

AGAINST THE **CURRENT** A SOCIALIST JOURNAL



Hands Off! The Resistance Rises

Trump's Tariffs and Democrats' Disarray

◆ KIM MOODY

DOGE's VA CUTS

◆ STEVE EARLY & SUZANNE GORDON

Campus Sexual Assault "Normalized"

◆ M. COLLEEN McDANIEL & ANDREW WRIGHT



A Letter from the Editors

Lessons of Abductions and Terror

THE ABDUCTION OF Mahmoud Khalil — the Palestinian graduate student and green card holder seized March 8 at his Columbia University residence — is now multiplied by other high-profile detentions and deportation threats, and dozens or even hundreds of unpublicized cases. Secretary of State Marco Rubio openly boasts as much.

These arrests and disappearances highlight a reign of terror confronting student visa and even green card holders. They pull together multiple interwoven aspects of the five-alarm civil and human rights emergency in the United States and the global U.S. empire:

- *The U.S.-Israeli genocide in Palestine*, which now openly threatens the forced depopulation of Gaza and the mass ethnic cleansing and Israel's pending annexation of the West Bank.

- *The drive to criminalize protest actions* against the genocide, especially on college campuses.

- *The collusion of the pro-Israeli Zionist and Christian-nationalist far right* including Campus Watch, Betar USA, and Canary Mission identifying student and faculty activists for government targeting, expulsion and/or deportation.

- *The intention of the Trump administration to destroy U.S. universities* as institutions of scientific, cultural and critical thought — and the *spectacular cowardice of college administrations at Columbia*, the University of Michigan and others in capitulating to these attacks.

- *The lawless conduct of the Trump gang*, including blatant evasion of court orders blocking deportations.

- *The connections between the far-right campaigns in both the United States and Israel*, aimed at consolidating authoritarian rule in both countries.

We'll discuss some specific cases. First, however, there's no denying the overall terrifying moment facing targeted groups in the United States, to say nothing of Palestine — or tens of millions of people globally facing mass epidemics or starvation from the peremptory cutoff of U.S. funding of critical survival programs.

At the same time, vital services provided by federal government agencies and their work forces are being shredded on a daily basis with pending disastrous consequences for public health, military veterans' care, public schools, the postal service, and soon Social Security and Medicare.

How to resist a multi-front assault that's clearly designed to have such a paralyzing effect? First, it's necessary to recognize the systemic and coordinated character of the attacks, so that the targets aren't compartmentalized and the defense efforts isolated and divided.

The Targets

Mahmoud Khalil, Dr. Rasha Alawieh and Prof. Badar Khan Suri are not separate cases from, say, the threatened cut of \$175 million in federal grants to the University of Pennsylvania for the crime of a transgender athlete participating in women's sports, or a presidential decree annulling federal workers' union contracts and bargaining rights.

Those interconnections are part of what brought out an estimated several million people April 5 demanding "Hands Off" into the streets of hundreds of U.S. cities and towns — large and small, blue states, red states and purple states — furious at the crimes of the Trump-Musk gang, and aghast over the astonishing market free-fall precipitated by Trump's tariff rampage against the world economy.

The staying power of this popular resistance remains to be tested, but April 5 was one hell of a start.

To review some basic facts: Mahmoud Khalil, the Columbia

graduate with a green card and eight-months pregnant wife Noor Abdalla, was grabbed by Department of Homeland Security plainclothes agents as the couple returned to their university-owned residence.

Columbia had ignored Khalil's requests for protection as he'd sensed he was being followed. A prominent activist during last year's encampment and a negotiator for the peaceful resolution of the occupation, Khalil has never been charged with any crime or university disciplinary action.

Upon being told his "student visa" (nonexistent) and then his green card were "revoked," Mahmoud was taken to New Jersey and whisked to an isolated Louisiana detention facility before courts could intervene. A federal judge ordered the case to be moved back to New Jersey. These days, whether the Trump regime will obey this and other rulings remains to be seen.

Columbia student Yunseo Chung, 21, is a permanent resident who has lived in the United States since age 7. Now at an undisclosed location, she's suing to prevent being deported after ICE agents raided and searched Columbia residences on the pretext that the school or its residences are "harboring and concealing illegal aliens on its campus."

Neither "illegal" nor charged with anything, under what conceivable legal theory is Ms. Chung subject to deportation? Supposedly, participation in pro-Palestinian demonstrations makes her "a detriment to U.S. foreign policy objectives" under the terms of a 1952 McCarthy-era law authorizing deportation on those grounds.

Dr. Rasha Alawieh, a kidney specialist, surgeon and assistant professor at Brown University Medicine, returning from a trip to Lebanon, was detained for 36 hours and then put on a return flight — in violation of an emergency court order barring her deportation.

The ostensible "grounds for removal": Dr. Alawieh's attendance at the funeral of Hasan Nasrallah, the Hezbollah leader assassinated by Israel, where tens of thousands of Lebanese were present.

These are far from the only cases of Trump's agents evading a court order, as illustrated by the mass removal of alleged Venezuelan or Salvadoran "gang members" — absent proof or any shred of legal process — to the deadly "super-max" prison in El Salvador.

Despite admitting an "administrative error," the government says the courts have "no jurisdiction" to order the return of the wrongfully deported Kilmar Armando Abrego Garcia, a father living with protected status in the United States, who was picked up March 12 in Baltimore after finishing his factory shift.

Ranjani Srinivasan, a student from India whose doctoral work in urban planning is almost completed, was "disenrolled" by Columbia after ICE agents arrived at her apartment and, failing to gain entry to detain her, said her visa was cancelled and informed her that she had 15 days to leave the country.

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Above: April 5 "Hands Off" action in Austin, Texas.
Front Cover: April 5 "Hands Off" action in Detroit, Michigan.
Back Cover: Mahmoud Kahlil, targeted by ICE.

Joshua De Vries
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“This Is Life and Death Stuff”: Vets Mobilize vs. DOGE

By Steve Early and Suzanne Gordon

ON MARCH 14, a much-decorated former Capitol police officer was on his way to the National Mall in Washington, D.C. to join a protest against down-sizing of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) by the Trump Administration.

Among the thousands gathered there were more than a few American flag wavers, decked out in camo and other forms of apparel favored by military veterans. The mere sight of them gave Harry Dunn a “PTSD moment.” As he explained later, “the last time I saw a crowd like this, they were beating the shit out of me and my co-workers at the Capitol.”

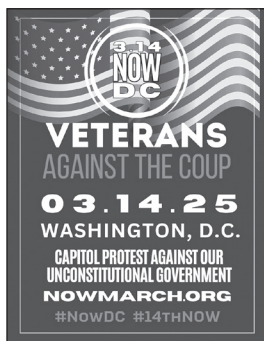
What Dunn encountered was not a re-union of now pardoned January 6 rioters, but an increasingly common sight outside VA hospitals and other federal buildings around the country: military veterans, their families, and VA care-givers rallying against Trump-Musk attacks on the nation’s largest public healthcare system.

These reinforcements are a welcome addition to the ranks of “Save Our VA” campaigners from Veterans for Peace and Common Defense, who have been sounding the alarm about VA privatization threats for years. In early March, Vietnam veteran Paul Cox was visiting a terminally ill friend at a VA facility in St. Louis. Afterwards, he ran into a woman in the hospital parking lot, who handed him a leaflet.

“VA workers are being fired,” it said. “This can hurt your care. This is an assault on the VA. Call or email your Senators and Representatives as soon as you can.”

Cox is a leading member of VFP long active in its Save Our VA (SOVA) committee; so, he has distributed similar appeals on many occasions. When the longtime VFP activist asked the lone hand biller whether she belonged to any labor or veterans’ groups, he found she was acting entirely on her own.

Reading about President Trump’s mass firing of federal employees, she became very worried about the impact on local VA care



for her husband. She had typed up the flyer herself, taken it to a copy shop, and began hand billing other patients, staff, and family members.

Several weeks later, at the same location, hundreds of demonstrators gathered to denounce Elon Musk and his tech industry underlings at the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE).

As one vet attending that protest told the press: “We’re not going to stand quietly by while the VA is dismantled, and benefits are taken away...They just come in and start pulling strings and wires on the wall to see what happens. But this isn’t X. It isn’t Twitter. It’s not me losing a tweet. It’s guys dying.”

VA Headquarters Leak

This growing backlash began in response to the indiscriminate dismissal of 2,400 VA probationary workers, including many former service members. That group — along with new hires in five other federal departments — got a temporary reprieve, in the form of a March 13 reinstatement order issued by U.S. District Court Judge William H. Alsup in San Francisco. [On April 8, the U.S. Supreme Court reversed Judge Alsup’s reinstatement order. —ed.]

However, as Alsup warned the union plaintiffs in this case, the VA and other agencies still have the ability to downsize based on future Reduction in Force (RIF) plans that are “done right.”

A March 4 headquarters memo revealed that new VA Secretary Doug Collins plans a RIF from 480,000 employees to 399,957, starting in August. This return to the agency’s headcount six years ago will, according to that leaked document, “eliminate waste, reduce management and bureaucracy...and increase workforce efficiency.”

In an opinion piece for *The Hill*, Collins pledged to do this “without making cuts to healthcare or benefits” and warned critics that “we will be making major changes. So get used to it.”

Others on the Hill, and their constituents, are not happy with that response. “The VA,” warns Mark Takano (D-CA) “is on the

precipice of destruction” from “a senseless reduction in force.”

According to this ranking member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, the VA-run Veterans Health Administration (VHA) will be seriously disrupted — particularly for those among its nine million patients who have service-related conditions due to past toxic exposures in combat zones or on U.S. military bases.

The VA has had a big influx of disability benefit claimants since Congressional passage of the Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act in 2022.

Nearly a million vets have since qualified for VHA care, due to medical conditions acquired while serving near burn-pits in the Middle East or on military bases in the U.S. with poisoned soil or water. They join older vets whose health was damaged by Agent Orange exposure in Vietnam or other forms of chemical contamination during the first Gulf War.

With VA workforce cuts of nearly 20% now looming, advocates for veterans fear that PACT Act implementation will be disrupted, even with a projected 10-year allocation of \$280 billion to fund its expanded coverage. As a *NY Times* investigation has confirmed, the VA’s initial job cuts in early 2025 and its DOGE-driven cancellation of hundreds of agreements with outside contractors has already had a chaotic, ripple effect.

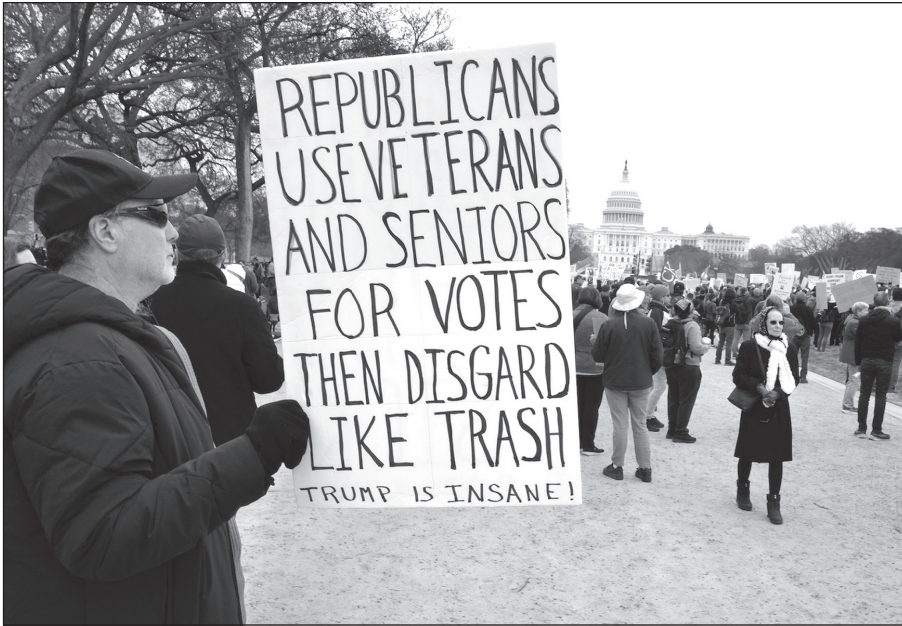
Longer term, the VHA’s role as a medical research powerhouse, leading provider of clinical education for healthcare professionals, and backup public hospital system during pandemics or other emergencies will be jeopardized. And veterans who have filed tens of thousands of disability claims with the VA-run Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) will face longer delays getting them approved.

Labor-Management Uncertainty

One regional VA administrator we interviewed (who asked not to be identified) described the widespread uncertainty among his/her colleagues about how to submit plans, demanded by VA headquarters in Washington, for further staffing cuts.

“Are we following Office of Management and Budget (OMB) rules, or the rule of law, which requires that we follow certain guidelines, for example, people with the most

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Hundreds of vets turned out March 14th in Washington, D.C. to oppose the dismantling of their vital healthcare system. They also participated in the April 5th Hands Off rallies.

seniority are the last to go, employees who are veterans are the last to go, employees with high performance ratings ditto?"

To share information and get answers to personnel questions like these, nearly 20,000 people have joined a Reddit group called VeteransAffairs. It's moderated by a VHA pharmacist and Tennessee community college teacher David Carson, a former VBA claims processor.

A combat vet with PTSD, Carson was fired in 2017 — in part because of a Facebook post he had written with the hashtag #AssassinateTrump, which some of his co-workers, and management, found to be threatening.

Learning from that experience, Carson is now trying to "create a safe, helpful, and respectful [online] community" where others can get the benefit of his experience helping vets qualify for VA benefits and fight unfair dismissals. As one grateful subreddit user in Salt Lake City told *The Times*, "it just gives you an idea of what other people at the V.A. are going through, that you're not alone."

