The second was *Handala*, the cartoon character created by Palestinian artist Naji Al-Ali, who was assassinated in London by the Israeli Mossad.

Zionists in SFBA and beyond claimed, and SFSU administration agreed, that *Handala* was antisemitic, a false charge employed to silence scholarship, teaching and advocacy for justice in/for Palestine. The Palestinian Mural course assumes added significance today as we see murals of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and Rayshad Brooks join murals of other Black and Palestinian martyrs.

"Comparative Border Studies: Palestine and Mexico," likewise demonstrates our consistent commitment to offer critical analysis in a comparative, nuanced and thoughtful manner. This course too came under attack by both right-wing groups as well as the university administration. "Hiding" the courses was therefore less an exercise of balancing the books and more the Administration's concerted efforts to slowly kill AMED's radical content and disappear the program.

Policing AMED and Campus Activism

Policing course content has not been the only measure SFSU administration has taken. Collusion between management and the pro-Israel right wing is quite extensive. As I explained in Part I, everything to do with Palestine, campus activism, or the study of Arab and Muslim communities from a justice-centered perspective, has been targeted.

The university has tried to control my social media presence as well as that of AMED Studies. For example, in response to a Zionist campaign, the Dean and the Provost threatened me with disciplinary measures if I refused to remove a post from the AMED Facebook page in which a student group, Jews Against Zionism (JAZ) criticized former university president Wong for welcoming Zionists to our campus (see image in Part I).

Last fall, I was all of a sudden blocked from administering the facebook page of Race and Resistance Studies. I have no idea why this happened. However, this followed

new attacks by AMCHA and other Zionist groups against my social media activism.

The new campaign targeted me for sharing the banner of NYC Queers Against Israeli Apartheid and for my livestreaming of the 50th anniversary commemoration of the Stonewall uprising. On June 30, 2019, I joined the Queer Liberation March, that was characteristically anti-corporate. Organizers also refused to let police march in their uniforms, given the alarming police brutality against queer and Black youth.

Our contingent included Queers Against Apartheid, Jewish Voice for Peace, Queers against Islamophobia, trans Jewish youth and several Arab and Palestinian queer groups. This reflected my longtime alignment with our Jewish sisters and brothers who see justice for Palestine as part of their commitment to the indivisibility of justice.

By contrast, right-wing Zionist groups again falsely accused me of antisemitism labeling my posts as “hateful” and demanded that CSU punish me for these posts. The posts I shared pronounced “Palestine is a queer issue”; “Zionism equals racism”; “We should divest”; and BDS.

Pro-Israel groups have attacked me for raising the question of “who owns Jewishness?” for insisting that there are multiple Jewish narratives and multiple Jewish experiences. Zionist groups who were monitoring my social media called on the State of California to discipline and punish me for advocating for what I believed in. Apparently, SFSU administration took it upon itself to police me for refusing to fall in line and acquiesce to Zionist attempts to silence me.

Holding SFSU Accountable

DF: *You're pursuing legal action against the SFSU administration for its failure to adequately protect you from threats and harassment by right-wing Zionist groups. Can you fill us in on the background to this, what you're asking for, and why did you decide to sue?*

RA: Suing the university administration has never been my first choice. My choice has been to pour all our efforts to build the AMED studies program and institutionalize it at SFSU and other U.S. colleges and universities and around the world.

However, when you're confronting a powerful institution with the resources of the state behind it, you don't really get to choose the timing, modalities or more broadly repression. You either accept the discrimination you face and experience constant humiliation and further marginalization, or fight it.

Having been victimized by a frivolous but dangerous lawsuit brought against me and the university by the right-wing and pro-Israeli Lawfare Project, I am in a position to speak directly to the detrimental impact of such litigation. It took almost 18 months of



In solidarity with Black Lives Matter, Palestinian muralist Taqi Sbateen painted George Floyd (RIP) on the Apartheid wall

my life to fight this lawsuit and the constant attacks by the pro-Israeli lobby.

It's perhaps instructive to add that SFSU did not make it easy for me to defend myself or defeat the Lawfare lawsuit, which sought and failed to establish their false allegations that Palestine-centered scholarship, pedagogy and advocacy caused a climate of antisemitism on campus.

SFSU excluded me from a meeting of the defendants, did not hire a lawyer to represent me for a month, provided Lawfare with over 400 pages of my correspondence with An-Najah National University (in which Lawfare hoped to but failed to find a smoking gun), and sought to undermine my defense over the grievance the union filed on my behalf a few months earlier.

In effect, the university was implementing what the Lawfare Executive Director Brooke Goldstein had promised a year earlier, namely to inflict “massive punishment” and “exact a heavy price” from critics of Israel. We refused to accept these false allegations, submit to the right wing agenda or allow SFSU to settle the lawsuit.

Instead, we built an international movement to confront Lawfare's extensive resources, including a mega law firm with almost 1,000 lawyers. After a year and a half, on October 30, 2018 we defeated them when U.S. District Court William Orrick III dismissed the lawsuit with prejudice.

We actually thought that winning this lawsuit and saving the university's reputation from such false allegations, and California taxpayers from wasting thousands of dollars, would motivate the SFSU administration to thank us and reinstate AMED faculty lines. Unfortunately, SFSU was not predisposed to supporting me or AMED nor stop its attempt to criminalize campus activism and student organizing.

As a result, what Lawfare was unable

to accomplish through the front door, i.e. Federal court, they achieved through the back door. Despite vowing to defeat these false accusations and the use of a major law firm with massive resources, SFSU settled behind closed doors, violating transparency and accountability that are required for a public institution.

In an October 2019 meeting, Palestinian, Arab, Muslim and Indigenous students handed the new SFSU President Lynn Mahoney GUPS's statement opposing the Lawfare settlement and asked her to get back to them with her response since the settlement was reached during her predecessor. Students report that they have still not heard back.

Hate Speech as “Free Speech”

The university has failed to protect us, as the first grievance the union filed on my behalf claimed. We argued that the inaction and refusal of the administration to firmly and appropriately respond to and reject several racist and Islamophobic incidents have been interpreted as an invitation to further attacks. The administration claimed they must allow free speech on campus.

The SFSU administration (and CSU Chancellor's office) did not investigate the wanted-style Islamophobic posters that falsely accused me, my colleagues and my students of “JewHatred,” labelling us as terrorists. On four different occasions these were posted on our campus presumably by persons affiliated with David Horowitz and the Canary Mission.

We expected an affirmation of our partnership agreement with An-Najah University, the only agreement SFSU has with any Arab or Muslim institution. The university could have used the opportunity to make a statement against Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism, highlighting the role of education and transnational collaboration in fostering

mutual understanding and respect among people in general and peace and justice in the region in particular.

Instead SFSU institutional leadership selected to issue a minimalist and lackluster statement in which SFSU and the CSU distanced themselves from the agreement.

I have received several death threats in writing, on my office voicemail (saying, "Muslims will die, Jews will live"), as well as mail to my office in the College of Ethnic Studies. This was not the only occasion on which SFSU failed to act appropriately. In fact, the administration has exhibited a pattern of negligence, discrimination, bias and failure to protect us and other marginalized communities.

Another glaring example of the disparate treatment SFSU systematically applies can be seen in the example of the Nazi student my students discovered in my Palestine class. According to my students of color who discovered it and shared it with the student paper reporters, this person had at least 250 posts on their Facebook page and Instagram account with racist posts against Arab Muslims, Palestinians, Blacks, Jews, women and refugees. The white supremacist sites contained Nazi symbols, calls for violence and featured a cannon pointed at arriving Syrian refugees.

Rather than defending us, the Administration's response was to call in the Nazi student and offer counseling, as the student paper *The Golden Gate Xpress* revealed. This was a far cry from how SFSU treated a Palestinian student in 2013 who faced disproportional allegations made by an Israel lobby campaign led by AMCHA of being a threat to Israelis on campus.

Former SFSU President Wong stated in an email to Israel sympathizers that SFSU investigated the Palestinian student in cooperation with UPD, the FBI and the Israeli consulate. The Palestinian student was also reprimanded by the university, forced to resign as president of the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS), ordered to stay off campus, and banned from taking in-person courses for two semesters.

None of these actions were applied by the Administration to the Nazi student in my Palestine class. Building upon their smear campaigns and misrepresentations, the same Israel lobby group, Campus Watch, twisted my interview with SFSU student paper to make it sound as if I was tolerant of Nazism and antisemitism.

The negligent manner with which SFSU has responded to years of smearing, intimidation, bullying and outright death threats against me, my colleagues and my students reflects such collusion with Zionist interests. SFSU administrators seem to be no longer satisfied with the earlier reliance of maintaining a neutral stand *vis-a-vis* the out-

side attacks against us but are now directly engaging in regular doses of "microaggressions," underhandedness and the use of the bureaucracy to marginalize AMED studies.

As a result, SFSU has forced me to seek legal remedies as a last resort after I failed to convince the administration to do the right thing and fulfill its commitments to me and our communities.

Let me also stress that AMED Studies does not only meet the needs of our communities. Equally important, AMED aligns with the needs of California and the U.S. education system, as the letter by the California Scholars for Academic Freedom pointed out when advocating for a California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum that was inclusive of Arab American Studies.

I had insisted that these commitments be spelled out in the job contract the university offered me as part of the institutional record. Our faculty union has issued several statements, urging the university administration to refrain from harassing me and my students. These were unanimously adopted by the San Francisco Labor Council and subsequently lent support for the Palestine Study Abroad program.



The union, California Faculty Association, filed three labor grievances on my behalf. A coalition of community advocates, organized as Friends of AMED, and as AMED communities of justice sent letters, petitions, emails and protests, and demanded individual and collective meetings with SFSU leadership and persistently challenged SFSU's collusion with Israel lobby groups.

There is a growing list of "conduct"-based policies that SFSU administrators have instituted following student and labor protests. Such tactics allow administrators to discipline those who rock the boat and demand their rights, defining them as troublemakers. Our faculty union's plate is overflowing with grievances filed on behalf of professors and lecturers that demonstrate how toxic the campus climate has become.

I think that it's important to keep in mind that all false charges brought against me were proven to be without merit. Unfortunately, SFSU is deeply colluding with these groups since it has become so beholden to right-wing donors. As a result, SFSU has engaged in a systematic pattern of

discrimination, racism and retaliation against the AMED program and me.

I have reached out multiple times to university administrators from the Deans, the Provost, to the President and other top administrators, pleading with them to let our program see the light and to stop the harassment and discrimination, to no avail.

For 12 years prior to filing the lawsuits in 2018, I worked to advance our social justice mission and drive the point home that free speech and academic freedom are as essential to Arab, Muslim and Palestinian communities as they are to all other marginalized communities.

The university's response has been to offer lip service at best but not take any meaningful steps. At worst, it has been harassment, discrimination and retaliation. Suing the university is my way of holding them accountable. My demands in the lawsuit are for transparency and accountability, building AMED Studies, and respecting my faculty and human rights.

Complaints on Top of Complaints

DF: *I understand that you were invited for the second year in a row to keynote the Students for Justice in Palestine national conference at UCLA and to lecture on Islamophobia. How was your talk received? Was there a Zionist backlash?*

RA: I was very honored to have been asked to speak at the national conference of Students for Justice in Palestine two years in a row.

The Houston 2018 conference was very significant, not only because it was held not far from the border where Trump is trying to build another Apartheid wall using the same Israeli company that build the one in Palestine. Further, it allowed me to discuss the Teaching Palestine project where I focused on 100 years of colonialism and resistance.

The 2019 conference at UCLA was quite besieged by pro-Israel groups after they failed to compel UCLA to cancel it. Pro-Israel groups gathered outside UCLA with Israeli flags and signs supporting the erasure of Palestine.

When we were about to leave at the end of the conference, we were accosted by young men who spoke to us in broken Arabic. I have to tell you, that took me back to very unpleasant memories of trying to cross Israeli checkpoints during the *Aqsa Intifada* and growing up under the Israeli occupation

With regards to my guest lecture on Islamophobia, I was invited to speak in Professor Kyeyoung Park's UCLA course on race and racism. As I started to speak, I was interrupted by the student who now claims that I silenced her. In my response I insisted that Zionists don't own Jewishness and

drew parallels between Zionism and white supremacy. This infuriated the pro-Israel network who once again launched a new campaign to silence me and my colleagues.

My lecture was fully streamed live and continues to be available on Facebook; it clearly vindicates me against another round of false accusations. But here is another rude awakening — where Zionists are concerned the truth is never relevant. They have continued bullying us — with their noise pollution hoping to drown our voices or yell loud enough for the lies to appear as truths.

StandWithUs, a major player in the pro-Israel right-wing network, has filed a complaint against UCLA mostly over the NSJP conference and my Islamophobia lecture. Just like the Lawfare lawsuits, the allegations are baseless. UCLA conducted a full investigation before concluding that I did not harass the student nor engage in antisemitic hate speech, but was exercising my academic freedom and freedom of speech.

My own university, SFSU, has conducted at least three overzealous audits of my travel that did not include any questions about missing funds or receipts but rather focused on my research trips and collaboration with Palestinian universities.

SFSU financial audits were unnecessary because before dispensing a penny in reimbursements, SFSU (and other institutions accountable to the public) must conduct multiple audits and have in fact subjected me to unreasonable scrutiny above and beyond its usual practice. Aside from the business-as-usual racialized and Islamophobic practices of constantly questioning the veracity of faculty of color, SFSU has applied exceptional treatment to me in response to pro-Israel groups.

UCLA engaged in a similar response, immediately assuming truth on the part of the student who falsely accused me and painting me as “controversial.”

SWU is not the only pro-Israel group that files baseless complaints with the Department of Education. Other Israel lobby groups have done the same against Duke, UNC, Columbia, NYU and a host of other universities. The timing is not accidental nor is the target of the complaints. The DoE has never been more predisposed to the pro-Israel agenda than it is now with Betsy DeVos whose Christian right-wing and privatization commitments need no citation.

As well, Trump’s appointment of Kenneth Marcus as the Department’s chief civil rights’ investigator has been the outcome of Trump’s unconditional support for Israel combined with the expectations by Christian Zionists and the Israel lobby to deliver in return for their donations and political clout. Civil rights groups have filed a complaint against his selective targeting of Palestine campus activism.

We have organized as scholars, students and communities. For example, when Zionists demanded that UCLA investigate the lecture I gave on Islamophobia and my talk at the national conference that Students for Justice in Palestine held there, a number of organizations sent off a letter in response, despite the preoccupation of our communities with the difficult conditions of the coronavirus.

It was initiated by the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) and co-organized by ns Palestine Legal, and signed by the Center for Constitutional Rights, National Lawyers Guild, Jewish Voice for Peace, my colleagues in the league Department of Asian American studies at SFSU, IFCO, ADC, National Education Black Agenda and National Women’s Studies Association. California Scholars for Academic Freedom issued a strong statement and so did many other academic associations, student groups and community organizations.

For my part I will continue building AMED, teaching Palestine, and producing knowledge for justice. All I need is continued community support. It might take long and sacrifices but what choice do we have? Losing our chains? So be it.

Global Contagion?

DF: *Israel’s “Jewish nation-state” law makes the lower status of Israel’s non-Jewish Arab citizens an official reality, despite the flowery language of its 1948 Declaration of Independence. At the same time, we’re seeing global examples like India’s steps to strip non-Hindu citizenship in Assam province, and the abrogation of Kashmir’s constitutional autonomous status. Do you see a global contagion in these developments?*

RA: First, I do not think that the Israel declaration of independence was “flowery.” It may have sounded flowery to liberal Zionists but neither to anti-Zionist Jews nor to anyone else who opposes colonialism and racism. It certainly was not to Palestinians who became refugees overnight, whose land



Dr. Rabab Abdulhadi at the 2019 Students for Palestine conference.

was taken, who had to live under military rule inside Israel from 1948 to 1966. The declaration stripped them of their legal status and their very existence. Therefore, it was another step in Israel’s dispossessing Palestinians. I see July 4th in the same light.

Second, I don’t see a fundamental contradiction between Islamophobia, Zionism, Hindu nationalism, caste hierarchy and white supremacy whether in the United States, Israel, India, Kashmir or elsewhere. I see them as going hand in hand.

We must pay attention to nuances to each context and examine historical differences. We should not conflate them, nor is it in the best interests of critical thinking and social change to do so. At the base of it they are about hate and constitute forms of racism and racial discrimination and we must fight them with the same determination.

We saw how Trump responded to Charlottesville when he maintained that there were “very good people on both sides.” We see it in the forces in Europe who donate money to the right-wing AFD in Germany, which was also funded by Zionist donors.

In Europe and the United States, white supremacy, Islamophobia and Zionism go hand-in-hand. Israel is right at the center of it, with Netanyahu very much in agreement with Modi of India, with Trump in the United States, with Bolsonaro in Brazil.