Among career employees like these, there is little confidence that Republican political appointees — eager to impress DOGE and the White House by meeting their staffing cut quotas — have any real understanding of who is "mission critical" at the VA and who is not. For example, many employees illegally fired by the first Trump Administration, under the VA Accountability and Whistleblower Act of 2017, were house-keepers and food service workers considered easily disposable.

As one VHA manager asks now, who is going to feed hospitalized veterans and keep facilities clean when you lay-off and don't replace such support staff members? Who is going to change the sheets on their beds

or sanitize a room to prevent the spread of serious hospital acquired infections like MRSA or *Clostridium difficile* (C-Diff)?

Another VA official pointed out the adverse safety impact of Collins's recent abrupt cancellation of multiple contracts with needed private sector vendors. One contract — since restored — was with an outside firm supplying radiation safety officers for VHA oncology and imaging departments (a position outsourced because of difficulty hiring inhouse staff to fill this role).

No More Phoning It In?

A well-documented strength of the VHA is its telehealth services in areas like nephrology and kidney care. This consultative capacity is critical, one staffer told us, for veterans in rural states like Alaska, Montana or Wyoming and isolated places like Guam or even Hawaii, where there are very few nephrologists.

Yet Secretary Collins — an Air Force Reserve Colonel, Baptist minister, and former congressman with no healthcare experience — insists that such care delivery is easily reproducible in the private sector.

Many veterans with mental health conditions, also rely on VHA telehealth sessions with their therapists, who are in very short supply in many parts of the country. These patients suffer from depression, substance abuse, and a higher risk of self-harm than the general population.

The VHA has a major advantage over alternative providers of therapy, via telehealth, who also operate on a multi-state basis. In the private sector, if a doctor, nurse, nurse practitioner, physician assistant, or therapist cares for an out-of-state patient, they must be licensed in both their own and that other

state.

The VA has been uniquely empowered to establish national standards of practice for its health care professionals that enables them to work remotely, from home, while caring for patients, without regard to state licensing requirements (which remain a legal obstacle to other healthcare systems' wider use of telemedicine).

Such advantages are little valued by right-wing operatives like Collins, who has now ordered mental health providers to return to work in VHA facilities — even if the only space available for them to conduct virtual psychotherapy with patients is cubicles in a large open office space, set up like a call center.

As new VA spokesman Peter Kasperowicz, a former *Washington Examiner* and Fox News reporter, informed *The Times*, on March 24, "Under President Trump, V.A. is no longer a place where the status quo for employees is to simply phone it in from home."

Clinicians interviewed by the newspaper warn that such work location changes "will degrade mental health treatment, which already has severe staffing shortages" and trigger "a mass exodus of sought-after specialists like psychiatrists and psychologists."

The result will be more costly referrals to private sector providers and longer wait times for appointments, particularly in rural areas and any part of the country with a shortage of mental health services for patients unable to pay out of pocket.

Claims Processing Delays?

Even before the arrival of DOGE cost cutters, VBA staff members faced the challenge of processing new PACT Act-related claims based on 23 medical conditions, ranging from bronchial asthma to various rare cancers, which are now considered presumptively related to either burn-pit exposure and other chemical exposures in the military.

VHA staffers fear that impending job cuts will make it harder for veterans to get medical exams enabling them to join registries maintained for victims of Agent Orange, Gulf War syndrome, burn-pit and asbestos exposure.

A survey of several thousand VA staffers conducted by the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) two years ago found that a majority of VBA respondents were experiencing unmanageable claims processing workloads. Even then, this was causing more than 60% to consider leaving their jobs.

A similar large majority of VHA participants in this survey said their facilities needed more frontline and administrative/support staff. But vacancies were not being filled, nor was sufficient recruitment of new staff underway. More than two-thirds reported

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Upholding Reproductive Rights: In Ohio and Beyond

By Marlaina A. Leppert-Miller

ALMOST A YEAR and a half after the Ohio citizens' victory passing an amendment to enshrine reproductive rights into the state constitution, and five months after the presidential election, the abortion issue is no longer front and center for most Ohioans.

Anti-choice forces, however, have not stopped looking for ways to strip away these rights. And unfortunately, some of our neighbors have not fared as well. Women in Kentucky, Indiana and West Virginia now live under draconian laws restricting abortion except in very limited circumstances.

So where are we now? And what can we do to continue fighting for reproductive freedom?

When *Roe v. Wade* was overturned in 2022, a six-week abortion ban with no exceptions for rape or incest went into effect for several months across Ohio until it was temporarily blocked by a Hamilton County judge.

Over the next year, Ohioans fought against the "dirty tricks" of the Republican-dominated state legislature and Ohio secretary of state and ultimately won a victory to reclaim basic rights for women.¹ A citizen-led initiative on the November 2023 ballot resulted in the passage of an amendment titled "The Right to Reproductive Freedom with Protections for Health and Safety."

Ohio's Reproductive Freedom Amendment provides a state constitutional "right to make and carry out one's own reproductive decisions, including but not limited to decisions on contraception, fertility treatment, continuing one's own pregnancy, miscarriage care, and abortion" until fetal viability without state interference or penalty.²

Continuing Attacks

Even with the Reproductive Freedom Amendment in place, reproductive rights in Ohio face ongoing attacks. Anti-abortion activists and many Republican legislators and other government officials are now attempting to undermine the amendment, which was passed by 57% of Ohio's voters. One of the first challenges came from Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost.

Ohio's six-week abortion ban, known as



Marlaina A. Leppert-Miller

the Heartbeat Law, was finally overturned in October 2024 by Hamilton County Judge Christian A. Jenkins, who had initially "stopped enforcement of the law when the case entered his courtroom in the fall of 2022 several months after the *Dobbs* decision."³

During the case, and after the passage of the amendment, state AG Yost insisted that the law should not be thrown out entirely, contradicting his own earlier analysis of the invalidating effects of the amendment on the Heartbeat Law. He now argued that some of the law's "provisions didn't conflict with the amendment passed by voters and should be kept, such as mandatory waiting periods and multiple appointments required for abortion care."⁴

Judge Jenkins disagreed, instead asserting, "The Ohio Constitution now unequivocally protects the right to abortion." Additionally, "unlike the Ohio Attorney General, this court will uphold the Ohio Constitution's protection of abortion rights," he wrote in his decision. "The will of the people of Ohio will be given effect."⁵

Yost nevertheless continues to spend taxpayer money on lawsuits and has filed an

appeal in the 1st District Court of Appeals, which oversees Hamilton County. So, we wait for the next chapter in this litigation.

Additional threats to reproductive rights are looming as anti-abortion activists like Austin Beigel, president of End Abortion Ohio, look for new ways to criminalize abortion and nullify the existing amendment.

"We do this by applying the word of God to this issue and our government" (despite America's long-held separation of church and state) and "borrowing from a lot of [the] language" of the 14th Amendment to make the legal arguments, Beigel asserts in front of an audience at the East River Church in Batavia, Ohio.⁶

Beigel is working with Republican lawmakers in the General Assembly to introduce what he calls the Ohio Prenatal Equal Protection Act. The proposed bill claims that "human life begins at conception," he says. "Therefore, all the protections that are offered to other people under the state law are also offered to the pre-born."⁷

He and other advocates for this legislation are trying to push a religious extremist narrative that everything from a fertilized egg onwards should be covered by the Equal Protection Clause in the U.S. Constitution. Based on this reasoning, Ohio's constitution would then be in violation of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Although most legal experts criticize this argument, these efforts may pose real dangers in the future. "Beigel knows there will be a legal challenge, but ... by continuing to introduce [such legislation], it may get passed further down the line, he argue[s]."⁸

We have witnessed the far-right capture of some of America's courts as they seek to enact a radical social agenda, with the U.S. Supreme Court stripping women of fundamental rights in their *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision and the Alabama Supreme Court ruling that frozen embryos are "unborn children" with legal personhood in that state.

With a growing number of ultra-right judges willing to reverse legal and democratic progress, Beigel's strategy requires us to be vigilant and proactive and not fool ourselves that Ohioans' reproductive rights are permanently secure under the Reproductive Freedom Amendment.

Marlaina A. Leppert-Miller is an associate professor of Political Science at Wilmington College, a Quaker founded college in Wilmington, Ohio.

Abortion Bans in Neighboring States

We have only to look across our border at the neighboring states of Kentucky, Indiana and West Virginia with near-total abortion bans to see what would be in store for us if we become too complacent with our gains.

Women in these states do not have the tool of fighting back through a citizen-initiated ballot measure and must instead rely on their legislatures or courts, which have thoroughly failed them so far.

Women in Kentucky, Indiana and West Virginia now lack autonomy over their own bodies, even though a woman's ability to make decisions about her own reproductive functions shapes her entire future in fundamental ways — in her personal, professional and family life.

Pregnant individuals in these states are put at greater risk for serious health issues, and even death, under the current restrictions and criminal penalties to healthcare providers.

The restrictions make it very difficult to retain and recruit doctors and other professionals in the field of reproductive health and beyond.

"Nearly 60 percent of medical students stated that they would not pursue residency training in states with abortion restrictions, according to a national survey by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists."⁹ The risks to doctors and their patients are just too great, and medical residents receiving training in states with abortion bans will "receive inadequate instruction in important life-saving techniques, which will further harm women."¹⁰

This is the message from hundreds of members of Kentucky Physicians for Reproductive Freedom in an open letter demanding the repeal of their state's abortion ban.

Their indignation is striking and justified: "A government that takes away the freedom of women and pregnant persons to access critical medical care and threatens physicians with criminal penalties for upholding their oath is un-American."¹¹

In addition to the deterioration of the healthcare system, there are other economic and social consequences to such abortion bans. Forced pregnancies can impact child development and lead to an increased likelihood of poverty as women, especially lower-income earners, struggle with the financial, physical and emotional requirements of childrearing and childcare.

Young women of childbearing years who are contemplating higher education or a career might think twice before staying in or moving to a state with such restrictions on their freedom.

Even with the bans, women in Kentucky, Indiana and West Virginia are still desperately

seeking abortion care. Those with time and means are crossing the border into Ohio to receive in-person care. Abortions in Ohio for out-of-state residents more than doubled in 2023, according to a report by the Ohio Department of Health.¹²

Many others are turning to self-managed abortions outside the medical care setting. Access to pills for medication abortions, also known as Plan C, is still available by mail through providers outside these and other states with abortion bans.¹³

Taken together, mifepristone and misoprostol are highly effective for ending pregnancy up to eleven weeks with low risk of complications, and many patients are assessed through telehealth visits prior to being prescribed the pills. However, there is a battle over continued access to this method of abortion care from outside providers.

Earlier this year a grand jury in Louisiana, where there is also an abortion ban, criminally charged a New York doctor who had allegedly prescribed abortion pills to a Louisiana patient. New York's Governor Kathy Hochul has refused to sign an extradition request to send the doctor to Louisiana,¹⁴ but the case is an example of the lengths to which anti-choice forces will go to further restrict access to safe reproductive care.

Moreover, there are rare cases when complications do arise from medication abortions, and patients' lives and health are now at greater risk due to the culture of fear leading some not to seek or receive timely medical intervention as things go terribly wrong.

Continuing Fight for Our Rights

In the wake of the *Dobbs* decision, there was nationwide outrage and a wave of activism and donations to pro-choice organizations. These have been drying up lately.

The 2022 U.S. Supreme Court decision itself not only took away a fundamental American right, but also severely divided our efforts to protect reproductive healthcare by forcing the abortion issue back to the individual states. And since then, the MAGA movement and the second Trump administration have bewildered and traumatized a large portion of the U.S. population with an assault on our democratic institutions and values.

In the chaos, it is understandable that we momentarily lose direction. However, it is more important than ever that we each focus on an issue or two of importance and put our efforts toward them. Some of us will choose abortion rights as one of those issues.

So how do we continue to fight to uphold reproductive rights in Ohio and beyond? Here are a few suggestions:

1) Stay informed and engaged through Planned Parenthood Advocates of Ohio and the ACLU of Ohio. These organizations

provide updates about reproductive health issues and legislation and offer opportunities for volunteer work and advocacy. They also accept donations for the work they do to protect our rights.

2) Donate to an abortion fund in Ohio or our neighboring states from which women must travel to obtain abortion care.

3) Show up to protest and participate in advocacy work.

4) Volunteer through Ohio Women's Alliance or other such organizations to provide rides and other practical support to people seeking abortion care.

5) Call/email your state and federal elected officials and urge them to act to protect abortion rights and access. Contact Ohio state legislators and demand that they NOT support the introduction of the extremist Ohio Prenatal Equal Protection Act! ■

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Betrayal at the Modern Language Association The Humanities After Gaza

By Cynthia G. Franklin

"Boycott is not a threat, not a sword. It's a tree, a light." —Fady Joudah, "Shifting the Gaze: A Brief History of Censorship of Palestinian Literature in English," a talk presented at the 2016 MLA Convention in Austin, TX, and archived on the MLA Members for Justice in Palestine website.

AT ONCE UTTERLY inhumane and singularly human, genocide poses difficult questions to the humanities.

Theodor Adorno's assertion that "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (*Prisms*, 34) has occasioned much debate. Palestinians, martyred by as well as living through the ongoing US-Israeli genocide, have provided a firm response to Adorno's provocation: It is possible, and necessary.

Reflecting on this genocide and an ongoing Nakba, novelist and poet Ibrahim Nasrallah tells Huda Fakhereddine, "Perhaps this line of poetry I wrote 42 years ago applies to me now: 'I write now so that I do not die'" (*Palestinian*, 31).

A month before the Israeli Occupying Forces assassinated him on December 7, 2023, in words that resonate with Nasrallah's, Refaat Alareer posted to X, "If I must die, let it be a tale," along with his 2011 poem containing those lines.

In Malak Mattar's 2023 art work, "No Words," in a mural within her mural, the words "will haunt you 4 ever" hover over an image of Naj al-Ali's child refugee Handala, symbol of the ongoing Nakba's pain, and resistance to it.

These poets and artists remind us how art and literature give expression to an inhumanity that should haunt us all. They also present humanities scholars with a responsibility: to raise our own voices against colonial

violence and genocide — not just in Palestine but also in the Congo, the Sudan, West Papua and elsewhere—and to lift up the stories of those without the privilege to look away.

To do otherwise is not only to sell out the humanities, but to dispense with our own humanity.

In mobilizing for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS), many MLA members have worked to hold the MLA accountable to the organization's claim to being "a leading advocate for the humanities" — but the MLA leadership has failed utterly, emptying the humanities of humanity.

In this light, consider the Modern Language Association's two refusals to endorse an academic boycott of Israeli institutions, first in 2017 and again in 2025. Selling out is precisely what North America's largest organization for humanities scholars has done.

In mobilizing for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS), many MLA members have worked to hold the MLA accountable to the organization's claim to being "a leading advocate for the humanities" — but the MLA leadership has failed utterly, emptying the humanities of humanity.

Because I care about the humanities, I am compelled to call this organization to account, to consider the costs of MLA's shilling for the Israeli state, its capitulating to racial capitalism and the turn in the United States to authoritarianism. The capitulation makes the MLA complicit in genocide, an active participant in an era of oligarchy and empire that requires the evisceration of the humanities.

The MLA may sell out Palestine and the humanities, but there *are* alternatives. Instead of the corporate and colonial cannibalism of the MLA, there is a vibrant practice of the humanities that heeds the call for BDS, and finds liberation in its embrace of a free Palestine.

The Place of Palestine

The MLA Executive Council's refusal to allow its members to debate proposed Resolution 2025-1 continues its dismal history of failing to support the 2005 Palestinian call for the boycott of Israeli academic institutions.

In 2017, following the passage of the

highly undemocratic MLA Resolution 2017-1, I wrote an open letter renouncing my nearly 25 years of membership in the MLA. Resolution 2017-1 put the MLA on record as the only academic organization actively *prohibiting* the right of its members to organize in support of BDS, the most impactful Palestinian-led global movement to pressure Israel to adhere to international law.

Resolution 2017-1 was part of an orchestrated backlash against Resolution 2017-2, which called upon the MLA membership to endorse Palestinian civil society's call for the boycott of Israeli academic institutions, and to affirm the right of faculty and students to advocate for the academic boycott, free from retaliation.

This resolution failed, owing in large part to an unscrupulous campaign waged by "MLA Members for Scholars' Rights" with the explicit support of the Israeli state and Zionist organizations.

Another factor was the MLA leadership's inconsistent enforcement of its own policies and procedures. (*Spoiler alert:* In an instance of what Nada Elia calls "the Israeli exemption," rules were overlooked, as they often are, when violated by Zionists.)

I concluded my 2017 letter of exit from the MLA by writing, "Although I choose not to work within an organization structured to foreclose democratic debate and participation in social justice work, should these conditions change, I look forward to rejoining these colleagues and friends [who remain in the MLA]. Both within the MLA and beyond it, as with other progressive movements, the fight for justice in Palestine will continue."

Several years later, as the fight has continued — as it will, until Palestine is free — those conditions did change, in ways that seemed to open possibilities for bringing BDS back to the MLA.

In 2025, with genocide raging, it is no longer possible to deny the Israeli state's colonial violence against the Palestinian people — and the role of the United States as a full partner.

Starting in October 2023, Israeli officials dropped all claims to the morality of their military occupation. They own and admit out loud their campaign of genocide. A database amassed by the non-profit Law for Palestine has documented over 500 statements of genocidal incitement issued by Israeli officials

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and public figures since October 7.

Live-streamed before our eyes, this genocide has sparked global outrage: massive protests, student encampments, thoroughly documented denunciations by human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, genocide charges filed by South Africa against Israel at the International Court of Justice, and arrest warrants for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant issued by the International Criminal Court.

Under such conditions, academic boycott has found firmer footing in the academy. In a July 2024 statement, the American Association of University Professors' Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure reversed its 2006 objection to academic boycotts, finding that "they can be considered legitimate tactical responses to conditions that are fundamentally incompatible with the mission of higher education."

Although unnamed, the conditions prompting this shift surely included the Israeli genocide's destruction of every university in

Gaza, its murder of students, and assassination of professors.

History Repeating

By 2025, with widespread awareness of a genocide that includes scholasticide, some past and present MLA members thought an academic boycott resolution was an achievable aim for an organization claiming a concern with humanity. It also seemed a belated one, given the number of academic associations that have passed boycott resolutions.

Another changed condition: a new generation of faculty and graduate students within the MLA was bringing fresh energy and vision to organizing for justice in Palestine. Through actions staged at the 2024 MLA Convention, and through sustained organizing, they were successfully building a groundswell of support within the MLA for an academic boycott resolution.

With these shifts, some of us who had renounced the MLA in 2017 rejoined to support the renewed efforts to advance BDS. We harbored hope that maybe, after all, it

was possible to hold the MLA accountable.

All too aware of the MLA's history of defeating any progressive movement by way of a maze of bureaucratic rules and regulations designed to maintain the status quo, Tony Alessandrini, who submitted the resolution on our group's behalf, consulted with lawyers, studied the MLA's procedures, and communicated with Executive Director Paula Krebs and the staff person for governance to dot every "i" and cross every "t."

After going through this process, and to address concerns about legal obstacles, we agreed to revise the resolution to make clear (as we did in 2017) that support for academic boycott was only an expression of members' sentiments. Palestine Legal confirmed that this protected the organization from anti-BDS laws.

Despite taking all of these measures, in October 2024, the Executive Council voted down the resolution. They issued a report citing "fiduciary" responsibilities to justify their refusal to advance the resolution for consideration by the membership, thus killing it even before a discussion by the membership at large.

History was repeating itself within the organization, albeit with some significant differences, including popular support for Palestinian liberation.

These differences matter to the struggle for justice in Palestine. They matter less when it comes to assessing the viability of an organization that, in its ever more repressive and craven leadership, draws on Steven Salaita's formulation, not "progressive except Palestine," but "regressive because Palestine."

Let's rewind to the 2017 MLA, to take stock of this history. At that time, MLA Members for Justice in Palestine (MLAM4JP) put forth a BDS resolution. Submitted by Rebecca Comay and David Lloyd, this resolution was the culmination of a multi-year effort.

In tandem with the attempt to pass a "Right to Enter" resolution proposed by Bruce Robbins, much of the organizing for academic boycott began in earnest in 2014. This work is archived on our MLAM4JP website.

It includes an impressively documented evidence report with findings from an MLAM4JP Delegation to Palestine, and other research establishing the decades-long complicity of Israeli universities in the Israeli state's practices of settler colonialism, occupation and apartheid. Much of the data we presented in 2017 remains foundational to groups condemning Israel's genocidal state practices.

What's Changed

I want to highlight a few things that connect but also differentiate that campaign from the most recent one.

First, in the 2023-25 push for a BDS resolution, we met with few explicitly Zionist

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public responses. By contrast, at the 2017 convention and in the years leading up to it, Zionist opposition within and beyond the MLA had been fierce, vocal, and well-funded.

“MLA Members for Scholars’ Rights” violated MLA rules and hired third party actors to mine members’ emails, then spammed us with an email attacking the BDS resolution. Worse, this email was designed to appear as if it came from the MLA Executive Council.

At the Delegate Assembly, as we lined up before the mic designated for support for the resolution, they took not only their own mic but stacked the one designated for questions. They dropped anti-Palestinian literature on every seat in the Delegate Assembly.

In town halls and at the DA, they twisted facts to fearmonger members and demonize Palestinians and anti-Zionists, while also weaponizing Robert’s Rules to interfere with debate of the resolution itself.

They also worked in concert with other Zionist organizations and entities. As noted by David Lloyd, “The Israeli Council of University Presidents claims to have orchestrated the counter campaign, doubtless in co-ordination with the Israeli Ministry of Security Affairs.” The doxing site Canary Mission participated in a social media campaign of bullying and harassment. The Brandeis Center also entered the fray, threatening lawfare against the MLA.

(I can add here a personal experience that speaks to just how low Zionist trolls go. Shortly after I was vilified in an article from the *Legal Insurrection*, a male co-organizer received a text message from a number spoofing my own. It featured a link to a porno video with my head photoshopped in.)

“Fetishization of Process”

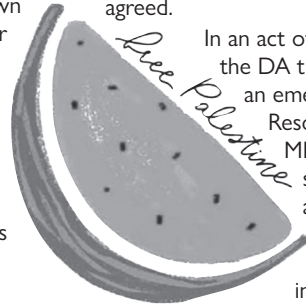
In keeping with the Israeli exemption, the MLA leadership had little to say about any of these interventions and violations, even as MLAM4JP members were held to every last Robert’s Rule and MLA regulation.

In their letter of resignation from the Executive Council, David Palumbo-Liu and Lenora Hansen powerfully detail how the EC displayed “a troubling fetishization of process.” The EC prioritized “the minutiae of procedure,” neglected their own distinctions between resolutions and motions as well as disregarded their fiduciary responsibilities. When it came to supporting the “Kafkaesque” anti-BDS resolution, it completely ignored the Israel-supported campaign of misinformation.

As a complement to the anti-BDS Resolution that demonstrates what Neelofer Qadir names as “the insidious depths of Zionist roots in MLA’s organizational culture,” MLA Members for Scholars’ Rights submitted a third resolution. It asked the MLA

to condemn the Palestinian Authority and Hamas for denying Palestinians their academic freedom.

Resolution 2017-3 blamed Palestinians themselves for the Zionist settler state’s structures of apartheid and military occupation. As noted in the minutes to the 2017 DA, when they failed to pass the BDS resolution by a vote of 79 to 113, and voted 101 to 93 in favor of the anti-BDS resolution, the DA proposed tabling Resolution 2017-3. In the spirit of “reconciliation,” its proponents agreed.



In an act of supreme hypocrisy, the DA then went on to pass an emergency resolution.

Resolution 2017-4 asked the MLA to endorse an AAUP statement supporting academic freedom, in anticipation of Trump’s move that same month into the White House.

This resolution was supported without a trace of irony by proponents of the anti-BDS resolution.

2025: Second Time Around

If in 2017 the anti-BDS resolution kept glaringly hypocritical company with an anti-Trump academic freedom resolution, by 2025, as we entered a second Trump presidency, the MLA didn’t bother to provide even a fig leaf of liberalism. Nor did it issue any moves to counter or cover over its neo-McCarthyism, its disrespect for democratic process, its support for a US-Israeli genocide, or its abdication of any responsibility to our Palestinian colleagues.

In 2025, the MLA leadership doubled down on the organization’s 2017 defense of Zionism. Through the rationale they provided (“fiduciary concerns” that might come from legal challenges the proposed resolution had already circumvented in its language), and through undemocratic processes, they disregarded MLA’s mission to support “justice throughout the humanities ecosystem.”

In 2025, the MLA as an organization capitulated not only to a Trump presidency, but to a longer history of corporate capitalism. In “What the MLA is...,” Matthew Seybold observes that the word “fiduciary” appears 15 times in the MLA leadership’s 3000-word report justifying their suppression of our resolution. “Genocide” appears zero times.

Seybold also notes, the recourse to “fiduciary concerns” has characterized neoliberal governance since the 1970s as “a rhetorical justification for private corporations to do what they prefer to do anyway: act contrary to the interests of rank-and-file employees, harmed communities, and social activists.”

As Anthony Alessandrini observed in his article urging members to exit the MLA, the EC’s report on the BDS Resolution also

made clear, “albeit buried in the faux-legalistic language,” that they were not only warding off anticipated legal threats, but had already cravenly signed anti-BDS clauses in order to obtain contracts, without informing or consulting with members.

Its acts of anticipatory obedience have positioned the MLA to partake in the march towards oligarchic fascism that the second Trump presidency is already accelerating. Nazi salutes and all.

What connects those earlier resolutions 2017-1 and 2017-3 and the censorship of the 2025 academic boycott resolution — just as what conjoins liberals and neoliberal policies to far-right forms of fascism and authoritarianism — are investments in racial capitalism and different but interdependent sites of settler colonialism.

At stake is the grabbing of land and money. The MLA, in putting profits over its mission “to support the humanities community,” buys into this economy and continues its shameful legacy.

In turning its back on Palestine, the MLA turns its back on all of humanity, because as Hala Alyan notes, “what is happening in Gaza is atrocious and breaks the limits of collective humanity.” But for many of us, our humanity is not for sale.

Not the Whole Story

And yet. The moral bankruptcy of the MLA and its selling out of its members — including our colleagues who are resisting a genocide, and including members engaged in Palestine solidarity, most especially those who are Arab and Muslim — is only part of the story I want to tell here.

This is because the MLA leadership has set a course that makes the MLA increasingly irrelevant, and it will become only more so. The truth is that the MLA needs Palestine far more than Palestine needs the MLA.

Palestine will live on, with or without an MLA endorsement of BDS. Meanwhile, having sold off the organization’s humanity, the leadership has set up the MLA to wither, to exist as but a shell for the humanities, or perhaps more precisely and certainly more shamefully, as a shill for Israel.