The discourse is similarly racist, supremacist and oppressive with an audacious disregard for the lives of Indigenous communities, third world communities and communities of color from Minneapolis and Atlanta Kashmir and from Gaza to São Paulo.

This gives us a roadmap of how the right wing works, how these forces are coming together. You can see a clear connection between the attempts on campuses to

silence advocates for justice in Palestine, to police activists for Black liberation or sovereignty for Kashmir, and the authoritarianism of Bolsonaro and Trump.

They connect with each other and with police states like Saudi Arabia with its oppressive human rights policies. These leaders seem to be drawing from the same book, even from the same page. Clearly Israel is part of this group. And those of us who support social justice must expose these racist, homophobic and misogynistic policies.

Trump's Plan to Liquidate Palestine

DF: *Although uncritical support for Israel didn't begin with the Trump presidency, we know that Trump has indicated his total support of Israeli supremacy by his actions and support to the Netanyahu government. Now Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner has developed an apartheid-annexation plan, "Deal of the Century." Will the plan succeed in pushing back Palestinian rights or is it dead in the water?*

RA: Palestinians and everyone else sees Trump's deal for what it is. It aims eliminating Palestine and crushing Palestinian resistance. It was preceded by Trump's cutting off U.S. funding of the United Nations Relief (UNRWA) program. Now he's trying to tie a noose around the very neck of Palestine.

But let's keep in mind what Jared Kushner stands for. His family's real estate business has been involved in questionable schemes as well as direct funding and support for Israeli settlements. He tried to organize a workshop in Bahrain to find Palestinian business elites, enticing them with money if they agreed to liquidate the cause of the Palestinian people. He only managed to find one person.

No matter how much money has been offered, the Palestinian people have not given up their rights. Palestine is not for sale. For years Israel has tried to create "facts on the ground" by building more colonial settlements and by confiscating more land from Palestinians. Land confiscations are also on the rise among Palestinians in the 1948 areas who are Israeli citizens.

Another harsh reality is the number of Palestinians who are imprisoned, including children. And even when children are released from actual detention centers, they are assigned to house arrest and their parents forced to act as their wardens. Under house arrest, these children are denied their right to an education.

Currently, we have a serious situation with around 5,000, including children, in prison. Although it's not widely or adequately reported in the news, there are nightly raids of Palestinian homes by the Israel military, not much different from that by U.S. police that in which they killed Breonna Taylor.

People are arrested and tortured.

Kangaroo trials, denial of rights, and inhumane prison conditions, are the norm as Israel tries to force Palestinians to comply with its will.

The Israeli military has used the outbreak of the coronavirus to increase surveillance. Since 2002, Israeli intelligence has been gathering data from Palestinian phones. Now, under cover of controlling the pandemic, they have justified the imposition of emergency regulations and increased their spying, including on all Israeli citizens.

Prisons and detention centers all over the world are places where diseases are easily spread. If not in solitary confinement, Palestinian prisoners share the same cell with only one toilet. There is no possibility to maintain social distancing or frequently wash one's hands with the use of soap. Instead, authorities advised prisoners to use their socks as shields against the virus.

It has already been established that an Israeli interrogator, who was involved in torturing Palestinian prisoners, has tested positive and infected four prisoners.

The demand is that all Palestinian prisoners and all prisoners be released, starting with the elderly, the sick and children.

BDS: A Quest for Justice

DF: *Clearly your harassment predates the Trump administration's recent moves. But just looking at Trump's recent moves, we're seeing a campaign to intimidate and silence campus movements for Boycott/Divestment/Sanctions (BDS) in support of Palestine. How do you assess the current state of the BDS movement?*

RA: The Executive Order that Trump issued last December is indicative of his interest in catering both to the Christian right as well as Israel's supporters. The order falsely claims that our criticism of Israel is equivalent to antisemitism. This could not be farther from the truth. It is a typical ploy by supporters of Israel within and outside the White House to bully us.

Bullies continue bullying. They do not stop. Pro-Israel lobby organizations with massive budgets, direct support from the Israeli Ministry of Strategic Affairs and the Trump Administration have been working against advocacy for justice in/for Palestine, including BDS. And now, Trump has once again joined by issuing an executive order that conflates racism with antisemitism.

Right-wing supporters of Israel, like the mega-billionaire Sheldon Adelson, are trying to stop BDS by banning the movement, but the movement continues to move forward.

We have seen a shift in U.S. public opinion — from being sympathetic to Israel to an understanding of what the Palestinian struggle is all about. There is growing support for Palestine, including among young people of college age, many of whom are Jewish. This is a very big disaster for Israel

because it means that the Zionist movement doesn't speak for all Jews.

Many young people see Israel's laws and actions targeting Palestinians and perpetuating injustices. This includes Jewish youth who are going on the so-called "Birthright" trips to Israel — but then defect and visit Palestinian areas to see the reality. They are contesting the colonial narrative that Zionists have spun.

The BDS movement is similar although not identical, to the international movement against South African apartheid during the 1980s and '90s. It's very similar to the students in the United States who sat in at lunch counters to oppose Jim Crow laws and boycotted businesses that engaged in segregation.

In that tradition, BDS is a movement that says that we are not going to allow injustice, colonialism, racism and apartheid to continue unchallenged in Palestine; we hold Israel to the same standard as any other country.

When educational institutions attempted to deny the right of professors or teachers to engage in BDS, there has been a push-back. The American Civil Liberties Union is standing up for the right of people to advocate for BDS. Now artists who are invited to perform in Israel are thinking twice about going because they don't want to identify with an apartheid regime.

Palestinian civil society and national and Islamic groups as well as the Arab opposition developed the BDS strategy (in 2005) as a way the whole world could express its solidarity with the Palestinian people. Despite the fact that the boycott hurts Palestinian small business, and despite the harsh penalties Israel imposes for those who speak out in support of this strategy, there is widespread BDS work inside Palestine and among Palestinians living in Israel.

As BDS builds, Palestinians see that we have not been abandoned, we are not alone. We also understand that the Israeli government and the lobby it sets up around the world to win support for its positions are hard at work.

So, the struggle continues. One of the latest, in California, is a vicious attack waged by Zionist and right-wing groups on the ethnic studies model curriculum required in all K-12 classes. They don't like this curriculum because it includes sections around Islamophobia and Arab-American studies, including the question of Palestine.

To support Rabab Abdulhadi, Palestine at SFSU, visit the International Campaign to Defend Professor Rabab Abdulhadi (<https://www.facebook.com/DefendProfAbdulhadi/>). To learn more about AMED Studies, visit its official site at <https://amed.sfsu.edu/> or its unofficial FB page at <https://www.facebook.com/AMEDStudies/>. ■

Lessons from World War II:

The Green New Deal & the State

By Martin Hart-Landsberg

THERE IS GROWING interest in a Green New Deal, but far too little discussion among supporters about the challenging nature of the required economic transformation, the necessary role of public planning and ownership in shaping it, or the strategies necessary to institutionalize a strong worker-community voice in the process and final outcome.

In this article I draw on the experience of World War II when the state was forced to direct a rapid transformation from civilian to military production to help encourage and concretize that discussion.

I first discuss the need for a rapid Green New Deal-inspired transformation and the value of studying the U.S. experience during World War II to help achieve it. Then I examine the evolution, challenges and central role of state planning in the wartime conversion of the U.S. economy to alert us to the kind of state agencies and capacities we will need to develop.

Next, I highlight two problematic aspects of the wartime conversion and postwar reconversion which must be avoided if we hope to ensure a conversion to a more democratic and solidaristic economy.

Finally, I'll discuss the efforts of labor activists to democratize the process of transformation during the war period in order to sharpen our thinking about how best to organize a labor-community movement for a Green New Deal.

The Challenge of Transformation

We are already experiencing a climate crisis marked by extreme weather conditions, droughts, floods, warming oceans, rising sea levels, fires, ocean acidification and soil deterioration.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's *Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C*, if we are to avoid ever worsening climate disasters, we must limit the increase in the global mean temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels by 2100.¹

The report also makes clear that achieving this goal requires reducing global net carbon dioxide emissions by 45% by 2030, then reaching net zero emissions by 2050.

Tragically, despite the seriousness of the crisis, we are on track for a far higher global mean temperature.² Even big business is aware of what is at stake. Two researchers employed by JP Morgan, the world's largest financier of fossil fuels, recently published an internal study that warns of the dangers of cli-

mate inaction.

According to *The Guardian*, which obtained a copy of the report, "the authors say policymakers need to change direction because a business-as-usual climate policy 'would likely push the earth to a place that we haven't seen for many millions of years,' with outcomes that might be impossible to reverse."³

It is easy to see why growing numbers of people are attracted to the idea of a Green New Deal. The Green New Deal promises a rapid and dramatic curtailment of fossil fuel use as part of a broader transformation to a more sustainable, egalitarian and socially responsive economy.

Such a transformation will, by necessity, involve massive new investments to promote the production and distribution of clean renewable energy, expand energy efficient public transit systems, support regenerative agriculture and retrofit existing homes, offices and factories.

The Green New Deal also promises new, publicly funded programs designed to ensure well-paid and secure employment

for all, high-quality universal health care, affordable, safe public housing, clean air, and healthy and affordable food.

Unfortunately the proposed Green New Deal investments and programs, as attractive and as needed as they may be, are unlikely on their own to achieve the required reduction in carbon emissions. It is true that many Green New Deal investments and programs can be expected to lower overall energy demand, thereby making it easier for rapidly growing supplies of clean energy to support economic activity.

But even though U.S. renewable energy production is growing rapidly, it still accounts for less than 15% of total U.S. energy consumption and less than 20% of electricity generation. And based on the experience of other countries, increasing the production of renewable energy does not, by itself, guarantee a significant decline in the production and use of fossil fuels, especially when they remain relatively cheap and plentiful.

Rapid decarbonization will also require direct government action to force down the production of fossil fuels and make their use prohibitively expensive. And this action will have significant consequences.

For example, limiting fossil fuel production will leave fossil fuel companies with enormous unused and therefore worthless assets. Raising the price of fossil fuels will sharply



Logo for Green Jobs Oshawa, a coalition of community activists and former GM workers. They are demanding that the federal or provincial government nationalize the former plant and commit to buying electric trucks for the first five years of the plant's operation.

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increase the cost of flying, with negative consequences for the large manufacturers of airplanes and their subcontractors.

It will also increase the cost of gasoline, with negative consequences for automobile companies that produce gas guzzling cars. Other major industries will also be affected, for example the home building industry that specializes in large suburban homes, and the financial sector that has extended loans to firms in all these industries. Thus, any serious attempt to rapidly force down fossil fuel use can be expected to negatively affect important sectors of the economy.

Proposed Green New Deal investments and social policy initiatives will lay the foundation for a new economy, helping to boost employment and absorb some of the newly created excess capacity, but given the need for a speedy transformation to head off climate catastrophe, the process, if left unplanned, could easily end up dragging the economy down.

As difficult as this process appears, we do have historical experience to draw upon that can help us prepare for some of the challenges we can expect to face: the experience of World War II, when the U.S. government was forced to initiate a rapid transformation of the economy from civilian to military production.

New planning bodies were created to direct resources away from civilian use, retrain workers, encourage retooling of parts of the civilian economy to produce military goods and services, and direct massive investments to build new facilities to expand production or produce new goods needed for the war effort. While it's far from a model to be recreated, advocates of a Green New Deal can learn much from studying the U.S. wartime experience.

World War II Planning

The shift to a war economy began gradually in 1939, some two years before the United States actually entered the war. In June 1939, Congress passed the Strategic and Critical Materials Stockpiling Act, which called for establishing reserves of strategic materials necessary for defense. In August, President Roosevelt established the War Resources Board to help the Joint Army and Navy Munitions Board develop plans for mobilizing the economic resources of the country in the event of war.

In June 1940, a National Roster of Scientific and Specialized Personnel was created. In August 1940, the Defense Plant Corporation was created and charged with planning how to expand the nation's ability to produce military equipment. And in September 1940, Congress approved the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940, which required all men between the ages of 21 and 45 to register for the draft.

In January 1941, President Roosevelt created the Office of Production Management to centralize all federal procurement programs concerned with the country's preparation for war. Shortly after the United States entered the war, this office was replaced by the War Production Board (WPB), which was tasked with directing the conversion of industries from civilian to military work; the allocation of scarce materials; and the establishment of priorities for the distribution of goods and services, including those to be rationed.

The conversion to a war economy, and the end of the Depression, roughly dates to the second half of 1941, when defense spending sharply accelerated. Federal spending on goods and services for national defense rose from 2.2% of

GNP in 1940 to 11% of GNP in 1941.

This was the last year that military-generated activity was compatible with growing civilian production. In 1942, military spending soared to 31% of GNP. From then to the end of the war, civilian production was suppressed in order to secure the desired growth in military production.

For example, real consumer durable expenditures reached \$24.7 billion (in 1972 dollars) or 6.2% of GNP in 1941. The following year they fell to \$16.3 billion or 3.6% of GNP. Real personal consumption, which grew by 6.2% in 1941, fell absolutely the following year.

Between 1940 and 1944, the total production of non-war goods and services fell from \$180 billion to \$164 billion (in 1950 dollars). In contrast, real federal purchases of military commodities grew from \$18 billion in 1941 to \$88 billion in 1944 (in 1947 dollars), accounting for approximately one-half of all commodities produced that year.

No doubt, the high level of unemployment that existed at the start of the conversion made it easier to ramp up military production — but the military itself soon absorbed a large share of the male working age population.

Moreover, the challenge facing planners was not just that of ramping up production in a depressed economy, but of converting the economy to produce different goods, often in new locations. This required the recruitment, training, and placement of millions of workers in accordance with ever-changing industrial, occupational, and geographic requirements.

In the period of preparation for war, perhaps the biggest challenge was training. It was largely met thanks to vocational training programs organized by the Employment Division. These training programs made use of ongoing New Deal programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps, Works Progress Administration, and National Youth Administration, the existing network of schools and colleges, and a Training-Within-Industry program.

Once the war began, the War Manpower Commission continued the effort. Altogether, some seven million people went through training programs, almost half through Training-Within-Industry programs.

The hard shift from a civilian-driven economy into a military dominated-one was, to a large degree, forced on the government by corporate concerns over future profitability. In brief, most large corporations were reluctant to expand their productive capacity, for fear that doing so would leave them vulnerable to a postwar collapse in demand and a renewed Depression.

Among the most resistant were leading firms in the automobile, steel, oil, electric power, and railroad industries. At the same time, these firms also opposed the establishment of government-owned enterprises, which they feared might become postwar competitors or even worse, encourage popular interest in socialism.

Unwilling to challenge business leaders, the government took the path of least resistance. It agreed to support business efforts to convert their plant and equipment from civilian to military production; offer businesses engaged in defense work cost-plus contracting; and suppress worker wages and their right to strike.

If the government did find it necessary to invest and establish new firms to produce critical goods, it agreed to allow

private businesses to run them, with the option to purchase the new plant and its equipment at a discounted price at the war's conclusion. As a consequence, big business did quite well during the war and was well positioned to be highly profitable in the years afterward.

Business reluctance to invest in expanding capacity, including in industries vital to the military, meant that the government had to develop a number of powerful new planning bodies to ensure that the limited output was allocated correctly and efficiently across the military-industrial supply chain. For example, raw steel production grew only eight percent from 1941 to the 1944 wartime peak. Crude petroleum refining capacity grew only 12% between 1941 and 1945.

Leading firms in the auto industry were also reluctant to give up sales or engage in conversion to military production, initially claiming that no more than 15% of its machine tools were convertible. But once the war started and U.S. planners regulated steel use, giving priority to military production, the auto industry did retool and produce a range of important military goods including tanks, jeeps, trucks, and parts and subassemblies for the aircraft industry, including engines and propellers.

In many cases, corporate foot-dragging forced the government to establish its own production. Thus, while steel ingot capacity expanded by a modest 17% from 1940 to 1945, almost half of that increase came from government-owned firms.

The role of government production was probably greatest in the case of synthetic rubber. The United States had relied on imports for some 90% of its supply of natural rubber, mostly from countries that fell under Japanese control.

Desperate for synthetic rubber to maintain critical civilian and military production, the government pursued a massive facility construction program. Almost all of the new capacity was financed and owned by the government and then leased to private operators for \$1 per year.

Thanks to this effort, synthetic rubber output rose from 22,434 long tons in 1942 to 753,111 long tons in 1944. The Defense Plant Corporation ended up financing and owning approximately one-third of all the plant and equipment built during the war.

The War Production Board, created by presidential executive order in January 1942, was the country's first major wartime planning agency. Roosevelt chose Donald M. Nelson, a Sears Roebuck executive, to be WPB's chairperson. Other members of the board were the Secretaries of War, Navy, and Agriculture, the lieutenant general in charge of War Department procurement, the director of the Office of Price Administration, the Federal Loan Administrator, the chair of the Board of Economic Warfare, and the special assistant to the President for the defense aid program.

The WPB managed twelve regional offices, and operated some 120 field offices throughout the country. Their work was supported by state-level war production boards, which were responsible for keeping records on the firms engaged in war production in their respective states, including whether they operated under government contract.

Despite its vast information-gathering network, however, the WPB was never able to take command of the conversion of the economy. To some extent that was because Nelson proved to be a weak leader. But a more important reason was

that the WPB had to contend with a number of other powerful agencies that were each authorized to direct the output of a specific critical industry. The result was a kind of free-for-all when it came to developing and implementing a unified plan.

Perhaps the most powerful independent agency was the Army-Navy Munitions Board. And early on, the WPB ceded its authority over the awarding of military contracts to it. The Army and Navy awarded more contracts than could be fulfilled, creating problems in the supply chain as firms competed to obtain needed materials.

Turf fights among government agencies led to other problems. For example, the Office of Defense Transportation and the Petroleum Administration for War battled over who could decide petroleum requirements for transportation services. And the Office of Price Administration fought the Solid Fuels Administration over who would control the rationing of coal.

A U.S. Bureau of the Budget history of the period captures some of the early chaos:

*"Locomotive plants went into tank production when locomotives were more necessary than tanks . . . Truck plants began to produce airplanes, a change that caused shortages of trucks later on . . . Merchant ships took steel from the Navy, and the landing craft cut into both. The Navy took aluminum from aircraft. Rubber took valves from escort vessels, from petroleum, from the Navy. The pipe-lines took steel from ships, new tools, and the railroads. And at every turn there were foreign demands to be met as well as requirements for new plants."*⁴

In response to the chaos, Roosevelt established another super agency in May 1943, the Office of War Mobilization (OWM). This agency, headed by James F. Byrnes, a former politician and Supreme Court justice, was given authority over the WPB and the other agencies. Byrnes' authority was so great, in fact, that he was often called the "assistant President."

The OWM succeeded in installing a rigorous system of materials control and bringing order to the planning process. As a result, civilian production was efficiently suppressed and military production steadily increased. Over the period 1941 to 1945, the United States was responsible for roughly 40% of the world's production of weapons and supplies, and with little increase in the nation's capital stock.

Cautionary Lessons

The experience highlighted above shows the effectiveness of planning, and that a contemporary economic conversion based on Green New Deal priorities, in which fossil fuel dependent industries are suppressed in favor of more sustainable economic activity, can be achieved.

It also shows that a successful transformation will require the creation of an integrated, multi-level system of planning, and that the process of transformation can be expected to generate challenges that will need to be handled with flexibility and patience.

The wartime conversion experience also holds two important cautionary lessons for a Green New Deal-inspired economic transformation. The first is the need to remain vigilant against the expected attempt by big business to use the planning process to strengthen its hold on the economy.

If we are to achieve our goal of a sustainable, egalitarian and solidaristic economy, we must ensure a dominant and ongoing role for public planning of economic activity and an expansive policy of public ownership, both taking over firms

that prove resistant to the transformation and retaining ownership of newly created firms.

In wartime, the federal government was all too willing to allow big corporations to dominate the conversion process as well as the peacetime reconversion, thereby helping them boost their profits and solidify their postwar economic domination. For example, the Army and Navy routinely awarded their defense contracts to a very few large companies, which chose other big companies as their prime subcontractors.

Small and medium sized firms also struggled to maintain their production of civilian goods because planning agencies often denied them access to needed materials. Harold G. Vatter highlights the contract preference given to big firms during the war, noting:

“(O)f \$175 billion of primary contracts awarded between June 1940 and September 1944, over one-half went to the top 33 corporations (with size measured by value of primary supply contracts received). The smallest 94 percent of prime supply contract corporations (contracts of \$9 million or less) got 10 percent of the value of all prime contracts in that period.”⁵

The same big firms disproportionately benefited from the reconversion process. In October 1944, the OWM was converted into the Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion (OWMR), with Byrnes remaining as head.

The OWMR embraced its new role and moved quickly to achieve the reconversion of the economy. It overcame opposition from the large military contractors, who were reluctant to give up their lucrative business, by granting them early authorization to begin production of civilian goods, thereby helping them dominate the emerging consumer markets.

The OWMR was also generous in its postwar distribution of government assets. The government, at war’s end, owned approximately \$17 billion of plant and equipment. These holdings, concentrated in the chemical, steel, aluminum, copper, shipbuilding and aircraft industries, were estimated to be about 15% of the country’s total postwar plant capacity. The government also owned “surplus” war property estimated to be worth some \$50 and \$70 billion.

Because of the way government wartime investment had been structured, there was little question about who would get the lion’s share of these public assets. Most government-owned plants were financed under terms specifying that the private firms operating them would be given the right to purchase them at war’s end if desired.

Thus, according to one specialist, roughly two-thirds of the \$17 billion of government plant and equipment was sold to 87 large firms. The “bulk of copolymer synthetic rubber plants went to the Big Four in rubber; large chemical plants were sold to the leading oil companies, and U.S. Steel received 71 percent of government-built integrated steel plants.”⁶

The second cautionary lesson is the need to resist efforts by the government, justified in the name of efficiency, to minimize the role of unions and working people more generally, in the planning and organization of the economic conversion. The only way to guarantee that a Green New Deal-inspired transformation will create an economy responsive to the needs of working people and their communities is to create institutional arrangements that secure popular participation in decision-making at all levels of economic activity.

While organized labor had at least an advisory role in pre-

war planning agencies, once the war began it was quickly marginalized, and its repeated calls for more participation rejected. For example, Sidney Hillman (head of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers) was appointed to be one of two chairs of the Office of Production Management, established in January 1941 to oversee federal efforts at national war preparation. The other was William S. Knudsen (president of General Motors).

The OPM also included a Labor Bureau, also led by Hillman, which was to advise it on labor recruitment, training, and mobilization issues, as well as Labor Advisory Committees attached to the various commodity and industry branches that reported to the OPM.

The labor presence was dropped from the War Production Board, which replaced the OPM in January 1942; Roosevelt appointed the businessman Donald M. Nelson as its sole chair. Hillman was appointed director of the board’s Labor Division, but that division was soon eliminated and its responsibilities transferred to the newly created War Manpower Commission in April 1942.

More generally, as organized labor found itself increasingly removed from key planning bodies, workers found themselves increasingly asked to accept growing sacrifices. Prices began rising in 1940 and 1941 as the economy slowly recovered from the Depression and began its transformation to war production. In response workers pushed for significant wage increases, which the government, concerned about inflation, generally opposed.

In 1940, there were 2500 strikes producing 6.7 million labor-days idle. The following year there were 4300 strikes with 23.1 million labor-days idle.

Hillman called for a national policy of real wage maintenance based on inflation indexing that would also allow the greatest wage gains to go to those who earned the least, but the government took no action. As war mobilization continued, the government sought a number of concessions from the unions. For example, it wanted workers to sacrifice their job rights, such as seniority, when they were transferred from nondefense to defense work.

Union leaders refused. Union leaders also demanded, unsuccessfully, that military contracts not be given to firms found to violate labor laws.

Worried about disruptions to war production, Roosevelt established the War Labor Board by executive order in January 1942. The board was given responsibility for stabilizing wages and resolving disputes between workers and managers at companies considered vital to the war effort. The board’s hard stand on wage increases was set in July, when it developed its so-called “Little Steel Formula.”

Ruling in a case involving the United Steelworkers and the four so-called “Little Steel” companies, the board decided that although steelworkers deserved a raise, it had to be limited to the amount that would restore their real earnings to their prewar level, which they set as January 1, 1941. Adding insult to injury, the board relied on a faulty price index that underestimated the true rate of inflation since the beginning of 1941.

Thus, while corporations were able to pursue higher profits, workers would have to, in the words of the board, postpone their “quest for an increasing share of the national income.” Several months later, Roosevelt instructed the War

Labor Board to use a similar formula, although with a different baseline, in all its future rulings.

Not surprisingly, the number of strikes continued to rise throughout the war years despite a December 1941 pledge by AFL and CIO leaders not to call strikes for the duration of the war.

In June 1943, with strikes continuing, especially in the coal fields, Congress passed the War Labor Disputes Act. The act gave the president the power to seize and operate privately owned plants when an actual or threatened strike interfered with war production.

Subsequent strikes in plants seized by the government were prohibited. The Act was invoked more than 60 times during the war. The Act also included a clause that made it illegal for unions to contribute to candidates for office in national elections, clearly an attempt to weaken labor's political influence.

Although wage struggles drew most attention, union demands were far more expansive. As Vatter describes:

*“Organized labor wanted wartime representation and participation in production decision-making at all levels, not merely the meaningless advisory role allotted to it during the preparedness period. But from the outset, management maintained a chronic hostile stance on the ground that management-labor industry councils such as proposed by Walter Reuther and CIO President Philip Murray in 1940 would, under cover of patriotism, undermine management’s prerogatives and inaugurate a postwar ‘sovietization’ of American industry.”*⁷

Unions often pointed to the chaos of early planning, as captured by the Budget Bureau history, arguing that their active participation in production decisions would greatly improve overall efficiency. The government's lack of seriousness about union involvement, however, is best illustrated by the WPB's March 1942 decision to establish a special War Production Drive Division that was supposed to encourage the voluntary creation of labor-management plant committees.

The committees were only allowed to address specific physical production problems, not broader labor-management issues or production coordination across firms. Most large firms didn't even bother creating committees.

Significantly, there was only one time that the government encouraged and supported popular participation in wartime decision-making, and that effort proved a great success. Inflation was a constant concern of the government throughout the war years, largely because it was a trigger for strikes which threatened wartime production.

The Office of Price Administration tried a variety of voluntary and bureaucratic controls to limit price increases on consumer goods and services, especially food, with little success. Finally, beginning in mid-1943, and over the strong opposition of business, it welcomed popular participation in the operation of its price control system.⁸

Tens of thousands of volunteers were formally authorized to visit retail locations throughout the country to monitor business compliance with the controls, and tens of thousands of additional volunteers were chosen to serve on price boards that were empowered to fine retailers found in violation of the controls.

As a result, prices remained relatively stable from mid-1943 until early 1946 when the government abruptly ended

the system of controls. This was an incredible achievement considering that the production of civilian goods and services declined over those years, while consumer purchasing power and the money supply rose.

For a Worker-Community Planned Process

During the war years, many labor activists struggled against powerful political forces to open up space for new forms of economic planning with institutionalized worker-community involvement.

The organizing and movement-building efforts of District 8 leaders of the United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers of America (UE), as described by Rosemary Feurer in her book *Radical Unionism in the Midwest, 1900-1950*, stand out in this regard. Although their success was limited, there is much that we can learn from their efforts.⁹

District 8 covered Missouri, Iowa, Kansas, Arkansas, southern Indiana and southern and western Illinois, and UE contracts in that area were heavily weighted towards small and medium-sized firms producing mechanical and electrical products. As the government began its wartime economic conversion in 1941, its policy of suppressing civilian goods and rewarding big corporations with defense contracts hit the firms that employed UE members hard.

The UE response was to build a labor and community-based effort to gain control over the conversion process. In Evansville, Indiana, the UE organized a community campaign titled “Prevent Evansville from Becoming a Ghost Town.” As Feurer explains:

*“District 8’s tentative proposal called upon union and civic and business leaders to request the establishment of a federal program that would ‘be administered through joint and bona fide union-management-government cooperation’ at the local level. It would ensure that before reductions in the production of consumer goods were instituted, government must give enough primary war contracts and subcontracts to ‘take up the slack’ of unemployment caused in cities such as Evansville. It also proposed that laid-off workers would get ‘first claim on jobs with other companies in the community,’ while excessive overtime would be eliminated until unemployment was reduced.”*¹⁰

District 8 organizers pressed Evansville's mayor to gather community, labor and business representatives from all over the Midwest to discuss how to manage the conversion to save jobs. They organized mass petition drives and won endorsements for their campaign from many community groups and small businesses.

Persuaded, Evansville's mayor contacted some 500 mayors from cities with populations under 250,000 in eleven midwestern states, requesting that they send delegations of “city officials, labor leaders, managers of industry and other civic leaders” to a gathering in Chicago. Some 1500 delegates attended the September meeting.

The conference endorsed the UE's call for a significant role for labor in conversion planning, specifically “equal participation of management and labor in determining a proper and adequate retraining program and allocation of primary and sub-contracts. . . [And that] all possible steps be taken to avoid serious dislocations in non-defense industries.” A committee of seven, with two labor representatives, was chosen to draw up a more concrete program of action.

One result was that Evansville and Newton, Iowa (anoth-



UE District 8 fought for worker-community planning.

UE

er city with a strong UE presence) were named “Priority Unemployment Plan” areas, and allowed to conduct “an experiment for community-based solving of unemployment and dislocations caused by war priorities.”

The plan restricted new plant construction if existing production capacity was considered sufficient, encouraged industry-wide and geographical-based pooling of production facilities to boost efficiency and stabilize employment, required companies to provide training to help workers upgrade their skills, and supported industry-wide studies to determine how to best adapt existing facilities for military production.

William Sentner, the head of District 8, called for labor to take a leading role in organizing community gatherings in other regions and creating regional planning councils. Unfortunately, CIO leaders did little to support the idea. Moreover, once the war started, unemployment stopped being a serious problem and the federal government took direct control over the conversion process.

Organizing for a Worker-Community Planned Reconversion Process

As the war began to wind down, District 8 leaders once again took up the issue of conversion, this time conversion back to a peacetime economy. In 1943, they got the mayor of St. Louis to create a community planning committee, with strong labor participation, to discuss future economic possibilities for the city.

In 1944, they organized a series of union conferences with elected worker representatives from each factory department in plants under UE contract throughout the district, along with selected guests, to discuss reconversion and postwar employment issues.

At these conferences District 8 leaders emphasized the importance of continued government planning to guarantee full employment, but also stressed that the new jobs should be interesting and fulfilling, and the workweek should be reduced to 30 hours to allow more time for study, recreation and family life.

They also discussed the importance of other goals: an expansion of workers’ rights in production; labor-management collaboration to develop and produce new products responsive to new needs; support for women who wanted to continue working, in part by the provision of nurseries;

and the need to end employment discrimination against African Americans.

While these conferences were taking place, the Missouri River flooded, covering many thousands of acres of farmland with dirt and sand, and leaving thousands of people homeless. The Army Corps of Engineers rushed to take advantage of the situation, proposing a major dredging operation to deepen the lower Missouri River channel, an effort strongly supported by big shipping interests. It became known as the Pick Plan.

Not long after, the Bureau of Reclamation proposed a competing plan that involved building a series of dams and reservoirs in the upper river valley, a plan strongly supported by big agricultural interests. It became known as the Sloan Plan.

While lower river and upper river business interests battled, a grassroots movement grew across the region opposing both plans, seeing them, each in their own way, as highly destructive. For example, building the dams and reservoirs would destroy the environment and require flooding hundreds of thousands of acres, much of it owned by small farmers, and leave tens of thousands of families without homes.

Influenced by the growing public anger, newspapers in St. Louis began calling for the creation of a new public authority, a Missouri Valley Authority (MVA), to implement a unified plan for flood control and development that was responsive to popular needs. Their interest in an MVA reflected the popularity of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), an agency created in 1933 and tasked with providing cheap electricity to homes and businesses and addressing many of the region’s other development challenges, such as flooding, land erosion, and population out-migration.

In fact, during the 1930s several bills were submitted to Congress to establish other river-based regional authorities. Roosevelt endorsed seven of them, but they all died in committee as the Congress grew more conservative and war planning took center stage in Washington D.C.

District 8, building on its desire to promote postwar regional public planning, eagerly took up the idea of an MVA. It issued a pamphlet titled “One River, One Plan” that laid out its vision for the agency. As a public agency, it was to be responsive to a broad community steering committee; have the authority to engage in economic and environmental planning for the region; and, like the TVA, directly employ unionized workers to carry out much of its work.

MVA’s primary tasks would be the electrification of rural areas and flood control through soil and water conservation projects and reforestation. The pamphlet estimated that five hundred thousand jobs could be created within five years as a result of these activities and the greater demand for goods and services flowing from electrification and the revitalization of small farms and their communities.

District 8 used its pamphlet to launch a community-based grassroots campaign for its MVA, which received strong support from many unions, environmentalists, and farm groups. And in August 1944, Senator James Murray from Montana submitted legislation to establish an MVA, written largely with the help of District 8 representatives. A similar bill was submitted in the House. Both versions called for a two-year planning

period with the final plan to be voted on by Congress.