This is particularly deplorable because, based on the support we received from members at the convention, including delegates publicly resigning, were it not for the Executive Council’s refusal of a democratic and transparent process, I think our resolution very well might have passed. (Its recent scrambling to regain members is particularly craven and pathetic; the leadership, “hearing members’ concerns” issued a one-sentence statement which was unable to even name scholasticide.)

So let us leave the MLA and turn to the other parts of this story, which concern the power of collective organizing, the

importance of a humanity that need not find a home in the MLA, and the unbreakable *sumud* (steadfastness) and beautiful resistance — in all its forms — of the Palestinian people who will ensure that Palestine will live well past the age of oligarchs and the Zionist entity known as the state of Israel.

I reentered the MLA fray in 2024 reluctantly — still bitter from the 2014-17 struggle, and somehow still burned out from that experience. I preferred to put my energy into getting a national FSJP network started and into local organizing with Students and Faculty for Justice in Palestine at the University of Hawai'i.

In fact, it was my co-conspirator at UH, Hannah Manshel, who drew me back in. And it was the community we built that revived my faith — not in the MLA, but in the humanities as a formation.

Manshel writes about this community beautifully in *LitHub*, including an account of the pop-up poetry reading we held outside the open hearing meeting for the Delegate Assembly:

"Spread across universities from New York to Georgia to Hawai'i, we came together over hours of zoom meetings and thousands of words in Signal chats, we came together to plan, to organize, to build community, and to speak out for Palestine. Together, we planned actions: a pop-up poetry reading, a die in, a walk out. We wrote open letters and statements for people to read out before their panels. No business as usual during genocide, we said. We weren't here to fight with MLA leadership or to win small concessions from corrupt institutions. We were here for Palestine. We were here for each other. We were here to build a world."

"Humanity" might be a noun, but it is not one that names a given condition. Instead, it is an interactive practice, one we enacted together, as an act of refusal of the MLA's business as usual. As Manshel put it so well, for Palestine and for each other.

Humanities and Liberation

I want to close this piece, however, by thinking about the humanities outside and beyond the MLA, and why the humanities cannot exist without a place for a liberated Palestine.

With this turn, I leave behind the spirit-sapping language of resolutions, the deadening effects of moribund institutions, in a turn towards the vibrant world-making that becomes possible with the understanding so beautifully expressed by Fady Joudah that "Boycott is not a threat, not a sword. It's a tree, a light."

With this departure, I join in solidarity with Nouri Gana, Jeff Sacks, Huda Fakhredine and Tony Alessandrini, contributors to the MLA 2025 "Poetry after Gaza" panel, who refused the containment of poetry

within the parameters of western humanism, and who took their leave of the MLA as a genocide institution, and urged that we meet elsewhere.



Fady Joudah, physician-poet.

For the pop-up poetry reading, as we participated in the creation of such an event elsewhere, I came ready to read Joudah's poem "Mimesis." Written for his son and appearing in his 2024 collection, it follows the poem by the same name written for his daughter in 2013:

*This morning, I don't know how,
an inch-long baby frog
entered my house
during the extermination
of human animals live on TV.
I recognized the baby's dread.*

*It leapt into the shadows,
under the couch, into my shoe.*

*My son was watching.
Gently, patiently
I followed it
on my knees
with shattered heart
and plastic bag.*

*Coaxed it, caught it,
released it
into the yard,
and started to cry.*

Joudah is not only a poet but a physician, and his work has prompted me to think about how poetry complements the practice of medicine.

Poetry and Power

What work does poetry do, at a time when, at any and every moment, we can open our phones and see livestreams of the Israeli Occupation Force wielding weaponry from the USA?

When we witness this systematic practice Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian theorizes as "*ashlaa*," which shreds Palestinians, the so-called "human animals" of Gaza, to pieces? Or what can poetry do when we see Palestinians' loved ones, left with shattered hearts to gather remains, in bits and pieces, in plastic bags, 17 kilograms for a child, 70 kilograms for an adult?

What good is a poem when doctors tend to those surviving dismemberment in tents set up next to bombed out hospitals, tents that the IOF then goes on to bomb, leaving boys to burn alive, still attached to their IVs? Why is it important that, as a poet and father, Joudah shares with us his tears, and the tenderness, denied by the world to Palestinian children, that he extends to that baby frog, as he releases it whole and free from that plastic bag, before the watching eyes of his son?

The answer, I think, is in this poetry's radical refusal of death, disappearance, and dehumanization. The Israeli state, which tortures and assassinates Palestine's medical workers as well as its poets and professors, fully understands, perhaps in a way the MLA Executive Council has yet to learn, what joins the practices of poetry and medicine.

It is no accident that Israel's and America's "smart bombs" target not only hospitals, but schools and universities, institutions that produce and archive knowledge. This scholasticide is not a byproduct of genocide. It is necessary to it.

As do the doctors, it is the poets of Palestine who insist that each and every life is worth fighting for, is precious. And that to fail to act upon this understanding is to diminish our own humanity.

This is perhaps never more true than in a time of genocide. Living through such a time, I believe the question of what we are doing to make life livable is an urgent one, and that even as the answer is always going to be never enough, so too the answer is that we must do what we can.

To write and study language and literature is not to reassemble limbs and repair hearts with surgical instruments. However, this does not mean that we are without tools and practices that can help heal our hearts, re-member our individual and collective bodies, and create worlds in which we all can live in true safety, freedom, and dignity.

As humanities scholars, we can study and teach and gather in community to read Palestinian poems and literature and scholarship. These works by Palestinian artists and academics have been censored and demonized in the United States and throughout the West.

The rise of authoritarian regimes counter this literature with narratives promulgated in mainstream media. These narratives make increasingly clear the connections between fascism, Zionism, settler colonialism, and capitalism. Politicians and university administrators, as well as executive councils of professional academic organizations, lip synch these narratives as they sell out those they should be protecting.

To them we say: *This is scholasticide!*

As Zionists justify dehumanization and dis-memberment, and the desecration of life and land, we can refuse to abdicate a commitment to humanity and to the humanities as we continue to organize to create new structures and communities through which we can support BDS and the struggle for justice in Palestine.

To return to Joudah's proclamation that boycott is "a tree, a light," this is how we honor his words. And this is how, to draw on the fierce and beautiful promise made by George Abraham to Kānaka Maoli in an address at the University of Hawai'i, we fight for liberation, "from every river to every sea." ■

On Social Movement Media: Learning from Krupskaya and Lenin

By Promise Li

WHAT WOULD THE leaders of the Russian Revolution make of social media? And what might their experiences teach us?

In the middle of the 1890s in St. Petersburg — years before the historic victory of the Russian Revolution in 1917 — militant workers and socialists were developing a media ecosystem to quicken a nascent mass movement against tsarism. At first, workers gathered underground to learn about Marxism to seek a framework that could allow them to synthesize and cohere their struggles.

They studied long texts like *Capital* and digested lectures and pamphlets in study circles. They vetted and invited others by ones and twos from local workers' night schools or workplaces. As the study circles grew to a critical mass, new mediums of circulating knowledge were needed.

The socialist revolutionary Nadezhda Krupskaya recalls, around this time, that “the soil had been fully prepared for agitation by leaflets.” But she also states that “this was one of the forms, but not the only form of work among the masses.”¹

Her comrade and later companion Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov continued to write pamphlets about specific topics that “proceed from the workers' needs, to lead them step by step to the question of the necessity of political struggle,” including one about factory laws “many intellectuals thought ... dull and prolix, but the workers read it avidly, for it was something clear and familiar to them.”²

The circulation of leaflets led to even more intense state surveillance, and activists needed to coordinate using “invisible ink, dotted codes, and secret ciphers.” When it became clear that the “leaflets and pamphlets roused the workers,” Krupskaya, Ulyanov, and others obtained an underground printer and began a “popular journal,” *Rabocheye*

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Deto (Workers' Cause).

Rabocheye Deto eventually became an all-Russian national newspaper and party organ, *Iskra*, when conditions were ripe enough to transform local Marxist groups and study circles into a unified party. These early days of Krupskaya and Ulyanov, who later took on the name Lenin, reveal diverse media forms unevenly unfolding across different stages of building a working-class organization.

Just as no sharp break exists between these stages, these media forms did not evolve cleanly: for one, book-reading coexisted alongside leaflet agitation.

Their experiences provide an essential lesson for critical thinkers and movements today: a rigorous exchange of ideas through discourse is more crucial than ever for clarifying political tasks, just as more accessible entry points for new militants are needed.

Both may overlap or require different forms of media. In any case, there is no single, most effective form of structuring this exchange. Movement conditions are ever-shifting, requiring media fit for various circumstances and tasks.

Sometimes, a pamphlet shakes up a movement and expands possibilities for struggle, like how hectographed print copies of Lenin's *Friends of the People* circulated through and energized a generation of Russian Marxists into action in the 1890s. In 1930s Palestine, popular oral poetry effectively gave life to radical ideas by activating peasants' struggle.³

In the 1960s in the United States, radio was the foremost medium that activists used to quicken the civil rights movement among Black communities.⁴ The Zapatistas made use of the early rise of the Internet in the 1990s to broadly disseminate their program and messages and encourage international awareness and solidarity.⁵

These spaces for critique did not precede the existence of mass struggle. The desire to

think and debate in more sophisticated ways emerged from the concrete needs of those already organizing. Theory is crafted from experiences of struggle. The critical tools that develop, in turn, can empower movements to organize better. In this vein, Marx writes that “the weapon of criticism cannot, of course, supplant criticism of weapons; material force must be overthrown by material force. But theory, too, will become material force as soon as it seizes the masses.”⁶

Building on Marx, we must understand how our weapons of criticism relate to existing struggles, and theorize and cultivate them to expand the power and scope of these struggles. Far more so than the 1890s, our own period features a flourishing of different media outlets, with new technologies coexisting with old ones, just as activists engage in short- and long-form writing.

The point is not whether one form is better than another. We must understand this array of resources in relation to each other and the larger conditions of struggle. Long-form analysis has little value if we cannot broadly expand left-wing ideas and culture to everyday people, let alone rebuild a culture of study and debate among existing organizers. And while social media has undeniably broadened the left's mass appeal, it runs into limits if new activists are not channeled into organizational work and deeper study.

Simply put, the most useful mediums of exchange, or combinations of which, are the ones that most effectively quicken mass movements toward a struggle against the capitalist system.

From Media to Collective Power

The capitalist class maintains its power not only through coercive means, such as the military and police, but also through powerful ideological fictions, like nationalist indoctrination in schools. Ideology is no less material than coercive power in securing the power of one class over the other.

But the realm of ideology can be a powerful arsenal for workers' movements to build power. Ideas themselves are products of pre-existing struggles; as Marxist writer Warren Montag puts it, “It is not critique that reveals antagonistic class positions ... but rather the specific forms and sites of mass struggle that render class rule as such intelligi-

ble and thus available to critique.”⁷

Further, different frames of intelligibility are needed to induce specific tasks that best develop an evolving class struggle. The question of which medium best suits the idiom of politics must always begin with considering what “seizes the masses” and compels them to participate in struggle.

Thus, the correctness of ideas can only be determined by their material impact on struggles. In this sense, the question of how these ideas are presented and accessed is inextricably linked to their efficacy.

The same text may also produce different effects on the movement when re-iterated and reproduced decades later. Something obscure in one period may become decisively useful for politics in another era, whereas a popular text at one point may be exposed as a political dead-end later on.

There is also a sense of “combined unevenness” in social movement media today that we must understand. As explored by another Bolshevik revolutionary, Leon Trotsky, the theory of uneven and combined development describes how transitions between modes of production are often characterized by “an amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms.”⁸

This framework enables an understanding of capitalism as containing disjointed elements, like the presence of advanced capitalist firms in a largely peasant-based economy. These elements mutually interact and compose a singular totality: the capitalist system. More recently, Warwick Research Collective applied this principle to literary forms:

“the very processes driving the changes in the contemporary world-system have led to a breakdown of traditional boundaries demarcating genres and media, such that world-literary space is now characterized by new forms of convergence, synergy, competition and displacement... in which diverse cultural forms, including new and newly recalibrated media, compete for representational space and power.”⁹

This literary application can help us understand today’s diversity of media platforms. Significant heterogeneity characterizes the composition and demographics of social movements, the development of media industries and technologies, the reading practices and habits of younger generations, and the political consciousness of social movements. Whether each media form is efficacious for emancipatory political practice depends on its relationship to a larger movement of revolutionary politics.

As the Hungarian Marxist philosopher Georg Lukacs puts it, “individual acts can only be considered revolutionary or counter-revolutionary when related to the central issue of revolution, which is only to be discovered by an accurate analysis of the socio-historic whole. The actuality of the revolution therefore implies study of each individual

daily problem in concrete association with the socio-historic whole, as moments in the liberation of the proletariat.”¹⁰

In other words, we must understand individual media forms, just as Lukacs calls “individual acts,” in the context of how each functions and mutually interacts to determine and shape the conditions of mass struggle.

From Newspapers to Party Organization

The beginnings of the Russian socialist movement continue to be an instructive example. In the 1890s and 1900s, Russia’s need for new forms of media emerged from the growing militancy of workers’ movements. Along with students, workers were honing their power by challenging the Tsarist autocracy through economic struggles.

For the first time, workers’ revolts forced the Tsarist regime to adopt unprecedented concessions in the 1890s, such as the prohibition on nighttime work for women and children and the reduction of the working day.