District 8 began planning for a bigger campaign to win Congressional approval. However, their efforts were dealt a major blow when rival supporters of the Pick and Sloan plans settled their differences and coalesced around a compromise plan. Congress quickly approved the Pick-Sloan Flood Control Act late December 1944 but, giving MVA supporters some hope that they could still prevail, Senator Murray succeeded in removing the Act's anti-MVA provisions.

District 8 leaders persuaded their national union to assign staff to help them establish a St. Louis committee, a nine-state committee, and a national committee to support the MVA. The St. Louis committee was formed in January 1945 with a diverse community-based steering committee. Its strong outreach effort was remarkably successful, even winning support from the St. Louis Chamber of Commerce. Feurer provides a good picture of the breadth and success of the effort:

*"By early 1945, other city-based committees were organizing in the nine-state region. A new national CIO committee for an MVA laid plans for 'reaching every CIO member in the nine-state region on the importance of regionally administered MVA.' In addition, other state CIO federations pledged to organize for an MVA and to disseminate material on the MVA through local unions to individual members. Further the seeds planted in 1944 among AFL unions were beginning to develop into a real coalition. In Kansas City, the AFL was 'circulating all the building trades unions in the nine states for support' to establish a nine-state buildings trades MVA committee. Both the AFL and CIO held valley wide conferences on the MVA to promote and organize for it."*¹¹

Murray submitted a new bill in February 1945, which included new measures on soil conservation and the protection of wild game, water conservation, and forest renewal. It also gave the MVA responsibility for the "disposal of war and defense factories to encourage industrial and business expansion."

But the political tide had turned. The economy was in expansion, the Democratic Party was moving rightward, and powerful forces were promoting a growing fear of communism. Murray's new bill was shunted to a hostile committee and big business mounted an unrelenting and successful campaign to kill it, arguing that the MVA would establish an undemocratic "super-government," was a step toward "state socialism," and was now unnecessary given passage of the Pick-Sloan Flood Control Act.

Drawing Lessons: Regional Organizing

A careful study of District 8's efforts, especially its campaign for an MVA, can help us think more creatively and effectively about how to build a labor-community coalition in support of a Green New Deal. In terms of policy, there are many reasons to consider following District 8 in advocating for regionally based public entities empowered to plan and direct economic activity as a way to begin the national process of transformation.

For example, many of the consequences of climate change are experienced differently depending on region, which makes it far more effective to plan regional responses. And many of the energy and natural resources to be managed during a period of transformation are shared by neighboring states.

Moreover, state governments, unions, and community groups are more likely to have established relations with their regional counterparts, making conversation and coordination

easier to achieve. Also, regionally organized action would make it much harder for corporations to use inter-state competition to weaken initiatives.

Jonathan Kissam, UE's Communication Director and editor of the UE News, advocates just such an approach:

*"UE District 8's Missouri Valley Authority proposal could easily be revived and modernized, and combined with elements of the British proposal for a National Climate Service. A network of regional Just Transition Authorities, publicly owned and accountable to communities and workers, could be set up to address the specific carbon-reduction and employment needs of different regions of the country."*¹²

The political lessons are perhaps the most important. District 8's success in building significant labor-community alliances around innovative plans for war conversion and then peacetime reconversion highlights the pivotal role unions can, or perhaps must, play in a progressive transformation process. Underpinning this success was District 8's commitment to sustained internal organizing and engagement with community partners.

Union members embraced the campaigns because they could see how a planned transformation of regional economic activity was the only way to secure meaningful improvements in workplace conditions, and such a transformation could only be won in alliance with the broader community. And community allies, and eventually even political leaders, were drawn to the campaigns because they recognized that joining with organized labor gave them the best chance to win structural changes that also benefited them.

We face enormous challenges in attempting to build a similar kind of working class-anchored movement for a Green New Deal-inspired economic transformation. Among them: weakened unions, popular distrust of the effectiveness of public planning and production, and weak ties among labor, environmental, and other community groups.

Overcoming these challenges will require our own sustained conversations and organizing to strengthen the capacities of and the connections among our organizations and to develop a shared and grounded vision of a Green New Deal, one that can unite and empower the broader movement for change we so desperately need. ■

Notes

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REVIEW

Clarence Thomas's America By Angela D. Dillard

Understanding Clarence Thomas:

The Jurisprudence of Constitutional Restoration

By Ralph A. Rossum

Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2014, \$45 hardcover.

The Enigma of Clarence Thomas

By Corey Robin

New York: Metropolitan Books, 2019, 320 pages, \$30 hardcover.

IN A WORLD where everyone had read Wilson Jeremiah Moses's classic text *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism*, Clarence Thomas would be less of an enigma. Maybe.

As the country's longest-serving Supreme Court Justice, Thomas deserves to be better understood. But so, too, does Black Nationalism. The term conjures up images of Black fists raised in defiant protest against racism, of afros and machine guns, of Black pride, Black identity and the romance of ancient African origins.

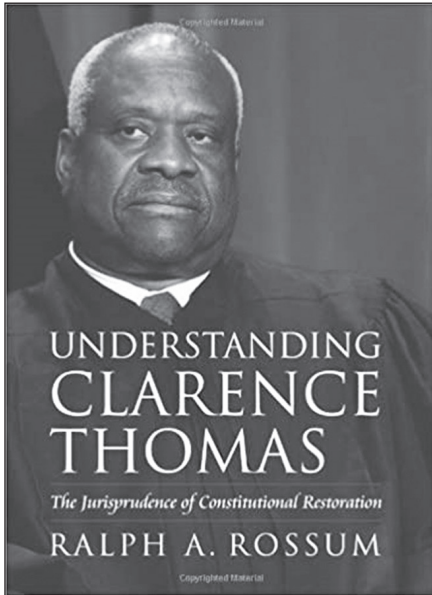
In the popular imagination, Black Nationalism — like Black Power — is rooted in the rejection of “white” values and Eurocentric culture, and expressed in the desire to separate either physically or culturally.

In *The Enigma of Clarence Thomas*, Corey Robin is counting on readers coming to his provocative biography with this historical film flickering in their heads. In his Introduction, Robin begins to outline Thomas's remarkable career, from the early years as the new occupant of Thurgood Marshall's “black seat” on the high court, to the middle period as the “Tea Party” Justice during the Obama years, to today's glory days in Trumpworld.

For the past 29 years Thomas has written, concurred and dissented on a host of influential opinions ranging from First and Second Amendment issues, to abortion, to policing and probable cause, to LGBT rights

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and economic deregulation. Throughout he has been engaged in a decades-long conversation about what the Constitution says and



how it ought to be used. He has also cultivated a veritable army of law-clerks — more than any other justice in the Trump era — who have been cumulatively reshaping the American judiciary.

Robin informs us that ten of his former clerks “hold high-level positions” in the Trump administration

or “have been appointed to the Offices of the United States Attorneys.” (2) Eleven more have been nominated to the federal bench, and an additional seven to the Court of Appeals.

Thomas, in short, has become an institution. And if that weren't enough for a Black man in America: “*Thomas is also a black nationalist.*” (2) The line is meant to be jarring and jolting, out of step with the sweep and scope of the Justice's influence. Roll the Black Power tape.

What is Black Nationalism?

Black Nationalism has always been a complicated body of ideas and beliefs, which is why the work of Wilson Moses is so useful. Over four decades ago, Moses argued that during its “golden age,” from the 1850s to the 1920s, Black Nationalism became wedded to European and American separatist doctrines and, ironically, emerged as a vehicle for the assimilationist values of Black, especially Black American, intellectuals.

In portraying this much-earlier and more-genteel form of Black Nationalism, Moses explores the political thought of Alexander Crummell, W.E.B. Du Bois, Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, and the National Association of Colored Women as well as the literary output of Sutton Griggs and Martin Delany, to argue

that it was ultimately a conservative — rather than a radical — political formation.

How does it change the story to know that Black Nationalism, whatever it became in later years, was born conservative?

Robin is well aware of Wilson Moses's arguments and is admirably versed in the work of Black scholars who have plowed, seeded and nurtured the field in the years since the publication of Moses's controversial treatise. Indeed, one of the strongest features of the biography, apart from the rigorous research and close reading of his subject's enormous judicial output, is Robin's serious engagement with African-American intellectual and political history.

This is far from a superficial treatment and is often appropriately nuanced. For example, Robin claims to be less interested in the “inherently conservative nature of Black Nationalism” (a la Wilson Moses), and much more invested in the “overlap between black conservatism and black nationalism,” which is a hard distinction to grasp, albeit a crucial one for Robin's subsequent analysis.

And he is absolutely right that Black Nationalism is embedded in the “deepest tradition” of Black political thought and that it can be found on either side of the political spectrum. (6)

What makes Thomas unique is his institutional location. As Robin puts it: “This country has seen black conservatives. It has seen black nationalists. It has seen conservative black nationalists. It has never seen a conservative black nationalist on the Supreme Court.” (7)

The Supreme Court Justice as Black nationalist is a nice hook, but does this really help us to understand the “enigma” of Thomas?

Nationalist and Conservative

The narrative of Clarence Thomas's affinity for Malcolm X and Black Power ideologies in his college years at Holy Cross, where he helped to organize the school's first Black Student Union, are well known. Aspects of his political biography even became a heated topic in its own right during his 1991 confirmation hearing.

At the same time, there has been a general assumption that he moved away from the militant race-conscious nationalism of his youth, into a “mature” set of political assumptions that led him to the Republican

Party and the conservative movement.

Many on the right believe that Malcolm X is part of what Thomas left behind; many on the left view any attempt by Thomas to lay claim to Malcolm X as crass political appropriation. In one memorable instance Amiri Baraka compared Thomas and other Black conservatives who emerged from the crucible of the 1960s to “pods growing in the cellars of our politics.” (Baraka quoted, 92)

Writing from the perspective of “interpretation and analysis” as opposed to “objection and critique,” Robin largely eschews these kinds of ideological pot-shots. (15) Instead he treats Thomas as an honest narrator of his own life, beliefs and experiences. Ultimately, he portrays Thomas as less of a pod and more of a time bomb.

Robin knows that Thomas can be both a (Black) nationalist and a (Black) conservative, and that both terms carry a distinctive resonance within African-American political culture. Like other members of this tradition, Thomas promotes individual and collective forms of self-help as essential for Black advancement, and believes that government interventions (aka entitlements and “hand-outs” from the Labor Department and elsewhere) damage their recipients and dump them into a vicious cycle of dependency.

Life on the government dole is said to make Black people and poor people weak and dependent, unable to compete for their rightful place within American society. And, according to this culture of dependency thesis, welfare corrodes their values.

Thomas believes, further, that the conditions facing African Americans were substantially better in terms of dignity and self-respect before the end of legal segregation in the United States. This “when we were colored” nostalgia for an era of Black businesses, churches and institutions is not at all uncommon within Black political culture.

Yet the depth and breadth of Thomas’s anti-integrationism, if Robin is correct, is a much darker and more sinister landscape. Mining hundreds of speeches and interviews, Robin argues that the Rosetta Stone to Thomas’s brand of conservatism is his understanding of race. Here is where things get interesting and . . . a little weird.

Thomas is anti-integration not only because he believes that segregation created a healthier institutional environment for African Americans, but also because of the distance it established between Blacks and whites both physically and emotionally.

On numerous occasions Thomas has shared stories about the personal sting of racism, and he has long believed that its origins are “unknowable.” In his view, racism is far from transient, to be overcome as part of a doctrine of African-American advancement and American reform. On the contrary, racism is a permanent feature of

American society. Assimilation is futile.

Years ago, the legal scholar and social critic Derrick Bell argued that acceptance of the permanence of American racism — see his 1993 *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism* — was a crucial part of crafting a mature understanding of response to the conditions under which all Americans live.

If Robin is right, Bell and Thomas both accept this reality but it led them in very different political directions. It pushed Bell toward the center-left and a belief that progressive change, under the right set of conditions, was possible; it pulled Thomas to the right — the hard right.

Both Bell and Thomas — and Malcolm X — might critique various forms of liberal social policy for reflecting assumptions about Black victims and white saviors, but Robin’s argument is that Thomas takes this position much further.

In Robin’s reading of Thomas’s worldview, all attempts by white liberals to “help” Black people are nothing more than an expression of their own combined privileges of race and class. This form of self-serving paternalism reinforces, over and over again, the stigma of blackness in ways that promote and solidify visions of white supremacy.

“So, too, does white conservative policy and ideology!” readers might be inclined to shout. In this regard, Robin argues, the racism of white conservatives is to some extent more acceptable to Thomas because it is more honest. It is also in line with his endgame vision.

For Thomas, liberals and conservatives may be equally racist, but conservatives use their racism in ways that redound to Black “benefit” — to stand against equally “racist” and damaging policies such as welfare, affirmative action, busing, and other failed attempts to “force” integration.

Unraveling the Enigma

I think Robin is correct that many of Thomas’s views about race and racism are often hiding in plain sight; people hear — or don’t hear — Thomas in highly selective ways.

For me the real enigma of Thomas is that his beliefs can be refracted through so many prisms simultaneously. For Robin he can become the conservative Black nationalist for whom race is everything and who harbors an apocalyptic vision of America’s future. For prominent liberal and left-leaning legal scholars like the late A. Leon Higginbotham and Randall Kennedy — who did a brutal take-down of Thomas in his review of Robin’s biography in *The Nation* — Thomas is the ultimate sell-out, vapid, cruel and antagonistic toward the Black freedom struggle that accounts for the objective conditions of his own success.

For conservative scholars Thomas is a talented and long-suffering hero, “courageously” facing down his detractors, decade after decade, as a conservative thinker who just happens to be Black. Indeed, Ralph A. Rossum, author of *Understanding Clarence Thomas: The Jurisprudence of Constitutional Restoration*, argues that Thomas’s race actually worked against his nomination to the Supreme Court.

Not surprisingly, Rossum locates the key to Thomas’s judicial philosophy in his embrace of color-blindness, the values of the Declaration of Independence, and what he views as the restoration of the original general meaning of the framers of the Constitution.

Reading Rossum and Robin side by side is like day and night. Both question the view of Thomas as the silent justice, who rarely speaks during oral arguments before the Court because he is not intellectually capable and suitably qualified. Rossum notes that Thomas has written “more than 475 majority, concurring, and dissenting opinions,” and “penned scores of law review articles and speeches.”

Rossum takes great pains to demonstrate that Thomas was in fact, in George Bush’s words, the “best qualified” person for the position on the high court. (1) Robin for his part notes that the only other Justice who has had his intellect and qualifications so relentlessly questioned was Thurgood Marshall, which should give critics pause at least on this score.

Yet the two books are diametrically opposed when it comes to judicial interpretation. In case after case and opinion after opinion, Robin argues, Thomas has been devoted to a battle to undo the grand experiments wrought by the civil rights movement and the Warren Court, experiments in integration and social welfare of which he believes himself to be a victim, along with the rest of Black America.

Thomas’s jurisprudence, as Robin summarizes it, “begins with the belief that racism is permanent, the state is ineffective, and politics is feeble, and ends with a dystopia that looks painfully familiar: men are armed to the teeth, people locked up in jails, money ruling all, and racial conflict as far as the eye can see.” (219)

In this interpretation, Thomas sees race everywhere and often uses the history of racism to justify his opinions. Because the federal government has acted in racist ways in the past, the logic goes that it ought not be empowered to act in the future.

Strictly curtailing the power of federal government, which has long been the goal of the conservative movement, is also, Robin asserts, part of Thomas’s pro-adversity strategy. Only under conditions that are harsh and brutal can the Black community

“develop its inner virtue and resolve.” What doesn’t kill you, makes you stronger.

“It’s astonishing how openly Thomas embraces not just federalism but a view of federalism associated with the slaveocracy and Jim Crow,” Robins writes. Read through a very different prism, this defense of federalism is fairly close to what Rossum calls Thomas’s philosophy of original general meaning.

“I have said in my opinions that when interpreting the Constitution justice should seek the original understanding of the provision’s text, if that text’s meaning is not readily apparent,” Rossum quotes Thomas, explaining that the original understanding of the Constitution also incorporates what both “the delegates of the Philadelphia and of the state ratifying conventions understood it to mean.” (13)

“Originalism” and Judicial Philosophy

In both Rossum’s and Robin’s attempts at translation and interpretation, Thomas wants to return us to the beginning.

For Rossum, Thomas’s faithful adherence to the original general meaning of the Constitution — ideally a fixed meaning that doesn’t change — is said to provide him with a source of judicial restraint and a dedication to impartiality. It functions as a bright line that finds an action consistent or inconsistent with the Constitution, and allows us to scrape away “the excrescence of misguided precedent” in order to restore “the contours of the Constitution as it was generally understood by those who ratified and framed it.” (23)

Part of this scraping can involve an adversarial view toward precedents (think Warren Court rulings), expressed as both a refusal to apply them and an open invitation for future cases to overturn them.

What might look like a form of right-wing judicial activism is not, for Rossum, because this philosophy aims to restore the Constitution to its original meaning. It is a form of judicial restoration. Above all, Rossum affirms, this doctrine ought to prevent us from “infusing the constitutional fabric with our own political views.” (30)

This does not mean, however, that one cannot have a judicial philosophy; Rossum located Thomas’s in both an originalist interpretation of the Constitution, but also in the Declaration of Independence that forms its “higher law background.” Although it precedes the Constitution and is not therefore legally binding, the Declaration provides the best defense, in Thomas’s words, “of limited

government, of the separation of powers, and of the judicial restraint that flows from the commitment to limited government.” (Quoted, 20)

The Declaration is also the font of the fundamental principle of equality said to inform the Constitution, and for Rossum that equality — that “all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights” — is both individualistic and absolutely color-blind.

Being blind to color demands at the same time a kind of blindness to power. As Rossum puts it: “As far as the Constitution is concerned, it is irrelevant whether a government’s racial classifications are drawn by those who wish to oppress a race or by those who have a sincere desire to help those thought to be disadvantaged.”

Race and Rights

Although both books cover a good deal of legal and Constitutional ground, especially Rossum’s, both return time and again to questions of race and the prospects for African-American advancement in Justice Thomas’s America.

Rossum shies away from too much biographical detail in accounting for his subject’s

views but does note that one reason for Thomas’s attraction to the Declaration of Independence’s higher law traditions is the question of slavery.

His interest in the Declaration, Thomas writes, “started with the . . . simple question, How do we end slavery?” and after having done so, “by what theory do you protect the right of someone who was a former slave or someone like my grandfather, for example, to enjoy the fruits of his or her labor?” (Quoted, 19)

Here again is the source of individual rights over group rights, personal responsibility and hard work in order to overcome histories of oppression and discrimination. Rossum also uses the “what he learned from his grandfather” lens to stress Thomas’s rejection of paternalism and notions of Black inferiority “on which paternalism is based.” (189)

Because Blacks are not inferior, there is no need, for example, for “forced integration” in schools just to be near “superior” white students; no need to regard “racial imbalance” or “racial isolation” as a Constitutional problem in need of remedy in voting rights cases; no need for affirmative action, only “a need for equitable remedies for those individuals who have experienced discrimination.” (190)

In this instance Rossum and Robin arrive at roughly the same destination, having taken dramatically different highways. Both scholars also make use of Justice John Marshall Harlan’s famous dissent in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision that justified legal segregation based on race. Harlan wrote:

“Our Constitution is color-blind, and neither knows or tolerates classes among citizens. In respect of civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law. The humblest is the peer of the most powerful. The law regards man as man, and takes no account of his surroundings or of his color when his civil rights as guaranteed by the supreme law of the land are involved.”

Rossum sees this as basis for Thomas’s decisions on issues such as affirmative action (Thomas quotes Harlan in his opinion in *Grutter v. Bollinger*, for example) and as part of Thomas’s dedication to restoring the original meaning of the Constitution by sweeping away wrong-headed precedents.

Robin also uses Harlan, but quotes from the line before the famous articulation of color-blindness:

“The white race deems itself to be the dominant race in this country. And so it is in prestige, in achievements, in education, in wealth, and in power. So, I doubt not, it will continue to be for all time if it remains true to its great heritage and holds fast to the principles of constitutional liberty.”

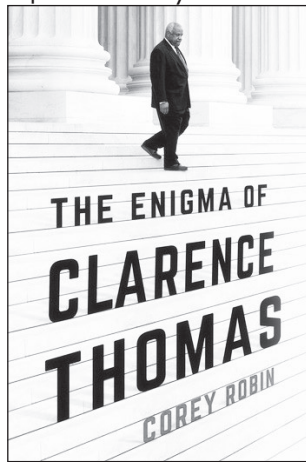
In other words, color-blindness, as Robin is quick to observe, can sit side by side of a racially unequal society, and can constitute a form of racism without explicit reference to race.

Robin puts aside all the conservative “boilerplate” decisions that Thomas has penned; Rossum is what you get when you add them all back into the mix. Rossum approaches Thomas without all of the biographical messiness, content with a few observations such as Thomas’s affection for his grandfather and a reading of his Black Nationalism that simply (and for Robin, falsely) notes that “Meanwhile, his militancy dwindled, and his opposition to affirmative action grew.” (40)

Robin, on the other hand, wants to make the invisible Justice visible by arguing that few Justices have made their biographies so central to their jurisprudence. For Robin, the ideas that Thomas developed about the Constitution were deeply informed by his understanding of race and gender as well as by his disillusionment with the Black freedom struggle. Rossum is not so burdened.

Voting Rights Gutted

Rossum’s Thomas is a love letter to the conservative movement that was determined to gut and overturn the civil rights revolution, especially in and around voting rights. Like Robin, he gives ample time and space to Thomas’s opinions in landmark



cases such as *Holder v. Hall*, the 1994 case that began the gutting of the 1965 Voting Rights Act that has been all-but-completed by the majority ruling in *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013).

In the former case, Thomas denounced the use of remedies to ensure the collective influence of Black voters and to fight against the dilution of Black voting power, insisting that such matters were outside of the original purview of the Voting Rights Act and therefore an improper subject for the court to review.

Further, Thomas denounced the collectivist assumptions lurking behind the claim of Black voting strength and Black voting dilution as a paternalistic insult and as a form of “apartheid.”

Rossum traces this back to Thomas’s adherence to the color-blindness of the Constitution; Robin roots it in Thomas’s belief that African Americans can never find their collective interest satisfied or addressed through the electoral process, a racially rigged game in which whites will always call the shots.

Both interpretations leave us in the same dismal swamp, gussied up as progress in *Shelby County v. Holder*, 19 years later. Writing for the 5-4 majority, Chief Justice John Roberts held that blanket federal protections once guaranteed under the Voting Rights Act are no longer necessary to prohibit racial discrimination in voting because, “our country has changed.”

Justice Ginsberg countered that this is like “throwing away your umbrella in a rainstorm because you are not getting wet.” Thomas sided with the majority. (For an excellent overview of the implications of this decision, see “How *Shelby County v. Holder* Broke America,” *Atlantic Monthly*, July 10, 2018).

What Went Wrong?

For understanding how we got from here to there and the decisive role played by Thomas in the transformation of the Court, both books reward the efforts of the reader. Reading them together is a strong reminder of just how partisan and ideological this transformation has been.

They also both offer a vision in which the Constitution is no longer the sword (Robin) or the crutch (Rossum) to reform the social, political and economic order.

In both instances we’ve come a long way from Wilson J. Moses’s *Golden Age of Black Nationalism*, which is not necessarily a bad thing. But Robin offers a far more profound challenge for political radicals to find and occupy spaces of disagreements with Thomas’s underlying vision, which so many of us have come to share, a vision, Robin argues, “of the permanence and autonomy of race, of the inability of politics to overcome social disrepair, of the ineffectiveness of state action.”

For Robin, the question in the end, may not be to ask where Thomas went wrong,

“but where we did.” (221)

This is a ravishingly clever analysis that unexpectedly closes the political divide between Thomas and disaffected leftists. But this startling conclusion leaves a few loose strings, two of which strike me as especially pressing. The first threads across just how well Robin captures the elliptical nuances of Thomas’s approach to race, society and the U. S. Constitution, and whether he is overly selective in his interpretation of Thomas’s body of work.

Of course, Rossum is equally selective in his own ideologically-laden way, and surely Thomas is more than a jurist with his own particular spin on “original intent” interpretations of the Constitution. Yet in some ways Rossum gives us a more comprehensive overview of Thomas’s voluminous writing.

The second loose string coils around Robin’s use of Black Nationalism as a trans-historical intellectual tradition and as a set of contemporary political affiliations. Has he taken too many liberties here?

Even at its most conservative, Black Nationalism has never yet been stretched so far as to encompass positions articulated in Robin’s version of Thomas. Decades ago Moses demonstrated the ideological flexibility of Black Nationalism, but herein Robin leaves it so contorted as to be unrecognizable.

I suspect that relative to this issue, among others, Clarence Thomas will remain an enigma for years to come. ■

White Supremacy Symbols Falling By Malik Miah

WITHIN A FEW days in early June, Confederate monuments began to tumble. Ostensibly memorials honoring southern Civil War fighters, these statues were erected decades later, to announce that white supremacy remained alive and well.

A Senate committee is reviewing if Confederate statues at the U.S. Capitol should be removed. Previous attempts have failed. Activists and some city governments aren’t waiting for official action.

A statue of Confederate President Jefferson Davis along Richmond, Virginia’s famed Monument Avenue was torn down by activists. Demonstrators beheaded four Confederate statues before pulling one down using a tow rope at the Portsmouth, Virginia Confederate monument as police watched.

Alabama’s flagship state university took down memorials to Confederate soldiers. The University of Alabama removed plaques honoring students who served in the Confederate Army and student cadet corps.

Two of Alabama’s largest cities — Birmingham and Mobile — took down Confederate monuments that were focal

points for civil unrest. Defying a state law intended to protect such memorials, Birmingham dismantled a massive obelisk dedicated to Confederate soldiers and sailors in a downtown park.

Mobile took down a statue of a Confederate naval officer that had been vandalized. Mobile Mayor Sandy Stimpson said on Twitter the move was not an attempt to rewrite history but intended to remove “a potential distraction” in order to focus on the future of the Gulf coast city.

Pressure is mounting in Mississippi over the state flag. Adopted in 1894, the design incorporates the Confederate battle flag — a red background with a blue X lined with white stars. In 2001, Mississippi voted to keep it. Now Republican Governor Tate Reeves says it is not up to elected leaders to change it.

Jefferson Davis and his legacy departed Kentucky’s Capitol Rotunda after a 12-foot marble statue commemorating the lone president of the Confederate States of America was removed June 12.

Ten military bases are named after Confederate generals who are properly seen as traitors by African Americans and

many whites. Fort Bragg in North Carolina and Fort Hood in Texas are two examples.

These bases are in former slave states in the South. They were all named some 50 to 80 years after the Civil War. Why then? It represented the emphatic victory of white nationalism over Black civil rights.

Donald Trump, the white nationalist-in-chief says not on his watch. “These Monumental and very Powerful Bases have become part of a Great American Heritage, and a history of Winning, Victory and Freedom.”

Like other defenders of these dishonorable men, he argues that it reflects “Southern heritage and culture.” They mean white culture even though the wealth of the southern economy was built by slave labor.

Blacks ask: Where are the monuments to former slaves who fought in the army and militias for freedom?

The Marine Corps recently banned displays of the Confederate flag (with an exception for Mississippi’s contested flag). So has NASCAR! Amid the rising anti-racist groundswell in the country, the times are changing. ■

REVIEW

Homeownership & Racial Inequality By Dianne Feeley

Race for Profit

How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership

By Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor

Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019, 368 pages, \$30 hardback, eBook \$22.99.

WHERE YOU LIVE predicts the path of your family's future. A hundred years ago those who gave their address as Back of the Yards, then the south side heavily Irish neighborhood in Chicago, couldn't get hired for a job in sales or offices.

One's address determines, to a large extent, where one's children attend school. It can limit or extend transportation routes to jobs, shopping and entertainment. People in some zip codes have higher rates of asthma and lead poisoning. And if you own your house, it is the potential source of wealth for most working-class people — unless you are African American.

By the 1960s, at the height of the post-war economic boom, most U.S. families owned their own home. Black homeownership was lower but nonetheless rising, and at a faster rate than white homeownership. But African Americans had a smaller market to choose from and less access to conventional financing.

That is, Black residents whether renting or owning paid more and got less for their housing than whites. A 1961 Urban League report cited a "race tax" of \$157 million in the Chicago housing market alone over just a seven-year period. (49) Additionally, almost a million urban whites had moved to the suburbs and the cities' tax base declined.

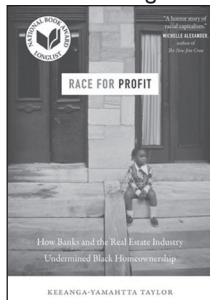
Race for Profit is one of the latest and excellent books showing how housing is a commodity that reinforces inequality in late capitalism. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, assistant professor of African American studies at Princeton University, describes and analyzes the federal government housing policies between the urban rebellions of 1967-68 and the Nixon-Ford era.

Saving the Cities

The era begins as the Kerner Commission identifies substandard, segregated and sparse housing of the Black community as a root cause of the urban rebellions. As the committee issued its final report, President Lyndon B. Johnson urged passage

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of the Housing and Urban Development Act



to ensure that the new program would be implemented equitably.

Under pressure to respond to the urban rebellions, Johnson increased domestic spending even while the cost of the Vietnam war ballooned. To carry out the scale of rebuilding, in the words of his special assistant Joseph Califano, it had to be a "creative revolution" of public-private partnership. This worked because saving the cities provided new opportunities for mortgage banks, insurance companies and the real estate industry.

More than 300 insurance companies stepped up to form an urban investment program to create low-income housing and inner-city jobs. Taylor notes that it was not a central pool of money or a decision-making body to allocate funds. Each company "retained its autonomy and made business decisions based on what was in its own best interests." (67)

These of course were the very same companies that had previously built segregated housing complexes such as Stuyvesant Town in Manhattan, Parkchester in the Bronx and the all-Black Riverton Houses in Harlem. By the spring of 1969 the companies claimed to have spent \$631 million in financing 63,000 units of low-income housing. In exchange for this infusion of cash, Taylor maintains that the federal government relinquished control of anti-discrimination regulations. (76)

If the goal was to rebuild the cities at the very time when two million whites left for the suburbs and two and a half million African Americans moved to the cities, combining that with ending discrimination in housing would require not just a law, but regulation and inspection.

Looming ahead was the 1968 presidential election, in which Richard Nixon disparaged Johnson's social programs. But once elected, he appointed George Romney,

who had a record of opposing segregated housing, as secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Initially Romney outlined a program of expanding affordable housing units by 200,000-300,000 a year while at the same time reversing the divide between suburbs and cities. He employed a carrot and stick method to set up subsidized housing in several overwhelmingly white suburbs. If city officials refused to cooperate, HUD would withhold infrastructural aid.

But Romney found suburban officials, white majorities, the courts and the president against enforcing the Fair Housing Act. For Nixon, racial segregation was the result of "the free choice of individuals and families in both the majority and minority communities." (125)

Zoning ordinances, and arguments that low-rent apartments would "flood" the neighborhood and overwhelm the schools, were "colorblind" devices used to circumvent the law.

Fair Housing Thwarted

The book's Chapters 3 and 4 document how the initial programs that came in response to the civil rights movement and urban rebellions were contained, first by thwarting low- and middle-income developments in suburban areas, then by expanding federal mortgages to dilapidated city housing not brought up to code.

Taylor outlines the various ways that developers, mortgage companies and real estate agents conspired with HUD and its financial arm. As a result, while capital covered a program that supposedly rehabilitated 1.7 million homes in three years, Black families moved into housing that was segregated and substandard.

Of course, when the corruption came to light, the program — not the players — was labeled corrupt. Romney did not seize the moment to raise the issue of how, without money for effectively managing the program, staff morale plummeted and the agency became subservient to the real estate industry. Instead he made his peace with the Nixon agenda.

These two chapters set up the way African Americans, particularly Black mothers, were blamed for the failure of the program. Chapter 5, "Unsophisticated Buyers" begins by noting rising mortgage foreclosures that began in 1972.

Many women, displaced by various urban redevelopment programs, were steered into buying rather than renting. Given the precariousness of their income, the reality that their new homes needed expensive repairs and maintenance, and high property taxes, they were unable to hold onto them.

Taylor sprinkles this chapter with compelling stories of women who struggled to maintain their homes. In fact, they were often advised by legal aid lawyers to stop making payments on homes with furnaces that didn't work, windows that didn't open and defective plumbing. But these women, desperate for a home for their family, were then labeled as irresponsible buyers who really didn't "deserve" to own a home.

Romney and his staff described the women as having poor "home-making skills." The agency even put out a "Simplified Housekeeping Directions for Homemakers," two pages of which the book reproduces. These included directions with illustrations on how to clean appliances and dust the furniture.

While HUD refused to consider the systemic problems of homes being sold without having been inspected, the chapter ends on a hopeful note. Taylor documents how women in several cities were able to build homeowner committees. They protested, testified before congressional hearings, brought class action suits, and eventually forced mortgage companies backed by FHA to inspect homes and take responsibility for correcting defects beforehand.