Accompanying this growing militancy was the rapid spread of socialist discourse among workers: as Lenin observed in 1900, “study circles of workers and Social-Democratic intellectuals are springing up everywhere, local agitation leaflets are being widely distributed, the demand for Social-Democratic literature is increasing and is far outstripping the supply, and intensified government persecution is powerless to restrain the movement.”¹¹

Historian Lars Lih describes how workers and party cadres understood the limitations of their existing organizational and media infrastructure through struggle:

“As the wave of revolutionary activity grew higher, the old party organizational forms were felt to be more and more of a burden. Isolated local committees wanted a way to share experiences, coordinate actions, and speak with a single voice. Party members wanted a unified national leadership consisting of respected figures with solid theoretical principles and great practical experience. Iskra responded to this widespread desire and took on the task of fusing the scattered Social-Democratic forces into a single centralized organization not just in words but in actual fact.”¹²

Workers and other radical activists confronted the limitations of their organizational and media infrastructure in practice, and demanded more to take their political work to another level. In *What Is To Be Done?*, Lenin observed that workers were asking not to be seen as “children to be fed on the thin gruel of ‘economic’ politics alone; we want to know everything that others know, we want to learn the details of all aspects of political life and to take part actively in every single political event.”¹³

Thus, the formation of *Iskra* as a national outlet did not come from Lenin’s mind ex nihilo but emerged as an organic response to actualizing concrete needs, reflexes, and urges already evolving among workers’ movements.

Iskra also did not displace the need for diverse forms of media to coexist locally. As the vexed road from St. Petersburg Marxist study circles to the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) shows, movements have uneven needs, requiring overlapping structures to facilitate their growth. So, we too must acknowledge how different forms of media can adapt to the varying needs of different phases of struggle in our conditions.

What needs did *Iskra* address? Lenin says that any form of centralization requires a certain basis of unity among socialists that “can not be decreed, it cannot be brought about by a decision, say, of a meeting of representatives; it must be worked for.”

Political ideas and tactical divergences must be clarified and debated, and “conducted in full view of all Russian Social-Democrats and class-conscious workers, are necessary and desirable in order to clarify the depth of existing differences, in order to afford discussion of disputed questions from all angles, in order to combat the extremes into which representatives, not only of various views, but even of various localities, or various “specialities” of the revolutionary movement, inevitably fall.”¹⁴

So, the immediate task was to organize a national newspaper, not to project a ready-made set of politics. *Iskra* opened a space to democratically clarify differences in ideas and strategies to strengthen the emergent movement. In this process, disagreements will inevitably arise, as Montag writes, as they “are the necessary effect of their necessarily heterogeneous experience of the often invisible forms of inequality and subjection that both stimulate and constrain revolt. Critique, even when it does not know it, absorbs, distills, and preserves this knowledge ... To return it to [the masses] in a coherent form is like handing them a weapon with which to transform the world.”¹⁵

The question for political movements at each stage is the same: Which weapons best distill the knowledge and experience gained from scattered, spontaneous struggle, and with which can the masses most effectively continue to develop their collective power to transform the world?

These early Marxists did not simply focus on building a single model of organizational or media infrastructure — they adjusted their tasks as the movements around them demanded new tools.

The ever-transforming media ecosystem they built — a matrix composed of a national organ for ideological and tactical debate, theoretical pamphlets, ciphered messages, and a sea of leaflets — shows that an ever-shifting world requires various weapons to comprehend and dismantle.

From Newspapers to Social Media

The lesson for us is not to simply reproduce past media as Lenin imagined them.

Some aspects may still be relevant, others need revision, while the rest should be left to history. Today, our world uses vastly different media technologies than in the 1890s and 1900s. Still, one trend is constant: different media forms coexist unevenly to account for a variety of organizing needs.

This unevenness also reflects how working-class political consciousness is developing disproportionately across different regions. Decentralized movements and formal organizations often coexist unevenly.

The radical left's current media landscape mirrors this sentiment: outlets remain scattered and decentralized as they multiply. The appetite for deeper theoretical engagement varies across movements.

Whatever the limitations of such dominant media platforms among younger political activists, we must recognize that they express concrete needs and ways to struggle in movements. Jasper Bernes cautions against merely reducing failures of mass protests in recent years to simply a problem of ideology or organization without "investigat[ing] the material origins of this ideology" and "locating these tactics in the underlying material conditions which protesters faced."¹⁶

The same goes for political media. Reflecting on recent mass protests, the sociologist Zeynep Tufekci sees political engagement on social media, from hashtag activism to organizing actions through encrypted apps like Signal, as a "digitally networked public sphere," partly emerging from distrust of and exclusion from various official or mainstream outlets, especially in repressive conditions.¹⁷

The COVID-19 pandemic further deepened the use of these technologies among social movements as they facilitate accessibility. Blacked out from mainstream media, Palestinians are exposing the effects of Israel's genocidal campaign through outlets like X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, Twitch and Instagram in real-time for everyday netizens across the world.

Since the mid-2010s, the proliferation of left-wing political education content on YouTube, from video essays to commentary channels, has led some to identify a new genre labeled 'Breadtube'.¹⁸

In China, intensifying repression and the clampdown on virtually a whole generation of labor organizers since 2015 have encouraged young activists to rely more on social media platforms like WeChat and Douyin for organizing and agitation.¹⁹ The digital ephemera on these platforms has become the most detailed record of Chinese workers' lived reality and daily struggles.

Some online platforms better enable the circulation of what *Logic(s)* (formerly *Logic*) magazine editors J. Khadijah Abdurahman and Xiaowei Wang call "the conceptual frameworks of impoverished Black people, marginalized folks, and jobless people

as opposed to delimiting them as a site of harm for outsiders to examine."²⁰ One such initiative may be *Scalawag Magazine's* "Week of Writing: Condemned" series that features analytical and other writings by death row prisoners in the U.S. South since last year.²¹

In February, immigrant high school students were able to coordinate across multiple schools in Pasadena, California, solely because of social media. Lead organizers from different schools discovered that they were all planning walkouts around the same week, because they found that each school's organizing committee was promoting through their own Instagram account.²² They messaged each other on Instagram and formed a group chat to organize collectively — resulting in a mass walkout gathering hundreds of students from each school on one day.

But are there limitations to social media in building up infrastructures of resistance? On the one hand, Tufekci (among other pundits) brings up many commonly discussed pitfalls of social media organizing, like "tactical freezes" induced by the hyper-decentralization of social media. On the other hand, Jane Hu argues that in 2020, we have entered a "second act" of social media activism, "in which the tools of the Internet have been increasingly integrated into the hard-won structure of older movements."²³

The U.S.-based socialist Twitch streamer Hasan Piker's platform may demonstrate Hu's point. While the popularity of the online multiplayer game *Among Us* was faddishly brief in 2021, Piker's Twitch stream playing the game and discussing politics with democratic socialist U.S. Congressmember Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez attracted 500,000 live viewers. Its recording was shared millions of times.²⁴

A year later, Piker's enormous following among Gen-Z netizens proved useful for building organizations when he joined the launch stream of the Young Democratic Socialists of America (YDSA)'s "Red Hot Summer" program (which drew more than a 1,000 youth participants) to organize young socialists in their workplaces. A participant observed that "many people in the stream were fans of Piker and were visibly excited when he arrived."²⁵

Zoe, an avid watcher of Piker's streams and a 20-year-old retail worker, began a union drive in their workplace after participating in YDSA's programming.²⁶

Earlier this year, Piker's Twitch stream was one of the only outlets that directly featured the voices of incarcerated firefighters during one of their rare breaks, as they labored to extinguish the deadly Los Angeles fires.

In another example, some of the most visible expressions of the American left to young, everyday Americans are the media institutions associated with the Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL). While PSL is

a tight-knit vanguardist formation, it poses an outsized influence on the left, not simply because of its large rallies, but also because of the vitality of its media ecosystem.

PSL has a variety of "front" outlets affiliated with the party. For example, Breakthrough News, led by PSL members, boasts hundreds of thousands of followers on Instagram and X. Its reporting on any major actions is often the most widely circulated among social media users.

Breakthrough News has increasingly taken on the role Democracy Now has played in the 2000s and 2010s, but for a younger generation. It has documented Palestine protests with professional quality, including drone use to capture the size of massive protests. It has collaborated with the rapper Macklemore to produce a film documentary of the Columbia encampment.

This documentary includes scenes of Palestinian student Mahmoud Khalil, who ICE kidnapped, and Columbia student worker union's president, Grant Miner, who was expelled for his Palestine solidarity work. This footage was quickly excerpted and circulated on social media upon their repression, providing popular agitational materials for their cases at a decisive moment.

Breakthrough News' operations are hosted from the People's Forum, whose leading staff are members of PSL. Based in the middle of Manhattan, the multi-story People's Forum (also with over a 100,000 followers on Instagram) is arguably the most well-resourced and visible physical hub for left-wing programming in the United States today. This media ecosystem has exposed new activist youth to left-wing discourse, while providing avenues for them to plug into upcoming local or online events.

Of course, PSL's politics is far from commendable, especially as it uncritically champions authoritarian capitalist regimes abroad that crush workers and mass movements, smearing all their opposition as mere puppets of U.S. interests. But we must acknowledge the singular role its well-resourced media ecosystem has played in amplifying the profile of the left among new generations of youth in the 2020s.

While the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) are much larger, PSL's cohesive and slick social media presence has allowed it to project a more robust public profile. It would not be an exaggeration to say that, for many young Americans, the PSL-backed social media ecosystem is often among their first exposures to the left.

From Social Media to Resistance?

However, it remains to be seen whether this social media-fuelled exposure to social movements could translate into the long-term rebuilding of the global left. In any case, the proliferation of social media also signals a larger question about the younger gener-

ations' capacity to engage with traditional long-form critical thinking and debate.

Some have raised concerns about younger generations' shorter attention spans because of social media. At the same time, research on Gen Z readers shows interesting trends. They read more widely across genres than other generations. They also prefer print texts over online ones, though most read texts online and receive reading recommendations through social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok.²⁷

There is no easy separation between "traditional" and online reading in activist social media. Users scroll through numerous webinars, protest and reading guides, tactical debates, and syllabi daily through Instagram infographics, TikTok videos, and X threads.

Reading groups proliferate online, in local circles, and even in protest sites. Last year, makeshift bookshelves with zines and books on theory and tactics can be found across the Gaza Solidarity Encampments. From Gaza to Miami to Hong Kong, repressive states are keen to limit access to books because they fear they can foster political consciousness.

Krupskaya and Lenin, following Marx's understanding of how theory can become a material force, might argue that all such media are important in their own ways. The real question is which medium, used in what particular way, in what relation to others, and in which phase of a movement, can best "seize the masses" into action.

The multiplicity of media platforms today can be a strength and a weakness. On the one hand, the decentralization of social media activism and knowledge production, the rapid speed of content consumption, and the ease with which we routinely cycle among heterogeneous forms of media — from our phones to movement spaces — allow diverse voices and perspectives to flourish quickly, as they did during the uprisings of the 2010s and into the present moment.

On the other hand, as movements and organizations that are growing in power realize at different historical junctures, deeper levels of critique and engagement with ideas are needed, facilitated by intentional, if not more centralized, coordination.

Despite the blossoming of left-wing media in recent years, there are still relatively few formal spaces for activists to discuss questions of political strategy and build sustainable organizations collectively. The strength of PSL's media lies in its political education and capacity to broaden left-wing culture for mass youth appeal. However, PSL's affiliate organizations, including coalitions like ANSWER, can be too bureaucratic and top-down. They provide few opportunities for militants and organizations to participate openly in shaping the direction of their campaigns.

More often than not, there is a gap between the masses of people open to left-

wing ideas and venues for rigorous strategic dialogue and thinking.

The continuing importance of print and online publications on the left, like *Jacobin* or *The Nation*, does not necessarily translate into deeper engagement with their ideas in broader mass spaces. Such a level of engagement mostly occurs internally in existing national organizations or scattered local formations, most of whom number no more than a hundred or so individuals at best. For better or worse, some of the most vibrant debates about politics across DSA caucuses, various left currents, and organizations are often unfolding informally and haphazardly on social media platforms like X.

And so, the left continues to need more spaces for productive, comradely debate across traditions and currents that make use of emergent technologies. How should we make sense of the state of labor or tenant organizing? Where should they be going next? How should these formations fit into a larger national strategy to defeat the far-right?

What we need to rebuild is a culture on the left, one in which people could move from consuming infographics and webinars and turning out for rallies to trying to grapple with such questions collectively. In other words, we must regularly study the shifting terrain of struggle together. This is needed to develop strategies of resistance and modes of mass politics that can pose a real political challenge to the capitalist system.

We can only figure out what forms of media are most helpful by trying things out as we organize, and analyzing as we go. Just as *Iskra* would not have made sense when the Russian working class and socialist movement was still inchoate before the 1890s, *Iskra* is no blueprint for what mass movements need today. Reflecting on how Lenin studied Marx, Krupskaya advocates "taking the works of Marx dealing with a similar situation and carefully analyze them, compare them with the current moment, discovering resemblances and differences."²⁸

Bringing together the right combination of activists to organize a targeted action or study group may be more beneficial at a certain moment than formalizing a party or writing a long-form critique. In another moment, stepping back from the frontlines to write a long-form critique can be more critical for the political moment than trying to make it to every single rally in your city.