While the beginning chapters of *Race for Profit* outline the HUD Act and promise of home ownership for low-income families, by 1973 the plug was pulled. Chapter 6 details how both the rhetoric of the Nixon administration and its policies did that so quickly.

In one of his last speeches as secretary, Romney announced that HUD was suspending all funding and construction of low-income housing across the country, effective immediately. As a result, 117,000 lost their loans and their homes as well.

Yet Taylor summarizes what HUD had accomplished:

"By some measures, the federally backed, subsidized housing movement was a historic success. Between 1934 and 1968, there had been roughly 1 million units of subsidized housing built in the United States. But between 1969 and 1972, the numbers accelerated dramati-

cally. Production of low-income housing jumped from 226,000 units in 1970 to 472,000 in 1971 and back to 380,000 in 1972. Of course, these numbers were lower than the ambitious goal of 600,000 units a year established by Congress in 1968, but they were higher than at any other point in U.S. history." (239)

Federal Neglect

Given Nixon's refusal to consider integrated housing in the suburbs, he developed a strategy of minimizing federal responsibility for low-cost housing and dumped the mission onto the cities and states.

The combined effect of destroying under-maintained public housing, the moratorium on low-income homeownership, along with rising unemployment in the post-1973 recession, produced thousands of foreclosures. This also drove down the market value of nearby homes and foreclosures ballooned. Taylor notes that by the end of 1974 the federal government was spending \$460,000 to maintain 78,000 repossessed homes. (217-18)

The Nixon Administration's analysis of why the program launched by the HUD

Act didn't succeed chalked it up to the "failure of big government." The supposed fault was an underclass with various "pathologies" that money couldn't solve. Poor people, particularly African Americans, were once again divided up into the deserving and the undeserving.

With rising unemployment and inflation, the "urban crisis" went on the back burner. Henceforth the main governmental housing tool would be a rent supplement (Section 8 vouchers) that families could use to find their own housing. It was their responsibility. Those who "chose" wisely might possibly lead the way to integrated housing — or not. The structural problems were never considered.

This sixth chapter probably quotes more racist comments about poor African-American families than any other, concluding this criminalization "legitimized the federal government's return to policies that encouraged residential segregation and the further isolation of poor and working-class urban neighborhoods." (251)

Profit from Segregation

Taylor's concluding chapter points out that real estate profits have been and continue to be rooted in residential segregation. There is one housing market, with the market value inversely based on the proximity of African Americans, both individually and

collectively. She defines this market as "predatory inclusion" because African Americans are "included" based on discriminatory practices that may entail ignoring fair housing laws, blocking access to credit or charging higher mortgage rates.

Home ownership is the main source through which white working-class families increase their wealth over generations. That is much less true for African-American families, who suffer greater rates of unemployment, underemployment and poverty.

When racism and inequality remain central to the housing market, promotion of homeownership as a means to overcome poverty is a cruel hoax. For a family with less stable income and less access to quality housing, African-American homeownership risks inability to keep their homes and neighborhoods in good repair, ultimately ending up in debt.

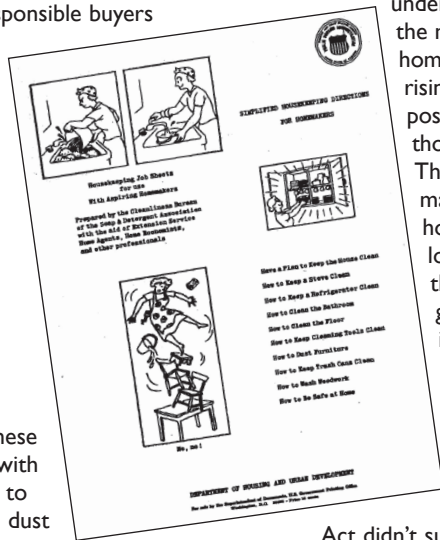
Race for Profit closes by summarizing in a long paragraph how the economic crisis of 2008-09 and the policy of subprime mortgages once again revealed predatory practices of the real estate market and governmental silence. This reality, so fundamentally rooted in racism and inequality, leads the author to state that this will be true as long as housing is a commodity and a badge of citizenship.

As an activist working to prevent foreclosures and evictions in Detroit — a Black and brown city — I found this detailed description of the "war on poverty" as it manifested itself in housing a compelling story. But as I was reading the chapters and marking passages, I found myself constantly questioning the author's idea of integrating the suburbs. I confess I have a bias for cities, and I love Detroit's oldest housing even though it costs more to renovate than constructing new housing.

The gentrification sweeping through most U.S. cities testifies to the attraction of urban life, even given the pandemic. Additionally, from the vantage point of what is environmentally sustaining, I'd suggest that cities are more energy efficient and, being compact, less intrusive on animal habitat.

The problem Detroiters currently face is displacement. Thousands of homes have been foreclosed and demolished; low-income housing is so difficult to find that some families are forced into nearby suburbs. Meanwhile historic downtown apartment buildings like The Albert have emptied out their previous largely elderly tenants and now, beautifully restored, cater to a different clientele.

Although these are not topics Taylor pursues, given her concluding remarks I don't think she would disagree. Especially as the pandemic disrupts our "normal" way of life, now might be the moment to examine how we might live and work differently. ■



REVIEW

The Power of Anti-Carceral Feminism By Lydia Pelot-Hobbs

All Our Trials:

Prisons, Policing and the Feminist Fight Against Violence

By Emily L. Thuma

University of Illinois Press, 2019, 246 pages, \$24.95 paperback.

THE DEMAND THAT no one be caged is an old one. Decades before the U.S. prison population hit two million and the concept of “mass incarceration” entered the public lexicon, anti-racist feminist organizers called for the end of criminalization and confinement.

In the new book *All Our Trials: Prisons, Policing and the Feminist Fight Against Violence*, Emily Thuma traces the “history of activism by, for, and about incarcerated domestic violence survivors, criminalized rape resisters, and dissident women prisoners in the 1970s and early 1980s” (2).

Focusing on how grassroots organizations contested gendered and racial carceral violence, *All Our Trials* offers a vital history for contemporary prison abolitionists seeking to make the world anew. The author is assistant professor of politics, philosophy, and public affairs at the University of Washington – Tacoma.

At the heart of the book is Thuma’s examination of how everyday activism sought to win material victories against the widening net of criminalization and reframe discussion and debates on gender-based violence.

Anti-carceral feminism, as Thuma elucidates, reveals that punitive power is anchored in patriarchal approaches to safety and violence — hence the necessity of rerouting responses to state and interpersonal violence from the carceral state to the transformative potential of community-based responses rooted in care.

In tracing a multitude of abolitionist feminist projects across the United States — from campaigns to close carceral psychiatric units, to Black feminist anti-rape work, to mass defense campaigns for criminalized sexual assault survivors, to radical feminist anti-prison newsletters — Thuma highlights the breadth of this activist current. Their organizing surpassed any single strategy

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Prison Culture

The “Free Joan Little” campaign became a coalitional space for Black liberation, feminist and prisoner rights.

but how they organized — from the structures of their meetings to their handling of internal political disagreements.

One of many strengths of *All Our Trials* is Thuma’s keen attention to how through political struggle, grassroots organizers sharpened their analysis of and produced new knowledge about the operations and logics of the carceral state.

Significantly, much of this work was led by radical women of color and anti-racist white women — many of whom identified as lesbians — who took what we would now describe as an intersectional approach to questions of gender violence.

Socialist and anti-capitalist politics also played a key role as anti-carceral feminists located the expansion of punitive state power as entwined with the contradictions of racial capitalism. In centering the experiences of criminalized and incarcerated women, this feminist formation revealed how the disciplining of racialized gender and sexuality was crucial in the production of carceral power — pushing the burgeoning prison abolitionist movement to integrate feminist politics.

At the same time, anti-prison and anti-policing feminists challenged the liberal tendencies of the mainstream feminist movement, which failed to interrogate not only how patriarchy was intertwined with other systems of oppression but also how interpersonal gender violence was situated within structures of state violence.

or tactic, reminding us that there is no silver bullet for undoing mass criminalization and the carceral state.

Thuma’s book is also notable for her thick description of not just what these various groups and coalitions organized

The abolitionist feminist organizing that Thuma details fundamentally counters the logics and practices of “carceral feminism” — the strand of feminist politics contending that the best strategy for remedying sexual violence and other forms of interpersonal gender violence is through increasing punitive state power.

In recent years, contemporary activists with organizations such as INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence have rightfully tied the rise of carceral feminism to the state’s co-optation of the early domestic violence movement through attaching funding streams to collaboration with law enforcement.

Yet Thuma reminds us that this co-optation was never totalizing. Although the collectives, organizations and coalitions she documents were never the mainstream of the feminist movement, they still provided an anti-racist, left edge to debates on dismantling patriarchal power and offered more expansive visions of liberation.

Organizing Mass Defense

Thuma begins the book by tracing a series of mass defense campaigns focused on women of color and indigenous women’s right to resist sexualized violence. The significance of the campaigns of Joan Little, Inez Garcia, Yvonne Wanrow and Dessie Woods went beyond their specific cases as they illuminated how “the struggle against the abuses of the carceral state and the struggle to eradicate sexual and domestic violence [were] indivisibly linked.” (10)

Through protests, teach-ins, and movement lawyering outside and inside prison walls, these campaigns won concrete victories, set legal precedents and reframed debates on feminist self-defense and racial criminalization.

While mass defense campaigns have a long history on the U.S. left from the Scottsboro case to Angela Davis, the 1974-1975 case of Joan Little galvanized a multi-pronged defense movement that would reverberate across the decade.

During her imprisonment at a North Carolina jail, a white guard Clarence Allgood physically forced Little to perform oral sex until she managed to stab him with the icpick he wielded against her.

The state responded to her self-defense by charging her with first degree murder with the possibility of the death penalty.

Soon the Joan Little Defense Fund organized for Little's acquittal, Refusing to exceptionalize her story, instead they emphasized how her case was located at the nexus of the right of women to self-defense against sexual violence, the inhumanity and violence of prison conditions, and the discriminatory deployment of the death penalty against Black people and poor folks.

Thuma demonstrates that the Free Joan Little campaign became a coalitional space for Black liberation, feminist, and prisoner movements. This cross-section of organizers rooted the campaign in the long lineage of Southern activism against white supremacist gendered violence, while also expanding the left's understanding of who constituted a "political prisoner."

Furthermore the Defense Fund pushed against the mainstream feminist movement's "everywoman" narrative which contended that Little, like other sexual assault survivors, represented the struggle of all women. Rather anti-racist feminists, most notably Angela Davis, argued the need to recognize how Little's structural position as a Black incarcerated woman in the U.S. South made her particularly vulnerable to white supremacist sexual violence.

The campaign's success in making Little the first woman acquitted of armed self-defense against a rapist proved the power of participatory defense campaigns.

The success of the Free Joan Little campaign paved the way for the defense campaigns of Inez Garcia, Yvonne Wanrow and Dessie Woods. Although different contexts shaped each of these cases and campaigns, organizers learned from and built upon each other's struggles.

Thus Black and white feminists formed the D.C. Coalition for Joan Little and Inez Garcia (acquitted in 1977), explicitly linking the two cases through everyday activism and political rhetoric. Additionally, the National Committee to Defend Dessie Woods — formed by activists affiliated with the African People's Socialist Party — argued that the state's targeting of Woods was an example of the repression of Black women under racial capitalism and the internal colonization of Black people in the United States.

Their analysis resonated with the long, ultimately successful campaign to free Yvonne Wanrow — a member of the Sinixt/Arrow Lakes Nation — who stressed how her criminalization was tied to settler-colonialism.

The Prison/Psychiatric State

Moreover, feminist organizers took on the inherent violence of what they termed the "prison/psychiatric state" through the Coalition to Stop Institutionalized Violence (CSIV). Decarceration, feminist, and mental patient liberation activists formed CSIV in 1975 to block the opening of a locked

psychiatric facility for "violent women" in Massachusetts.

The state's proposal was shaped by the medicalization of carceral regimes, particularly the rise of "behavior modification" units in response to prison protests. While this was framed by state officials as necessary for the treatment of mentally unstable and violent women, CSIV declared that whom the state deemed violent was fundamentally a political question.

Building from insights gleaned from previous inside/outside organizing against a similar unit, CSIV "argued that the center would be used discretionarily against imprisoned women who protested their conditions of confinement and that women of color and lesbian women would be particularly vulnerable." (55)

Their organizing drew on queer activism that challenged the power of psychiatry to define "deviant" and "normative" gender expression and sexuality, and the pathologization of resistance to state violence. CSIV called attention to the carceral links among jails, prisons and psychiatric institutions and demanded community alternatives.

Through mass protests, petitions and political education, CSIV put the proposed unit for violent women up for public debate. Activists took advantage of the fact that the approval of the unit fell under the jurisdiction of the more left-leaning Department of Public Health, which they targeted at public meetings with testimonials — leading to the state removing the unit from the state budget.

CSIV's victory not only stemmed carceral state expansion. As Thuma illuminates, by the coalition "reconfigure[ing] violent women as victims of institutional violence and foreground[ing] imprisoned women as subjects of feminist discourse, CSIV challenged the liberal legal imaginary in which criminals and victims were discreet populations and called for alternatives to criminal justice." (80)

Thuma further recounts how radical women's prison newsletters made abolitionist world-making possible across bars. She details how two publications of the 1970s — *No More Cages* and *Through the Looking Glass: A Women and Children Prison Newsletter* served as "hidden transcripts" of women's resistance to confinement while also attacking the isolation that is critical to prison regimes.

These publications served as spaces for imprisoned activists and their outside counterparts to share information and organize around issues ranging from the criminalization of battered women, including Yvonne Wanrow and Dessie Woods, to women's prison strikes to demands for adequate healthcare. As Thuma notes, such "print media not only documented activism; it helped to produce it." (122)

Furthermore, by putting carceral violence against women at the center of their analysis, prison newsletters incubated a politics of abolition feminism. Prison newsletters constituted an important site of collective activist knowledge production, ranging from critiques of the erasure of women's prisons from radical prison movements to critiques of the mainstream feminist anti-violence movement's cozing up to the criminal justice state. These clarify the racial and gendered violence central to imprisonment.

Coalition for Women's Safety

The final activist current that *All Our Trials* examines is multifaceted Black feminist antiviolence organizing in Boston and Washington, DC that advanced a critique of state violence and put forth alternatives to criminalization. Thuma charts the history of the neighborhood-based Coalition for Women's Safety (CWS) which developed in response to the crisis of Black women being murdered in Boston during 1979.

While several organizations comprised CWS, Thuma highlights the central role played by the Combahee River Collective — the Black lesbian feminist socialist collective known for their articulation of systems of oppression as "interlocking." Combahee's pamphlet *Why Did They Die?* argued that the root of this crisis lay in the intersection of racism and sexism, including in the press and police's neglect of the crisis.

This analysis shaped the activism of CWS, which engaged in street level political education to counter dominant narratives of the killings as random, alongside advocating for collective self-protection over calls for heightened policing. The work was to tackle the immediate crisis and to challenge "the persisting, pervasive reality of lethal and nonlethal violence against women." (132).

In addition, their expansive vision motivated them to support the defense campaign of Willie Sanders — a local Black man who grassroots activists contended was framed for a series of high profile rapes in a white neighborhood. For CWS this work was part and parcel of their work of creating a society invested in the safety of all Black people and all women.

Adjacent to CWS's activism, Black feminists with the DC Rape Crisis Center (RCC) expanded what was considered anti-rape work. While initially run by a collective of predominantly white feminist women — many who were rape survivors — the recruitment of working class women of color activists for paid jobs rerouted the political direction of the DC RCC.

The growth of Black feminists in organizational leadership pivoted the organization towards community accountability over criminal justice intervention in their anti-rape work — a critical position to take as

continued on page 44

REVIEW

Half-Life of a Nuclear Disaster By Ansar Fayyazuddin & M. V. Ramana

Manual for Survival:

A Chernobyl Guide to the Future

By Kate Brown

New York: Norton, 2019, 432 pages,
\$27.95 paperback.

ON APRIL 26, 1986, one of the reactors at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine exploded, scattering highly radioactive materials into the surroundings. As the fire ignited by the explosion in the reactor core burned, more radioactive effluent was expelled and swept by the winds from the Ukraine and neighboring Belarus, to much of Europe.

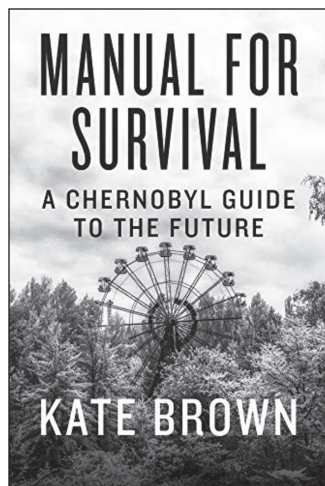
In fact, the disaster came to international attention partly as a result of radioactive rain falling in far-away Sweden, only two days after the explosion. To date, thousands of square kilometers in Ukraine and Belarus remain closed off because of high radiation doses that would accrue to inhabitants.