In any case, the most reliable metric for which forms of movement media are effective lies in determining which are most useful in pushing the masses toward deeper forms of struggle. As with all things in politics, there is no one-size-fits-all solution that works across time and space. ■

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The Rule, Not the Exception: Sexual Assault on Campus

By M. Colleen McDaniel & Andrew Wright

AN APPREHENSION IS rising among U.S. anti-sexual violence activists. Four years after the first Trump administration massacred sexual assault survivor protections on college campuses by releasing harmful and exclusionary Title IX regulations, the Biden Administration — after failing three times to live up to the promise of a new final rule on federal legislation that prohibits sex discrimination — finally only released half of the rule.¹

That half-reform has been thrown away by the second Trump administration. Now this same administration is attempting the illegal overhaul of the Department of Education, leaving questions of the potential shift in enforcement of Title IX and other civil rights laws that were intended to respond to discrimination on college campuses.

The original Obama-era guidance around Title IX responded to rape survivors who called attention to the extremely high prevalence of rape on campus. The guidelines created strict policies to increase offender punishment and expand strict reporting requirements.

Mainstream narratives claim that survivors want safe investigation and hearing procedures after an assault, but what many of us, especially survivors with marginalized identities and those who see the harms of carceral

responses to violence, are calling for is something that the Department of Education hasn't acknowledged before.

We want action to hold accountable not only offenders, but institutions and communities, for the perpetuation of violence on campus. To do so, universities must recognize that *sexual violence is the norm, not the exception*.

Not So "Safe Spaces"

Since its inception in the United States, college life has been depicted as the oscillation between ascetic career-building and hedonistic experimentation.

As shown across popular American culture in films, TV shows and literature, college is not just about the promise of earning the degree and all the implied career potential. It's about the overall experience of campus living that prospective students and their families strive for: community, character building, and new experiences.

Many survivors of campus sexual violence, however, learn all too quickly that this image of college life is a facade. We know too well the dialectical relationship between such a portrait of the idyllic college experience and the violent underside that upholds the system of contemporary higher education.

A false conception of campuses as inherently safe spaces has set up an ideology that exceptionalizes violence and in doing so, reproduces it.

The idyllic portrait of college campuses has come to be known over the last decade as the "safe space." According to popular culture, a "safe space" is a place meant to be free of conflict, biases, threats, and criticism — although the term has roots in lesbian and feminist movements against violence dating back to at least the 1970s.²

According to activist Moira Kenney in a description of 1960s queer safe spaces in Los Angeles, it was here that marginalized groups found "a certain license to speak and act freely, form collective strength, and generate strategies for resistance." The term was popularized and spread widely in the 2010s as students started establishing organizations that would ensure specific locations on campus would be held as "safe."

From this, critics arose concerned about the state of college campuses. For example,

establishment author and journalist Mitch Albom, asked "how does [the safe space] prepare students for the real world?" Albom claimed that safety on campuses "now means a protected bubble with no nasty comments, no judgment or criticism, nothing that might make anyone feel uncomfortable."³

Many critics decry safe spaces for creating a false sense of security and sheltering people from the harsh realities of everyday life. Journalist John Lloyd similarly argues that "[t]here is no 'safe space' for a mind which wishes to understand something of the world. A liberal society cannot create boundaries to understanding between the approved and the forbidden."⁴

Maybe campuses in some ways do attempt to create a sheltered, safe, unworldly space. Yet considering all too familiar stories of the professor who retains the position of power over students despite allegations of sexual harassment, the gymnastics and football coaches who are not investigated despite decades of reports of child molestation, a survivor not being taken seriously despite video evidence because the man who raped her is an athletic star, survivors are well aware that campuses are by no means safe.

In fact, if college campuses are safe spaces for anything, it seems to be only for the reproduction of sexual violence. It isn't just that violence abounds on campus either. Campuses are unsafe because so-called "protections" for survivors are harmful as well.

Over the past decade, since the first release of federal guidance around Title IX from the Obama administration, many universities have taken federal guidelines as "How Not to Get Sued by the Department of Education 101." For example, Title IX coordinators are often placed under general counsel; blanket mandated reporting policies force faculty and staff to violate survivor choice and report entrusted disclosures; and insufficient investigation processes retraumatize survivors at every step.⁵

Have survivors really won any rights, or have universities just figured out a way to avoid any and all liability for violence committed on their campus and by their community members? Add to this the utter lack of resources for effective primary prevention (stopping violence before it happens), and one could argue that those of us who are the

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How to hold colleges responsible for stopping sexual violence?

The Promethean

most at risk of sexual violence are no better off than we were before 2011.

Harms of “Carceral Feminism”

The reason that Title IX applications thus far have caused so much harm to survivors is that they have largely been framed after carceral feminism — a view which utilizes surveillance, policing and state violence against perpetrators of violence as a tool for the liberation of women.

As described by Shepp, O’Callaghan and Kirkner in their 2023 review of the carceral logic of Title IX, although Title IX investigations do not “contribute to the prison-industrial complex in the form of putting people in cages... Title IX policies operate with carceral logic in a way that individualizes harm and focuses on punishment rather than restoration.”⁶

One of us (McDaniel) along with Gómez went as far as to say that current Title IX practices “mirror the criminal legal system.”⁷

The carceral anti-rape movement on (and off) campuses for decades has operated on the exceptionalization of violence. Herein lies a painful irony.

Movement activists have sought to *de-exceptionalize survivorship* — raising awareness about just how common sexual assault is (one in two trans people, one in five women, one in 17 men). Instead, the carceral approach of the mainstream anti-rape movement has *exceptionalized perpetration*, making the violence seem uncommon and committed by only a small number of pathological serial offenders.

Whereas lingering mainstream narratives often paint accusations of violence as false and proven perpetration of violence as accidental, an increasingly survivor-friendly view has made way for new portrayals of perpetrators.

Some prominent anti-rape experts have argued that rape is “a highly calculated, pre-meditated crime” committed by serial offenders. (Legally and in academic research, “rape”

is often defined as a distinct action which requires penetration of the body; whereas, “sexual assault” includes a wide range of behaviors — including rape — such as using verbal coercion, alcohol/drugs, or physical force in order to impose a range of acts from unwanted sexual touch to penetration of another person against their will).

Although committing *rape* is certainly not the norm, some research has found that up to 60 percent of men have committed other forms of nonpenetrative *sexual assault* or *attempted rape* — meaning force was used with the intention of rape but for some reason penetration did not happen.

The Perpetrators and the System

As well, more recent (and replicated) research in the field of psychology has demonstrated that there are different kinds of men who perpetrate rape. Indeed, serial rapists may be a part of this problem, but many rapes are committed by “one-time only” offenders who become less likely to perpetrate into adulthood — particularly in the absence of peers who normalize rape and see binge drinking as a justification for violence.

The offenders are also most often family, friends, classmates and trusted others.

As recounted by McDaniel and Rodriguez (2017), this limited view of perpetration paints rape as the result of extreme, individual personality characteristics like narcissism and psychopathy, rather than the result of internalized oppressive values and attitudes.⁸

Decades of research pointing to the latter psychological explanation support the idea that because of the conditions of systemic oppressions (Capitalism, Patriarchy, White Supremacy), *anyone* is capable of committing the harm of sexual violence because we have all internalized their messages to some extent, *and* because the systems and institutions we operate in every day allow for situations that could put any of us at risk for violence perpetration.

This is not to deny that there are protec-

tive factors that lead many of us away from these behaviors, but to instead imply that this potential capability points to the *systems* over the *individuals* as the root cause for such a high prevalence of violence.

The former approach not only swerves away from critiquing the higher education system by placing the sole blame on the mental state of a few individuals, but also entirely misses the causal role that oppressive systems play in creating, normalizing and perpetuating sexual violence.

When individuals and their abnormal traits alone are to blame for violence, the popular answer is to punish and remove that allegedly small number of perpetrators, leaving behind a safer campus. This then allows for policing, a punitive criminal system, and incarceration to be the only answer for this violence.

It also leaves room for institutions of higher education to waive their responsibility in the perpetuation of violence on their campuses. If campuses are safe spaces that are sometimes infiltrated by “undetected” serial offenders, then the university must not be at fault for such extremely deviant behavior. The university can only respond not prevent.

Further, the implication that the only way to prevent a rape is to avoid such offenders: Cover your drink, don’t walk alone at night, dress and act in a manner that makes you less of a target.

Sexual Violence as Systemic Disaster

To take a deeper look into how the exceptionalization of violence reduces institutional responsibility, an analogy can be drawn to natural disaster studies.

Current disaster studies presume a “vulnerability approach” when looking at how and why a particular person or community is affected by a natural disaster. A vulnerability approach looks at a person or group’s capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of a natural disaster rather than any systemic reasons — whether it be political or economic.

The vulnerability approach suggests a purely (depoliticized) social view of disasters, emphasizing the capacity of individual responsibility over the responsibility of state governments or public departments to reduce vulnerability and increase safety.

Such an approach can never demonstrate vulnerability as a result of systemic injustice because of its liberal assessment which focuses on individual characteristics. Researcher Peer Illner pointed this out in his work, *Disasters and Social Reproduction: Crisis Response Between the State and Community*.

In this book Illner uses a social reproduction critique of disasters, claiming that “vulnerability emerges as a systemic corollary of capitalist everyday life.” Vulnerability is defined as “the characteristics of a person or

group and their situation that influence their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact” of a disaster.

According to Illner, disaster studies take a vulnerability approach because they “held onto the normative idea of a more or less stable everyday state that is impacted by a sudden disruption,” adding: “[V]ulnerability studies misses the systemic nature, in which power structures make populations vulnerable; not only in disaster, but in everyday life.”

Applied to interpersonal violence, rape is similarly viewed as a sudden interruption to the everyday rather than part of the power structures already in place. But how can this be when sexual violence is so prevalent?

Taking the systemic view of disasters, we can better understand how exceptionalizing sexual violence in higher education similarly creates a vulnerability approach.

The typical view of sexual assault or harassment on campus is that which happens between students. Yet other common power dynamics that stem from the hierarchical structures within universities tend to be ignored.

Consider the role of professors and administrators in positions of power over students, which is not a momentary interaction, but an everyday reality. Sexual misconduct by professors is very prevalent in colleges across the nation, and this is especially true for graduate students.

Often these perpetrators target those in subordinate positions. Such misuses of power, even when consensual, have led some universities — a notable few spearheaded by graduate student unions — to implement bans on amorous relationships between university employees to prevent this.

Furthermore, the *dismissing* of witnesses or silencing of survivors, as in cases like Michigan State and U.S. nation gymnastics team doctor Larry Nassar and Penn State football coach Jerry Sandusky, points less to a deviant bad actor and more to an institutional practice.

It's not that the vulnerable are those who experience the most violence, but rather that the experience of that violence creates the vulnerability of both current and future survivors. System-imposed vulnerability in higher education not only allows for the prevalence of sexual assault, but it reproduces this violence at the administration level.

By taking such violence to be “exceptional,” the universities themselves create a distance between the institution and survivors. That is, sexual assault becomes a matter of misfortune rather than the direct result of the power dynamics and violent norms created and reproduced by universities.

Betrayal of Trust

What domestic (in the home) violence and campus violence share is a presupposed trust of not just specific people or figure-

heads, but of an institution itself.

Whether in marriage, family or the state, domestic violence survivors are betrayed by people who are presumed to be trusted or loved ones. Likewise, students and workers on campus must also presuppose a minimal level of trust in administrators, professors, security officers, coaches, roommates, cohort members, etc. — yet these all too often are the sources of violence on campus.

However, violence is perpetrated, though, vulnerability is not considered to be derived from one's relation to the institution but as specific individual criteria (i.e. one's social identities). Those whose professor commits sexual violence against them are not considered “vulnerable populations” for reasons that are institutional.

For example, a university that has a history of protecting predatory professors might only consider potential victims as vulnerable because of what they bring to the university — their race, gender, or intoxication levels — and not the ecology of the university itself as a hierarchical structure, wherein the educator retains full power over the learner rather than seeing education as a collaborative process.

Likewise, the very conditions of vulnerability are reproduced not only in presupposing who is a vulnerable population while ignoring the power dynamic of the institution itself, but also in the exercise of that power in the guise of what is normal or that status quo.

Cases like Jerry Sandusky and Larry Nassar showcase not only the crimes of these individuals, but how others allowed for them to continue and how these crimes were institutionalized. Even when Nassar was reported or Sandusky was caught, those who experienced or witnessed this violence were assured this was not out of the ordinary — that knowing about the acts was not enough to stop them.

When knowledge of a crime is not enough for those with the power to prevent it to actually do so, vulnerability becomes the norm while those labeled as “vulnerable” are still further exceptionalized.

This vulnerability ideology plays directly into carceral approaches to violence. Not only do these approaches take the perpetrator to be some disordered individual who has strayed from the standard path of civilized living, but they repress accountability, responsibility, and even the psychological potential in transforming violent behaviors — e.g. via intervention and restorative justice practices like healing circles.

This makes resorting to punitive measures the only solution.

Displaced Responsibility

Ultimately, this puts responsibility of solving the issue on those who have been harmed before — i.e. survivor groups on and off campus. Illner makes a similar argument

by demonstrating that off-loading government responsibilities onto local groups and nonprofits after a disaster is no longer exceptional either but now the official response.

Using the example of Occupy Sandy where over 60,000 volunteers, mobilized to help provide services and assist those affected by the hurricane in 2013, ended up being the stand-in for any state-level intervention. Shortly thereafter, the Obama administration presented a fiscal budget which cut one billion dollars from FEMA's annual budget and quoted the “superiority” of community-run disaster relief.

The dependence on those impacted by the disaster to dig themselves out and offer their own relief is all too similar to how universities have taken an indifferent stance toward campus violence, or at best, as put by Dr. Veronica Shepp and colleagues, offered “surface-level diversity initiatives and empty proclamations all the while failing to structurally address the harms in which the university itself is implicated.”⁹

In shifting away from the liberal “vulnerability approach” and towards a social reproduction explanation, we can start to view campus sexual assault as neither a growing problem set against a peaceful background of studying, nor a matter of an inflated sense of victimization.