This was all inconceivable to nuclear experts. In 1983, a Soviet nuclear specialist wrote in the *Bulletin of the International Atomic Energy Agency*: “a serious loss of coolant accident is practically impossible... the safety of nuclear power plants in the Soviet Union is assured by a very wide spectrum of measures...” The irreconcilability of experience and professional expert testimony has been a signature motif of the Chernobyl disaster.

Kate Brown’s *Manual for Survival: A Chernobyl Guide to the Future* lays bare the toll of the 1986 Chernobyl disaster from the perspective of the people who experienced it. Brown’s book is distinguished from other works on Chernobyl by years of archival and on-the-ground field research, as well as extensive first-hand oral history. It is the confluence of the right person for the subject approaching it at the right time.

Brown is a renowned historian and professor of Science, Technology and Society at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Ansar Fayyazuddin is a physicist active in Solidarity and Science for the People. M.V. Ramana teaches in the School of Public Policy and Global Affairs at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada and is the author of The Power of Promise: Examining Nuclear Energy in India. This review is being co-published in ATC and Science for the People magazine in slightly different versions.



Her first major publication, *A Biography of No Place*, won the American Historical Association prize for the best book in International European History.

She has deep knowledge of the local culture and has had significant previous engagement on

the effects of low-level radiation, especially found in *Plutopia*, another prize-winning book. *Plutopia* recounts the effects of radiation on the communities and environment around two plutonium plants.

Her timing was good too: archives from the former Soviet Union were opening up their records of Chernobyl, and some of the survivors of the disaster were still available to recount their experience.

Her human subjects are portrayed with empathy and warmth even when she disagrees with them, the landscape is vividly described, and the historical background always engaging and pertinent.

Mystery and Official Denials

Manual for Survival is partly structured as a mystery: why do official accounts of this major disaster only record an absurdly small number of deaths and relatively minor long-term ill-effects?

For decades, the Soviet state and many international bodies offered figures that ranged from 31 to 54 short-term fatalities and a few thousand thyroid cancers. Brown investigates how these numbers came about and provides a fuller picture of the devastating consequences of the accident, many of which continue to unfold today.

Her heroines — factory workers, doctors, some scientists and activists — are all, in their own ways, carrying out a science for the people, often at odds with officialdom. They don’t start off trying to carry out such science, but are driven to it by virtue of living and working in contaminated regions and endeavoring to make sense of their own experience and observations.

As elsewhere, citizens in Belarus and Ukraine had to take matters into their own hands and learn to measure radiation doses and mitigate contamination. Brown’s portraits bring to life what cold numbers never can. One is reminded of psychologist Robert Jay Lifton’s pithy observation: “statistics don’t bleed.”

The official denial of the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster follows a familiar playbook. The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were followed by a blackout of information about the resulting deaths and, especially, the impact of radiation exposure.

Similarly, the adverse health effects of atomic bomb tests and accidents at nuclear facilities were kept secret and any revelations treated as a public relations problem rather than as an opportunity to address the public health disaster that it actually was.

Surprisingly, the United States, far from using Chernobyl in anti-Soviet rhetoric, accepted the Soviet claims of minimal disruption of the ecology and ill-effects on humans. This strange congruence between the Cold War rivals, Brown argues, was due to their mutual interest in preserving the legitimacy of nuclear power as a safe energy source.

Timing also played a part. During the 1990s, when Chernobyl’s impacts were being debated, many Western countries, including the United States, were being sued by their citizens for exposing them to radiation from atomic weapon tests.

Minimizing the Toll

Manual for Survival documents the various devices used to minimize the health toll from Chernobyl. One was to allow only a very small number of conditions, specifically cancers, thyroid cancer in particular, as the only admissible signatures of harmful radiation. A second was to use unwarranted extrapolations from earlier studies (e.g. the Hiroshima Lifespan Study) to Chernobyl.

A third was to low-ball the radiation dose people were exposed to, and then argue that any observed health effects could not be due to such small doses. A fourth was to define safe levels by fiat and declare that exposures below these levels could not cause health impacts.

A chapter called “The Butterfly Effect” explores the history of how official bodies like the World Health Organization

(WHO) and the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR) dealt with the explosion of cases of thyroid cancer in the region. It is a good example of the way Brown integrates biographical narrative, history and political analysis.

The chapter details the hard work and uphill struggles in which scientists like Valentina Drozd from the Institute of Radiation Medicine in Minsk and Keith Baverstock from the WHO's European office were involved. They ultimately uncovered the "unexpectedly early and large spike in cancers in children from the most contaminated regions." (251)

Brown goes on to document the hostile response of officialdom, particularly how the upper echelons of the WHO, UNSCEAR and the International Atomic Energy Agency tried to suppress this knowledge.

She crisply summarizes the playbook they employed: "classify data, limit questions, stonewall investigations, block funding for research, sponsor rival studies, relate dangers to 'natural' risks, draw up study protocols designed to find nothing but catastrophic effects, extrapolate and estimate to produce numbers that hide uncertainties and guesswork, privately slander and threaten dissenting scientists, and cast doubt on known facts so that scientists must pursue expensive and duplicative investigations to prove what is clearly evident." (256)

The resulting charts in UNSCEAR documents, Brown says, "felt like meditation...I too wanted to believe in the charts, to dissolve into them and make those sick kids in the contaminated regions go away." (262)

Proliferating Disasters

Manual for Survival also records one role that scientists sometimes play in undermining struggles for environmental justice: abusing their status as experts by denying negative health consequences of "low" levels of radiation, they delegitimize and undermine the lived experience of the affected population.

This role is by no means specific to radiation debates, as scientists have been deployed by corporations and governments to discredit popular environmental and public health movements.

Brown's questioning of the legitimacy of the technocratic whitewashing of the real impact of Chernobyl has unsurprisingly been criticized. Some reviewers have attacked her by counterposing her claims with those made by the kinds of "experts" whose work stands exposed by the history Brown uncovers.

Underlying these attacks, and the associated debate over the health impacts of low-level radiation, is the future of the

nuclear industry with billions of dollars at stake. Brown is open about her stance on these subjects and has argued for her point of view vigorously yet rigorously, without pretending to be observing from the proverbial disinterested academic ivory tower.

Finally, Brown's book is opportune. The subtitle, "A Chernobyl Guide to the Future," suggests that this is not history for history's sake but a message for us now when nuclear power is being aggressively promoted as a solution to climate change.

By bringing home the lessons of Cher-

nobyl, Brown gives a glimpse of a possible future if nuclear power is pursued. If we absorb this history, the seductions of nuclear power will no longer have a hold on us. We thus have in our hands history as redemption — the unacknowledged victims of Chernobyl finally have a voice.

Like Hamlet's father, their ghosts flicker through these pages demanding acknowledgment and redress for the injustice done them. And we have history as prophecy, what Chernobyl portends for the future if we pursue nuclear power — a proliferation of nuclear ecological disasters. ■

The Brotherhood of Railway Clerks By Jessica Jopp



With their newly sharpened lead the brotherhood of railway clerks document summer latitude sitting at their heavy station desks. They pinpoint destination times precisely as a silver watch.

In the bright sun of an afternoon they use fine instruments to match their passengers with numbered seats, compartment green, window, aisle. The leather satchels and the worldly trunks, the clicking dinnerware they count, perhaps some extra cargo, too.

Yet while they gesture over ledgers and shape the graphite figures with their capable hands, they are dreaming of a rail line cut through trees, the way a head-lamp beam at night weaves its ignited breath, the windows lit behind like sparks extinguished by pursuing dark.

If they had to account for beauty, the clerks would look up from their desks and out an open window watch a live oak fifty yards away, marvel that everything has been remade by what its leaves and branches cast across the station platform.

If they had to document grief, they'd look in the same direction, but then their eyes would close to the voices warm air will fade (all those lives that have shuttled past!) and their startled pencils would pause before the keen sorrow of shade. ■

Jessica Jopp is the recipient of the Baxter Hathaway Prize in Poetry from Epoch. Her work has appeared in many journals, among them The Progressive, The Texas Observer, Poetry and Seneca Review. She teaches in the English Department at Slippery Rock University in Pennsylvania.

REVIEW

Planet of the Humans:

Can the Damage Be Repaired? By Bill Resnick

GIVEN HIS OTHER films, the left and climate action forces anticipated Michael Moore's latest work, *Planet of the Humans*, to be a vivid exposition of the great threat of climate change and an equally vivid and inspiring demonstration of what can and must be done.

We expected a film that would demonstrate that humanity already possesses the knowledge and technologies — of renewable energy, of regenerative agriculture, of alternative transport, of all the Green New Deal's goals including democratizing communities and achieving a measure of climate justice — to end the threat of human extinction and in the process bring to birth a new world.

Instead, what we got is was way beyond disappointing, indeed shockingly arrogant, immoral and reactionary. The film contends that:

- Renewable energy is a hoax, that it can't replace fossil fuels, that it is in fact the spawn of the fossil fuel industry and a piece of its portfolio.

- "The takeover of the environmental movement by capitalism is now complete." That's from the director and film narrator Joey Gibbs; Moore was listed as Executive Producer.

- The era of industrialization must and will end. By plundering earth it has generated an unsustainable human population explosion, such that humanity inevitably faces mass death, and that we must unflinchingly recognize that this death is not only part of life but a necessary solution to ecological catastrophe.

Gibbs' nihilism and misanthropy, only leavened by a love of nature, inform the entire film. Every critical reviewer has raised the question: How did Michael Moore, of all people, come to have a role in a film "that purports to care about the environment and the future of humanity and yet seeks to undermine support for the very things we must do to save this planet, and ourselves..."

All also asked what could be done to

Bill Resnick hosts "The Old Mole Variety Hour" on KBOO radio in Portland, Oregon. He has published in the Columbia Law Review, Socialist Review, Against the Current, the Portland Alliance and the Portland Oregonian.



Renewable energy can save the planet for humans and our fellow species.

repair the damage. Moore did win some supporters. The film got rave reviews from Breitbart and Fox News, especially from the ecofascists among them, welcoming Michael Moore to the club.

Reactionary, Ignorant, Deceptive

Planet of the Humans trashes renewable energy deploying so many prevarications, distortions and duplicitous claims that reviewers had to limit their examples. Here are mine:

Contending that renewables cannot and will not replace fossil fuels, the film features an interview with Richard York, who in 2008 wrote that up to then renewable energy production was a small fraction of electricity supply and was not replacing coal and nuclear power. But the film ignores York's articles written in 2018 and 2019, demonstrating that renewables have become far cheaper and some replacement is apparent in the U.S. and even more so in other countries.

More important, these articles point out that the barriers to transforming renewable energy are political and economic, not technological. Once policies are enacted to reduce energy consumption and end subsidizing fossil fuels, renewables will easily replace fossil fuels.

Ozzie Zehner, the Svengali and energy

*The film echoes near word for word the talking points of the fossil fuel industry, for example pointing to intermittency of sun and wind to demonstrate that renewables could never replace fossil fuels because they cannot produce the required baseload round-the-clock power of burning coal. In fact, coal plants often break down and their sudden unexpected stoppages are more disruptive to the system than regularly intermittent renewables. More important, the problem of intermittence has proven easy to solve by a combination of load sharing, load balancing, and storage of various kinds which are getting cheaper, producing a steady supply of energy.

"expert" who guides Gibbs throughout the film, contends "You use more fossil fuels manufacturing solar panels than you get benefit from them. You would have been better off burning the fossil fuels in the first place than playing pretend."

This is absurd. Over the life span of a solar panel today, the benefit in replacing fossil fuel energy is at least 15 times the cost in terms of greenhouse gas pollution, even if the solar panel was built with fossil fuels.*

On visiting a Tesla plant Gibbs notes thick wires connecting the plant to the grid, which he thinks shows the lie to Tesla's claim that it's 100% renewable powered. Gibbs gloats — for him it's another Gotcha moment exposing renewable energy advocate propaganda — while in fact, nearly all solar and wind arrays are connected to the grid because they get paid for the excess they pump into the grid.

Zehner guides Gibbs to a desolate abandoned solar energy facility, to demonstrate how solar power just doesn't work and destroys the land. But right down the road a replacement solar facility using next generation technology pumps out cheap reliable electrons and stores the output not needed.

One could go on exposing the deceptions. For example, the film savages renew-

able energy forces as having sold out to corporate America and is silent on their accomplishments and promise. It “proves” the argument using old footage of climate change leaders and old errors of climate forces.

Thus Bill McKibben and 350.org once supported biomass burning. The film fails to point out that when the disastrous effects of biomass became clear, 350.org and McKibben quickly joined the campaign to stop biomass as an alternative energy source.

More important, “Planet of the Humans” is silent on the fact that the wholesale prices of sun and wind have fallen below the price of coal and now natural gas sourced electrons, partially explaining why renewable energy is so fast growing as a percent of total energy production. And it is silent on profoundly important and astonishing developments in California.

In that state, over 50% of electricity customers are now served by public programs, either by the long established public utilities (in Los Angeles and 45 others across the state) or by Community Energy projects that over the last ten years have overcome Investor-Owned Utilities’ resistance to take over four million customers from the IOUS.

All these public agencies are being pushed by the movements and the people they serve to build out community sun and wind energy, to democratize decision making, and to work with and support the whole range of community groups battling for alternative transport, clean water, regenerative and urban agriculture, zero carbon habitation design, energy conservation and use reduction, and climate justice.

The film is also silent on the Green New Deal; silent on the radicalization of 350.org and the Sierra Club now supporting the GND and local public power systems in the battle with the IOUs; silent on the revolt of the young; silent on the Sunrise Movement, Extinction Rebellion, Rising Tide, the Climate Mobilization, System Change Not Climate Change, and high school and college organizing, among others.

“Solutions:” Deindustrialization and Mass Die-off?

Although “Planet of the Humans” is wrong in its blanket critique of climate action forces, the film rightly points out that the IOUs have pivoted in the face of the climate movement’s growing political strength. Like most of corporate America they are greenwashing, including with fossil fuel company adverts proclaiming their research into alternative fuels. And they have successfully coopted some environmental NGOs to support their efforts.

The utilities have also tried to get in front of the movement, by organizing to

take charge of the shift away from fossil fuels and toward renewables. In addition to slowing down the pace of change, in order not to strand their huge coal burning and nuclear assets, the IOUs are doing everything they can to undermine the growing struggle, especially now in California, for community control and the build out of renewable energy.

Unfortunately, in their zeal to defend renewable energy most of the film’s critics neglected this front of the struggle.

Gibbs offers many minutes of heartbreaking footage — smoldering rainforests, fouled rivers, desolate collapsing factories, roads clogged with cars, smokestacks spewing filth, deadly smog, dying animals.

After one long sequence near the end, he intones “Is it possible for machines made by industrial production to save us from industrial civilization?” Sure we can, it’s an essential part of our only hope. But after those horrifying clips, how many of his audience would have the background to challenge this condemnation of industrial technology?

The film does not discuss what follows after we humans reject industrial production and embark on a mass die-off. The film’s apparent solution, a return to the land, is simplistically utopian. Do we really want to leave behind modern medicine, communication systems, and urban life? Or do we want to choose among technologies, and reconfigure the uses to which technology is put and the social/political relations of their management?

Gibbs conflates population growth with over-consumption, failing to identify which parts of humanity over-consume. Worse, he offers a succession of talking heads who urge us to accept that a human die-off is not only inevitable but necessary to address the ravages of climate change.

Thus a fellow in an academic looking office but only identified as a “scientist” offers: “Species hit the wall and then they crash. That’s a common story in biology. If it happens to us, in a way that’s the natural order. ... There’s no going back. Without seeing some die off in population, there’s no turning back.”

This is not some mistake picked up from the cutting room floor. For Gibbs closes his case urging another talking head in an academic setting to present his pet theory, that fear of death drives human overconsumption, to ward off the fear. This talking head then quotes Albert Camus, “There’s only one liberty, to come to terms with death, thereafter anything is possible.” The talking head concludes, “I find that downright inspiring.”

Maybe the Camus quote contributes to the examination of alienation and existential angst? But as a solution to the climate crisis?

This then raises questions that should be directed to Moore and Company. How do we decide who should die, and who should live? What does justice require? Maybe accept the advice of the lieutenant governor Dan Patrick of Texas who early in the pandemic volunteered to die in order to save the economy for his grandchildren?

Planet of the Humans and Beyond

Perhaps after pondering these problems, Moore and Company might more deeply examine the strategies for stopping climate change offered by climate scientists and engineering labs and being demonstrated around the world?

The film is doing and will do great damage, especially when promoted by Michael Moore whose celebrity has already gotten the film respectful media attention.

Every critical reviewer has asked the same question: How could Michael Moore do this atrocity of a film? Immediately after it appeared free on U-Tube, getting millions of hits, a group including Naomi Klein and many climate scientists, climate action and environmental movement leaders, did a letter asking Moore to take another look and withdraw the film.

Moore blew them off and made a number of appearances defending the film, though with little conviction and deflecting the hard questions. In one appearance Moore and Company denied they were for “population control.” But whatever Moore thinks or does, nature will not stop.

Climate disasters will increase in frequency, intensity, and damage, with conditions made even worse by a pandemic or two. At some point, hopefully in time, the people will awake to the danger and demand dramatic action.

As the left and environmental and climate action forces continue to grow and build out the elements of the Green New Deal, especially successful models of local renewable energy, those prefiguring a sustainable and democratic future, perhaps the radical left can decisively influence the direction of this mobilization to come. And perhaps, Michael Moore, who has won such a huge audience for his film achievements, will come to recognize the great promise of renewable energy and be there to film it. ■

THE 5-4 SUPREME Court decision denying Trump’s cancellation of the DACA program is a tribute to the power and courage of DACA recipients and their “Dreamers” movement. It’s also a reflection of the reality of hundreds of thousands of anti-racist protesters in the streets of U.S. cities.

But the Court leaves the door open to cancel DACA through a “properly reasoned” process, meaning that this life-and-death struggle will continue. ■

REVIEW

A Lifetime for Liberation

By Naomi Allen

Holocaust to Resistance: My Journey

by Suzanne Berliner Weiss

Roseway Publishing (Nova Scotia and Manitoba),
2019, 311 pages.

SUZANNE WEISS'S THRILLING and sometimes harrowing account of her life, from war orphan to immigrant to socialist activist, can be read almost as a catalog of liberation struggles from the post-World War II era through the first decades of the 21st century. Her personal story meshes almost seamlessly with the political history of those years.

For her contemporaries, some of the fascination in reading this account will come from a shared experience — growing up in the stifling 1950s, the sudden expansiveness of the '60s, the life-altering embrace of radical politics, then navigating a route through the thicket of political life without a compass.

But the core of the story is not one that most of her readers will have experienced — born in 1941, the war refugee child of Polish and Russian Jewish resistance fighters, raised in French orphanages, adopted by Jewish American “progressives,” seeking her place in the world. Nevertheless, the writer's voice is so engaging that her personal story grabs the reader from the very start, and becomes a compelling guide through her life and adventures, both personal and political, to almost the present day.

On one level Weiss's story reads as a personal odyssey, and on this level is irresistible. After the bitterness and confusion of losing both parents at an unbearably early age — her mother to the Nazi death camp at Auschwitz and her father to war wounds — and moving from one French Jewish agency orphanage to another in a mostly loveless early childhood, she put Europe behind her literally and figuratively when she was adopted and moved in 1950 to the United States.

Although she turned her back on the land and language of her birth, the yearning for family, and for information about her parents, never left her. She was able to make contact with surviving relatives and began to glean information about her parents, helping to neutralize the toxic sense of abandon-



Raincy-le-Plateau orphanage 1946: Suzanne (second from left) with other children and their dog, Zezette.

ment. And she came to realize that it was indeed love and solidarity that had rescued her from death as an infant and protected her, and that helped her develop a sense of her Jewish heritage.

Without the resistance to Nazism, by Jews and non-Jews, and the solidarity of common people, she and thousands of other war orphans would certainly have perished. It was a lesson that helps throw into relief the importance of solidarity with today's refugees, fleeing climate catastrophes and political upheavals of all kinds — a lesson Weiss assimilated and has acted upon with conviction.

Political Journey in Late 20th-Century America

On another level, *Holocaust to Resistance* is an account of the formative political moments in the lives of many of us who came to political consciousness around the same time as Weiss, as radicalization swept our generation, fostering a new consciousness and new activism on many fronts.

During the '60s, the U.S. Socialist Workers Party experienced dramatic growth because of that new radicalization, and developed some authority and influence in the growing social movements challenging the status quo. Weiss's youthful entry into the SWP positioned her to be a participant in many of these struggles for justice and self-determination.

Solidarity with the Black struggle for civil rights, the anti-Vietnam War movement, support to the fight against South African apartheid — these were Weiss's early and enduring commitments. After seven years working in the party's printshop, and a stint

working as secretary to party founder James P. Cannon, she took grueling industrial jobs in New Orleans and Virginia, and learned first-hand the difficulties facing women — and Jews — in much of American life.

When the SWP went off the rails in the early '80s, Weiss was among the first to notice that its claim that American workers were moving into the center of political life was an illusion. (She does not mention other negative developments in the SWP around the same time — its turn away from Trotskyism to appeal to the Cuban leadership; its turn away from the abortion rights movement to appeal to more socially conserva-

tive women in the garment industry, where the party was trying to establish a base; its abrupt ending of democratic norms for discussion of debated issues.)

She became disaffected from the party, and after a decade-long hiatus and a move to Toronto, opened a new chapter in her life as a writer for the journal *Socialist Voice* and an activist in the movements to keep Canada out of the war in Iraq, combat the fossil-fueled climate crisis, and support Palestinian human rights.

Here she benefited from a lifetime of experience in political liberation movements: her accrued skills at coalition-building, debate and mediation were the glue that helped keep these movements alive and thriving.

Weiss assesses her experience in the SWP frankly. “Was joining the US Socialist Workers Party in my youth a mistake? No, I am grateful to the party that educated and oriented and helped me make sense of a confused and turbulent world. In the 1980s, the old guard passed from the scene, and their replacements derailed the party. But its founding spirit guides [us] as we continue our work as activists in resistance and struggle for a just and better world, and for equality, love, and peace for the downtrodden, for immigrants who seek refuge, for the Palestinians who fight for justice, and for Indigenous Peoples, who teach us to repair our relationship with the earth.” (260)

Some of her lifelong areas of activism included Cuba (the revolution becomes a honeymoon destination); Poland (where she used a visit to her mother's hometown as an opportunity to meet with leaders of the

Naomi Allen is a member of New Paltz (NY) Women in Black and Hudson Valley Middle East Crisis Response.

Solidarnosc movement); Venezuela (where she participated in massive demonstrations in the capital), Bolivia (whose Evo Morales explained the importance of confronting the climate crisis for the benefit of the world's people).

The Morales connection spurred Weiss to begin organizing with environmental activists, allying with Indigenous groups to oppose the building of a pipeline to exploit Canadian tar sands, and educating about the tar sands industry's responsibility for disastrous global climate changes.

Holocaust Survivor, Champion for Palestinian Rights

Many Jewish Holocaust refugees and survivors fled to Palestine before, during and after the Second World War, one of the few places that would admit them — this initially included Weiss's father, who fled to Palestine from Russia before he went to France to fight the Nazis with the Resistance.

The formation of Israel in 1948 was promoted internationally as a necessary step to give Jews a safe haven from anti-Semitism and genocides for coming generations. This was not a unanimous position by any means. Long before Israel was formed by the United Nations, it became clear that it was not a land without a people.

Much of the international Jewish community, including many outstanding public intellectuals and rabbis, regarded Jerusalem as a spiritual and emotional center, but had opposed putting a Jewish state there at the expense of the Palestinian population.

The Nazi holocaust and the destruction of European Jewry, plus Zionist control over Jewish emigration from the displaced persons camps, put an untimely end to that discussion.

In 1947-48, Jewish militias aided by the new Israeli army violently expelled most of its indigenous population, 750,000 Palestinians whose families in many cases had lived on their land for generations, from their homes and land, demolished more than 500 of their villages, and killed many thou-

sands of people.

To this day Israel prevents the survivors and their descendants from returning, in violation of all international law. Hundreds of thousands today live in squalid refugee camps in Lebanon, Jordan, Gaza and elsewhere. Even within Israel, its Palestinian citizens face restrictions on where they can live and what occupations they can fill.

The theft of Palestinian land has been non-stop in the past 72 years, and has speeded up in the years since Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza (1967), and above all since the notorious Oslo

accords provided the window-dressing of peace for Israeli territorial expansion (1993).

But international public opinion has turned against the Israeli government as its goals have become clear to all — to eliminate as many Palestinians as possible; seize as much Palestinian land as possible; build settlements on that land for Jews only, who can vote in Israeli elections and get the advantage of Israeli protections, while subjecting Palestinians to military law, arbitrary attacks, and shoot-to-kill; deny them control over their water and resources; and strangle their economy.

Suzanne Weiss had never been a Zionist — she had always believed that “Never Again,” the slogan of Jewish defiance to Nazism, also applied to genocidal attacks on others, including Palestinians.

When then-Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon planned to visit Toronto in 2005, there was widespread outrage.

Sharon had Palestinian blood on his hands dating back to his days in the *Haganah* (predecessor of the Israeli army), conducting hit-and-run terror attacks on Arab villages in 1947-48, and later leading Unit 101 responsible for the infamous 1953 Qibya massacre among others.

As Israeli Defense Minister in 1982, Sharon was known as the Butcher of Beirut for enabling Lebanese militia attacks on the Palestinian Sabra and Shatila refugee camps



in Beirut, killing thousands of civilians. He was also a champion of the settlement project in the West Bank.

Weiss signed her name to a letter opposing Sharon's visit to Canada, and added “Holocaust survivor.” This was the beginning of her outstanding activism as a supporter of Palestinian human rights.

Making the connection with her previous efforts against South African apartheid, she spoke against Israeli apartheid toward Palestinians. And reaching deeply into her Jewish heritage, she pulled out the traditional solidarity of Jews with oppressed people everywhere, paying tribute to her parents' sacrifice as part of their struggle for human values. Thus, she understood that her support of Palestinian human rights flows directly from the best values of her Jewishness.

Indivisible Solidarity

It's impossible not to be moved by this development in the author's life. At an age when she could have retired from contentious issues, instead she embraced perhaps the most contentious one of all.

Many Jews of her generation — our generation — turn their faces away from the plight of the Palestinians because it challenges long-held beliefs that are too painful to examine. But to Weiss, the solidarity and humanity that saved her life as a war orphan are indivisible — nobody can be excluded — and this recognition provided the strength to take an unpopular stand in favor of Palestinian rights.

The enduring lessons of this book — that justice and human rights are indivisible, that human solidarity can redeem even the grimmest debacles, that people who don't share all our values can be important allies in a common struggle — these lessons badly need to be disseminated widely. That they can be delivered in such a palatable form as Weiss provides, in a human story of alternating pathos and triumph, should give us hope.

If we can assimilate these lessons, we'll be in a better position to continue the struggles that Weiss has been part of for her entire life.

As Weiss put it, speaking to French students from the Auvergne region, where as a baby she had been rescued and saved from certain death by a local farm family:

“I want to thank the people of Auvergne who gave refuge to me and so many others, Jews and non-Jews, for their courage in the face of danger. Today, we face similar problems with refugees seeking sanctuary. We need the spirit of those times — of solidarity and humanity — to face today's challenges. We must follow the example of Auvergne and be true to our humanity.” (291) ■

Anti-Carceral Feminism — *continued from page 38*

more and more RCCs turned to carceral feminism. For instance, in contrast to the white radical feminist movement's separatist politics, the DC RCC believed in the necessity of working across gender lines — notably with their collaboration with the group Prisoners Against Rape.

Moreover, their analysis translated into their broad-based anti-violence organizing, from the First National Conference on Third World Women and Violence in 1980 to their coalitional DC's March to Stop Violence

Against Women and their community organizing in the face of the shooting of their own board member Yulanda Ward.

All Our Trials is a compelling historical analysis of the varied and rich political tradition of anti-carceral feminism. Thuma provides today's abolitionist activists with a highly usable past to learn from, as we strive to redirect our collective capacities away from prisons and policing and towards transformative justice and care. ■

The Worst of the Worst

We now know that the novel coronavirus had begun traveling from China by early winter. Since then, three governments stand out for the most complacent, arrogant and incompetent response: the United States, Russia and Brazil, under the ruinous rule of Trump, Putin and Bolsonaro. Those countries happen to be, of course, the giants of North America, Eurasia and South America, helping ensure that the spread would be global and maximally destructive.

A second tier of regime malpractice would have to include mullah-ruled Iran, Boris Johnson's Britain, and Mexico where president Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador caved in to Trump's demand, forcing the reopening of *maquiladora* plants for the sake of the U.S. auto supply chain. One should also add Narendra Modi's India, where the no-notice lockdown sent millions of workers walking from the cities to their rural villages, inevitably circulating the virus to the most vulnerable regions.

The rapid full decoding of the genome of the present deadly new coronavirus is an amazing tribute to what science has achieved. Meanwhile the spectacle of the U.S. and Chinese governments spewing garbage at each other about which side "created" or "unleashed" the virus speaks volumes about the condition of global civilization.

Put to proper use, scientific knowledge of the virus — combined with early full disclosure, flawless coordination among governments, plentiful global supplies of protective equipment for medical workers, testing and quarantining capacity in case of need, and a strategic national plan in each country about which sectors of the economy were "essential" to maintain and which would need to be shut down in an emergency — could have contained COVID-19 with relatively minimal damage.

That's not the world we live in. It's not the world that Donald Trump inherited when he won the U.S. presidency, and international cooperation and massive investment in global public health certainly were no part of his agenda to "Make America Great Again."

Notoriously, Trump blew off a detailed blueprint prepared by the Obama administration for dealing with a pandemic, and dismantled the interagency office that was actually in place to handle such an emergency. That's criminal negligence, on steroids. Yet it can be seen as a perfectly rational political calculation at the time.

Think of a parallel with the threat of catastrophic climate change. A given politician may or may not care about the impending disaster, but the truly horrific environmental consequences will not hit (at least in the rich developed countries) during their present term of office and next reelection campaign.

Similarly, even assuming (against the weight of evidence) that Donald Trump understood that the threat of a deadly global pandemic was real, it made sense to calculate that the risk of it happening on his watch was small. Why then spend money on replacing the surgical masks and equipment used up during a previous flu emergency that you'd probably not need, compared to the urgent priorities of wiping out Obamacare and shoveling tax-break money to cronies, corporations and billionaires?

Short-term political rationality translates to ultimate insanity. Almost certainly, thousands in the United States

alone would have died in the best-case scenario, but what could have been a costly but probably contained epidemic in 2020 has become an open-ended calamity for the U.S. population and economy, and for the entire world. Epidemiology experts like the fired Dr. Rick Bright fear that the coming winter in this country "may be the darkest in modern history."

In a country with no national health service or universal insurance, tens of millions of laid-off workers have lost health care — and many who get called back will find their employers no longer providing it. The insurance industry's preparations for increasing premiums to hit next year can only be imagined.

What is the future of public education, already facing a federal administration committed to destroying it? When filling classrooms with 30+ students is out of the question? When reliance on "online learning" is an educational and social disaster for students and their families? When the race and class gap between those with/without reliable internet technology is enormous, and when so many kids depend on school-provided breakfast and lunch meals?

Whole economic sectors stand on the brink. While some like major airlines with political clout and claims to be "essential," will probably be bailed out, others — such as hundreds of thousands of non-chain restaurants and myriad small retail outlets will disappear. Musicians and cultural workers relying on live performances and art fairs; seasonal workers, in tourist and travel sectors — all kinds of small businesses and their work forces — face ruin.

With state and local government budgets in catastrophic shape, the jobs and crucial services they provide — along with public workers' pension plans and union contracts — will face the chopping block. On top of so much human misery and insecurity entailed in all this, the cascading collapse of purchasing power and consumption feeds on itself, creating exactly the conditions for a possible prolonged Depression. The absurd claim that May's slight decline in unemployment signals a "V-shaped recovery" is not taken seriously by any economist.

Coronapolitics Inflames Everything

For a long time now, the racialized inequalities of America's neoliberal regime have been leading toward some kind of social explosion. Its timing and the form it might take were not predictable — whether it might be mass strikes and community mobilizations, or uncontrolled rioting, or something in between.

We now have a somewhat better idea — the hybrid combination of workplace actions at "essential" work places and hospitals, and the anti-police rebellions all mark elements of a mobilization responding to the crisis of a devastated capitalist society. The coronavirus crisis, which will not go away quickly if ever, further inflames everything.

We can barely imagine what might occur if the 2020 election culminates in a shambles and a full-scale crisis of political legitimacy, but that too requires a subsequent discussion. Immediately, can sustained organization and a new mass socialist movement crystalize from the current crisis and struggle? That may be the central question in a situation where we can no longer speak of — nor can we survive — a return to the death spiral that used to be called "normal." ■

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