Instead we can see campus sexual assault as one of many capitalistic antagonisms found in the higher education system which benefits off of systemically marginalizing women, queer people, and people of color — at best, disrupting and, at worst, terminating their education.

The exceptionalization of violence fails to consider that the majority of perpetrators are themselves survivors of sexual abuse. It fails to consider that rapists are not sexual deviants but rather conformists to a violent rape culture.

It fails to consider that not only offenders and victims/survivors are harmed by violence, but entire communities. It fails to consider that many survivors don't want punishment, they want validation, repair and the hope that it won't happen to others.

The category of exception can mean unlawful actions from the top down as well. As we have covered, categorizing violence as exceptional means that the law can be enforced to maintain the status quo, which presumes a climate of safety in general. But it can also be used to justify the use of state violence to return the exceptional to the normal, to the supposedly safe state of things.

The latter is what German philosopher Carl Schmitt meant by the “state of exception,” which is when a governing body acts above the law in order to restore the status quo or for the “common good.” This is precisely what we have been seeing in the treatment of student protests on campus

recently.

In the spring of 2024, local police enforcement started arresting and brutalizing students on campuses protesting the genocide in Palestine. The suppression of support for Palestine did not end there as many faculty members, like Dr. Rupa Marya, were also met with punishment and even being fired for being critical of Zionism and the on-going genocide.

More recently, Palestinian activist Mahmoud Khalil has been detained by ICE due to the Trump administration's promise to detain and deport student activists. A week and a half later, Georgetown professor Badar Khan Suri was detained by ICE as well.

Although the threat of deportation is unique to the Trump administration's treatment of protesters, as opposed to Biden's, debating which brutality is "worse" in the time of genocide is cynical and should be rejected as quickly as the brutality itself.

What needs focus is how the "exception" functions with respect to the expected "normalcy" of campus life: Here, the protesters are considered extraordinary and disturb the image of the peaceful campus, and thus the state can step in and justify its own exceptional use of force.

Whereas supporting Palestine is considered a political threat which must be treated with extralegal measures, sexual violence on campus is the exception begetting normal lawful punishment. Despite the obfuscation by being set at different poles, these differing exceptions fit together in the site of the college campus as inherently one of violence: that is, violence is immanent to the "normalcy" of the college campus.

The promise of Title IX regulations that effectively address such concerns is a bit of a pipe dream, considering the numerous setbacks we've already witnessed just this past year.

Whatever may be implemented or blocked, it is evident that the popularized liberal claim of the "safe space" tends to function in the opposite way than expected: By placing all blame on a specific few, psychologically irredeemable offenders rather than on systems of oppression, the institution (and the state) can avoid responsibility in every possible way.

The novel safe space of the last seven years or so, however, must be re-read against this background: Safe spaces on campuses have been demanded because safety, not violence, is the exception.

The Solution of Abolition

So where do we go from here? We first ground ourselves in an Abolition Feminist approach from thinkers like Ruth Wilson Gilmore who shares that "Abolition [of carceral responses to violence] is about presence not absence. It's about building life-affirming institutions."

Beyond ridding campuses of increasingly court-aligned reporting and investigation processes, we believe in building paths to healing for survivors, implementing comprehensive prevention education, taking accountability and transforming out of the ways our communities have facilitated violence perpetration, and resisting oppressive practices within the university structure.

In our 2023 piece, McDaniel and Gómez outlined four layers of carceral practices on campuses (surveillance, policing, mandated reporting, and investigations that mirror the criminal legal system) with 14 non-carceral alternatives that campuses could implement such as bystander intervention initiatives, student-led crisis support, and transformative justice practices.

We would add to this several political solutions outside the Title IX regulations as paths forward. For example, canceling student debt would not only alleviate financial concerns of students moving on to their careers, but also eliminate the control that debt has over student lives.

Student debt in particular has a way of forcing students' hands in what they study, under whom they study, and where they go to school. It can be especially controlling in keeping students enrolled in programs and schools where they may have experienced a sexual assault.

To prevent the need for student loans in the first place, reduced costs for college could make higher education more accessible. University divestment from fossil fuels, war manufacturers, and companies with human rights abuses, could be replaced by investment back into communities: libraries, community mental health and wellbeing programs, and health inequity research.

Two years ago, we saw a wave of graduate student strikes across the country. Last year bore witness to student-based protests against several different universities' connections to Israel. Both the responses from the universities themselves and police forces have expressed overt shows of the violence immanent to these higher education institutions.

Perhaps this is why graduate students do not simply strike for higher wages but for much more.

Looking at the example of University of Michigan graduate students in the summer of 2023, their bargaining platform reads less like a contract and more of a modern treatise on human rights: improved reproductive rights, access to transgender healthcare, and financial support for the additional financial burdens faced by international students.¹⁰

These graduate students are not only taking these rights more seriously than perhaps any modern state does today but also taking the promise of the university more seriously than any college actually does.

While such reforms to the system of higher education are promising to advance equal access to higher education, we still wonder: can an educational system set up for the few ever produce just access to education for the many?

Similarly, McDaniel and Gómez (2023) asked if a "new model of the educational system is altogether needed?" — as described above, centered around a pedagogy in which educators collaborate with learners to practice the art of the subject in ways that are effective for them rather than the traditional lecture.

It would be one in which students are guided through learning at their own pace and in a way that emphasizes knowledge as liberation instead of knowledge for production or success. One that would be owned by the local community, educators and learners rather than by wealthy board members with their financial and political agendas.

In hopes that such a future is not so far off, we recognize that reimagining what a higher education institution looks like, how it functions, and what global causes it funds is a necessary first step — and often the most difficult — to change the violent landscape that the college experience means for so many. ■

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Diktats, DOGEs, Dissent & Democrats in Disarray: In the Era of Trump

By Kim Moody

ANALYZING THE VARIOUS policies and assaults of Trump's unprecedented blitzkrieg would take many works. Here, important aspects of the reorganization of the American Empire will be left to others. I will limit my analysis to a few central points that suggest the limits to as well as extent of Trump's bulldozers and the roots of opposition.

The ultimate tripwire in both Trump's plans and the Democrat's efforts to block or minimize them, much less pose a real alternative, lies in the long-term state of capitalism, above all in the United States and other developed economies.

Trade, Tariffs and the Cost of Living

Trump has given new life to imperial conquest. His focus on Panama, Greenland and even Canada may be just plain nuts in political or military terms, but it's not entirely irrational economically. Indeed, the rush for rare earth and metals needed for Artificial Intelligence and related technology, along with competition for stakes in the Arctic, are some of today's newer imperial contests.

Reappropriating the Panama Canal would give significant U.S. control over ocean-to-ocean trade and its costs; purchasing Greenland and even more preposterously annexing Canada would give Greater America dominance in the expanding northwest passage Arctic shipping lanes. Alliance with Russia would add a huge presence in the northeast Arctic passage, completing two major northern inter-oceanic routes. Both would reduce ocean-to-ocean trade time significantly.¹

There are already some 200 ice-free ports on the various arctic shipping lanes, at least twenty of them in Greenland.² As the polar ice cap melts the possibilities become, well, not endless — because they will be bringing climate disaster closer — but in the meantime there is money to be made.

Of course, the objects of this colonial fantasy will resist and there are problems of international law. What is more likely than possession is that Trump wants and will get some deals like that reached with Panama.

There the Hong Kong-owned firm Panama Ports Company has sold 90% ownership to a U.S. consortium headed by private equity giant Blackrock that gives them control of the ports at the Canal's Atlantic and Pacific entrances. In addition, the president of Panama agreed to dismiss China's Belt and Road

initiatives in Panama.³ Quite a coup for Trump.

Perhaps Greenland will be persuaded to give preference to U.S. shippers in Arctic ports, along with the rights to rare earth and other metals he so covets. Such a reorganization of trade routes, however, would disrupt current global supply chains as some east coast U.S. and European shippers shift from eastward movement to westward "steaming," rerouting and disrupting major supply chains.

The tariffs are supposed to bring revenue to offset the reduction of taxes on the rich, but their main alleged purpose is to encourage firms to invest in manufacturing in the United States by raising the cost of imports. Customs and tariffs account for about three percent of U.S. federal revenues. Trump raised them to 3.65% in his first term and Biden brought them back down somewhat. While the much larger tariffs he is proposing now would increase revenue somewhat, they would also reduce imports, limiting new income from the tariffs.

In any case, while high tariffs will significantly raise consumer costs, they are unlikely to offset deep tax cuts. As a Biden White House study put it, "It is mathematically unlikely that a broad tariff could ever replace revenue raised by individual income tax."⁴

While there has been some increase in U.S. manufacturing in recent years, the major reason that increased tariffs are not likely to produce some big manufacturing revival lies in the state of the economies of the United States and most developed nations since the Great Recession of 2008-2010.

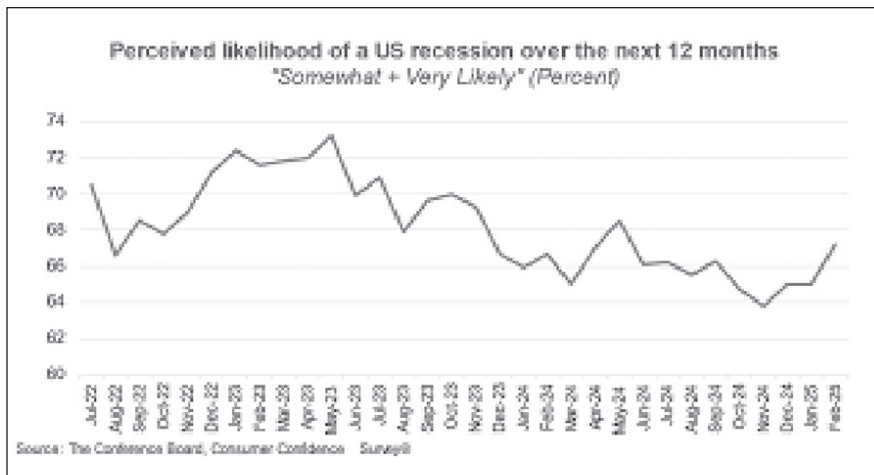
This is characterized not only by the tendential fall and volatility of profit rates and the extreme unevenness of the distribution of profits within the United States, but by a decade and a half of low productivity in manufacturing that shows no signs of improving, along with relatively slow economic growth in general combined with a tendency toward inflation.⁵

As a result, tariffs of the sort Trump has put on, off and on again on Mexico and Canada supposedly until April, and his surprise 50% on Canadian steel and aluminium along with those imposed on China, will accelerate the already existing tendency toward inflation.

The auto industry is a clear example. About 40% of vehicles sold in the United States by Stellantis, 30% by Ford, and 25% by GM are made in Canada or Mexico. Nissan, Honda and Volkswagen also produce cars in Mexico for export to the United States. Obviously, a 25% tariff would increase sticker prices significantly. But even cars and trucks "made in the USA" depend on imported parts.

A recent OECD study shows that parts imported from Mexico and Canada account for an average of 10% of costs for cars made in the United States, while Chinese parts add another

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er 5.4%.⁶ Obviously, large tariffs on such inputs not only in auto but throughout manufacturing will push prices up across the board, even beyond the underlying inflationary trends in contemporary capitalism.

One estimate of the tariffs proposed so far, including those on Mexico, Canada and China sees a \$600 billion increase in costs.⁷ This will be a serious problem for Trump, who won in part on the promise to control the cost of living.

Shrinking the State, or Political and Ethnic Cleansing?

Today, the U.S. federal state employs about three million civilian workers, down from its 1990 high of 3.4 million with no decrease in the budget. It increased under Reagan, dropped somewhat under Clinton and Obama, then rose under Trump and Biden. But it has never dropped much under three million for the past half century. Nor have its costs ever fallen significantly over the decades.⁸

Elon Musk claims his DOGE has cut 200,000 federal jobs. This would bring it to the 2016 level under Obama, hardly enough to fund Trump's proposed gifts to the obscenely wealthy. Faced with criticism from many corners, Musk says agency heads will do the rest of the dirty work and he will move on to re-digitizing the already digital agency systems.⁹

DOGE, however, has already run into trouble from various sources including the courts and, of course, federal workers and their unions. So it is not clear if even these cuts will be permanent. If, on the other hand, they stick and even deepen, the government will more likely face disruptions and closures rather than efficiencies.

This may be fine with Trump, Musk and their billionaire colleagues, but those in the public impacted by this will not be so happy — and they will be many, including current MAGA supporters. Furthermore, a growing number of businesses that have government contracts or depend on government approval have expressed warning in their recent quarterly reports about the chaos created by DOGE.¹⁰

Along with the inhuman deportation of millions of immigrants, one of the most immediately socially damaging moves under contemplation, and likely to bring a backlash, is the proposed slashing of Medicaid. House Republicans have already moved toward \$880 billion in cuts to Medicaid over ten years in their budget resolution. That would be a significant chunk of the \$660 billion annual Medicaid bill.

While Medicaid is still seen as a program for the poor, in

fact, 72 million people receive Medicaid benefits. Such cuts would hit Democratic districts more, as these are in states that expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act, but many Republican districts will also be hit. In Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson's district, for example, a third of the population get Medicaid assistance. Some Republican representatives have expressed concerns about the electoral effects of such cuts.¹¹

Serious cuts in Medicaid will also undermine hospitals and nursing homes in those districts hardest hit. Medicaid and Medicare together account for almost a third of hospital revenue. Medicaid alone provides about 14% of that income and more for nursing homes. The proposed budget cuts would lead

to the closing of wards and services, and layoffs of healthcare workers. Thus, communities hit hardest by cuts and already overstretched for medical services would see shrinking facilities.

These cuts will also impact state budgets in general, since combined federal and state Medicaid funds compose an average of 28% of state revenue.¹² Opposition to Medicaid cuts has already taken shape in the form of legal challenges by an alliance of blue state Attorneys General.

Most of the cuts made so far point not only to shrinking or eliminating agencies that aid poor and working-class people at home and abroad, but specifically at asserting presidential power and control over every aspect of the executive branch bureaucracy.

Seven thousand in the USAID program, 1700 in the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, and three top administrators from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and two at the perpetually understaffed National Labor Relations Board were dismissed or given leave.

Trump's new agency heads have also carried out political purges in the State Department, the National Security Council, the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, and two Department of Commerce economic advisory panels. One clear indication of increased presidential power and license is the firing of the 18 Inspectors General who oversee all major federal agencies — that is, the elimination of objective oversight and transparency.

Trump/Musk also fired more than a dozen federal prosecutors who worked on investigations of Trump's criminal activities.¹³ And so on.

Not since Woodrow Wilson segregated much of the federal bureaucracy has a president taken such openly racist actions against federal workers. One of Trump's first executive orders was a general end to all DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) programs. This has been followed by firing or placing on "leave" DEI-related personnel throughout the government.

By mid-February this included those at Veterans Affairs, EPA, Education, EEOC, and even the Coast Guard.¹⁴ Along with the planned deportation of millions of immigrants, this is one more step in Trump's effort to Make America White Again — something it never was. Demonstrations have already broken out in opposition to this overt racism and more can be expected.

To top off his ethnic cleansing of the government with plu-

tocracy or even oligarchy, Trump appointed no fewer than 13 billionaires and an additional number of multi-millionaires to fill high level positions in his administration. Some are friends of The Donald, many are in finance, private equity or real estate. Together they are said to be worth \$380 billion.

This doesn't count Elon Musk whose wealth at over \$400 billion exceeds that of the whole bunch, at least until his Tesla stock plummeted in March.¹⁵ This is quite a lineup for a supposed populist.

Barriers to MAGAnomics, Roots of Resistance

Both the barriers to much of Trump's dream of a smoothly running, manufacturing-based economic Fortress America and the roots of growing resistance lie in part in the long-standing state of the U.S. and world economy. I say "in part" because human social action is never simply a reflection of economic conditions.

Trump will go against the economic grain as long as possible, and inflation and anti-deportation driven resistance from below will help but not ensure increasing numbers of grassroots leaders and organizations, potentially including growth of organized labor. I along with many others have often argued for the need of a self-conscious and well-organized, working class "militant minority," such as emerged in the 1930s, to provide leadership in mass resistance.

By now it is almost universally recognized that capitalism in the advanced economies, with the United States at their center and China catching up, have slowed to a near crawl over the last decade or more and are expected to continue at this pace. Even the International Monetary Fund and World Bank confirm this. As IMF Director Kristalina Georgieva put it last year, the rest of the decade appears "sluggish and disappointing" and "without a course of correction, we are...heading for a tepid Twenties."¹⁶ While there is debate over this reality, from a Marxist perspective a general decline in profit rates, with some ups and downs, has limited investment in productive areas of the economy.

Furthermore, even if the super-rich spent their new tax breaks less on crypto currencies, stocks and other financial speculation (against Trump's advice), success is sure to be limited. The U.S. economy has been distorted by disproportionate amounts of investment in developing the huge (super-expensive and ecologically disastrous) infrastructure required by generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) and related technology. Much of this is likely to have little practical industrial use — although Musk will soak up some as he remakes the U.S. state.

The huge amounts of capital sucked up by this AI sector, in turn, have been one factor in undermining productivity in the rest of the economy, particularly in the production and movement of goods. In an effort to increase profits, firms have raised prices and contributed to inflation. Together these trends point toward a period of "stagflation" analogous to that of the 1970s rather than a new "golden era."¹⁷

In the United States the mass of non-financial profits has increased from year to year, but their distribution has prevented a period of general growth. On the one hand, hundreds of billions for AI and a small group of large corporations (mostly "The Magnificent Seven" tech bros); on the other, "zombie" firms slumping along with few if any profits comprising twenty to thirty percent of all corporations in recent years, and those in the middle falling below par.¹⁸

An indication of the spread of profits can be seen in the fact that measured in net profit margins (after expenses, interest and taxes), information technology firms lead by twice the average. With so many corporations showing poor returns on investment, average profit rates since 2022 have fallen again.¹⁹

Furthermore, the idea that generative AI will bring about a renaissance in manufacturing is another techno-fantasy. As Daron Acemoglu, a leading expert on AI, notes, as of late 2024 "only about 5 percent of businesses in the United States have reported using AI." Further he argues:

*"A.I. is an information technology. It will not make your cake or mow your lawn. Nor will it take over the running of companies or scientific inquiry. Rather, it can automate a range of cognitive tasks that are typically performed in offices or in front of a computer."*²⁰

A recent Brookings Institution study drew the same conclusion that "AI is not likely to disrupt physical, routine, blue collar work much at all, barring technological breakthroughs in robotics."²¹ The latter has failed to impact manufacturing or transportation productivity for over a decade despite some new developments.

A 2025 Pew Research Center survey found that almost 80% of workers don't use AI or haven't heard of it in their workplace. Furthermore, those who do use it are concentrated in a few "high-skill metro areas," i.e. San Jose, San Francisco, Durham, New York and Washington, DC, not major cites of manufacturing.

AI may well speed up and eliminate many jobs, but these will not be primarily in the production and movement of goods or in most services that require physical effort and movement, the majority of working-class jobs.²²

Finally, inflation is almost certainly going to undermine Trump's plans and, at the same time, produce increased resistance among greater numbers of working-class people. This is likely to encourage both pushes for union militancy and new organization, despite Trump's undermining of the NLRB and general anti-union fanaticism.

Low productivity combined with longterm stagnation of real wages and mark-ups to increase profits (even though unevenly distributed) tend to push price increases and inflation. After falling somewhat from February 2024, inflation rose again beginning in September through January 2025 to three percent on all goods before falling slightly to 2.8% in February due almost entirely to falling airfare and car prices — reductions that won't last long with Trump's tariffs.

Overall, Goldman Sachs expects Trump's tariffs to increase inflation by a full percentage point in 2025.²³ Real GDP growth fell over that period to 2.3% and unemployment remained around four percent. Despite rising profits, fixed investment was down and business bankruptcies were up, all pointing to "stagflation," slow growth combined with increasing prices.²⁴

Strikes of course are about more than wages, with work-related issues often being even more important. And here too there is reason to expect resistance as employers seek to increase slumping profit rates through work intensification — driven often these days by digital technology.

As things stand now in early 2025, however, there is no upsurge in strikes. As the Institute for Labor Research (ILR) Labor Action Tracker reports, the number of strikes fell from 471 in 2023 to 359 in 2024, while the number of strikers dropped from 539,000 to 293,000. These levels are still well



Hands Off action in Chicago, where the CTU has led the way in labor's revival. Sarah Jane Rhee

above 2022 and 2021. By early March this year, however, only 36 strikes were recorded by the ILR tracker, considerably below the previous three years.²⁵

The number of strikers in 2023 were buoyed by such big bargaining units such as 160,000 SAG-AFTRA actors, 75,000 SEIU members at Kaiser Permanente, and 65,000 teachers in Los Angeles.²⁶ Two possible reasons for this decline in strike action are that consumer prices increases slowed for most of 2024 and that the number of contracts expiring, which is when most strikes occur, was lower than in 2023.

In terms of major strikes by 1000 or more workers, however, the numbers were up with 31 involving 271,500 workers, over 90% of the total, beginning in 2024. The number of major strikes was well above that for any year since 2000, while the number of strikers was also above most years since 2000 except for 2023 and the “Red State” teachers’ upsurge of 2018-19.

Education and health services have been the biggest sites of strikes, and the West the location of a majority, reflecting changes in the working class.²⁷ A large proportion of the contracts expiring in 2025 are in education and health services so that a significant number of large strikes are likely.

On the other hand, new organizing accelerated somewhat in 2024 with an improved NLRB and bolder tactics — although still far short of what is needed for labor to actually grow through this method. According to Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) estimates union membership barely changed, squeaking up by 31,000 due entirely to the education and health sectors.²⁸ Early, if partial, organizing victories at Amazon by the Teamsters and “transplants” by the UAW, however, could preview a major breakthrough with or without the NLRB’s aid.

At the same time reform movements in recent years have pushed for greater democracy and action in a number of unions including the United Auto Workers (UAW), Teamsters, rail unions, United Food and Commercial Workers, Theatrical and Stage Employees, Professional and Technical Engineers, and the National Association of Letter Carriers.

Following the examples of Teamsters at UPS in 2023, more workers engaged in active contract campaigns and contract rejections, often winning significant gains with a serious strike

threat.²⁹ These are indications that while the new level of strikes and increased organizing remains low by historical standards, the new tactics and greater rank and file involvement suggest the “militant majority” is growing.

Winning by conventional means will be even more difficult in 2025, not only because Trump will do whatever he can to prevent victories, break unions and attack immigrant workers who are key in many industries, but because of the underlying problem of profitability. In addition to poor profits for many companies, production costs have already risen as measured by increases in the BLS’s producer price index, and employers will resist the big gains of the last couple of years.³⁰

At the same time, however, rising costs of living will encourage worker action. It is not possible to predict which of these contradictory forces will dominate, but the underlying conflict has intensified. Signs of resistance are growing both in collective bargaining and the opposition to the mass deportations of immigrant workers.

The Chicago Teachers Union, for example, is attempting to build a coalition of local unions willing to fight Trump’s initiatives. Strategically, building on the successes of the last year or so, by Teamsters and others, a serious breakthrough at Amazon or other highly profitable firms could shift the balance of class forces significantly.

Dazed Democrats in Decline and Disarray

One place where serious resistance is notably missing is the Democratic Party. From past and current office holders, sympathetic strategists and pundits, allied consultants and newspaper columnists consultants to major donors, there is disillusionment and disagreement about the party’s election defeat, its loss of traditional Democratic voters, its fate, and what to do about it.

Too “woke” or not too “woke”? Oppose or cooperate (when possible)? “Play dead” (James Carville) or “wait and see” (Hakeem Jeffries). Or perhaps that old one, “It’s the economy, Stupid.” While there are suddenly occasional rhetorical denunciations of billionaires, there is no serious reconsideration of economic or social policy with which to win voters.

One thing almost everyone seems to agree on is that, while there are plenty of contenders for the 2028 presidential nomination, this party lacks leaders and leadership. Additionally, say politicians and pundits alike, the problem is one of the party’s “message” and “brand.”³¹

This is the language of advertising, not politics or policy, much less grassroots organization. It is the analytical framework of a party that spends billions on advertising, consultants and party bureaucracy, lacks a membership or organized base, and depends on the kindness of donors. Its electoral base is an individualized public and it is losing more and more of that.

It wasn’t always so. Whatever one thinks about the limitations of the New Deal Coalition that collapsed decades ago, and they were many, it was rooted in urban neighborhoods through its old machines, corrupt as they were, with their county organizations, party club systems, and after 1937 active industrial unions. By the 1970s the machines, starved of patron-

age with urban demographics changed, clubs abandoned and county organizations hollowed out, were gone.³²

Even before the industrial jobs left and the unions shrank, as the industrial unions increasingly embraced business unionism, they lost their ability to mobilize members for political action. Politics and political endorsements, like collective bargaining, became the sole possession of the leadership. In the workplace, grievances were increasingly settled at the highest level and shop stewards and committees reduced to legalized case work rather than mobilization and action, economic and political.

So, after a brief increase to 80% against Goldwater in 1964, with no organized resistance to the “white backlash” of the late 1960s, the Democratic union household and white union member vote collapsed long ago. The union household percentage has since been stuck in the mid-to-high fifties except for 1976 after eight years of Nixon, never to recover, not even after four years of Trump.³³

In their place beginning in the 1970s came the corporate PACs, followed by wealthy donors, high-priced consultants,

and increasingly well-financed and staffed top-level party committees.³⁴ In 2024, the three major national Democratic Party Committees alone — not including what related PACs, individual candidates and state parties raised — spent over \$2 billion compared to \$620 million in 2000, much of it spent on media and consultants.³⁵

Politically, the centrists who now control these party committees have no plan to change any of this, and no economic policies to alter the perception that the Democrats are the party of the (previous, unsatisfactory) status quo.

The Democratic hierarchy’s major, ongoing problem is the erosion of its electoral base seen in 2024 by the loss of six million votes compared to 2020, including the continued decline of the Black male vote and the steep drop in the Latino vote.³⁶

Over the last two decades registered voters who identified fully as Democrats fell from between 37-40% to 33% in 2024. Things were no better down ballot as the percentage of Democratic state legislators became a minority, at 44%, for the first time in over one hundred years.³⁷

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The economic conditions discussed above — combined with an inability to tax high incomes, obscene individual wealth and the bloated profits of the financial and high tech giants due to the Democrats' dependence on them, as well as the ideology of most officials and office holders — precludes the Democrats advocating a significant redistribution of wealth.

That's why universal healthcare, job guarantees, low-cost housing, increased minimum wages, price controls of any sort, vast expansion of renewable energy sources, etc. are beyond serious consideration.

Furthermore, the 2024 election moved the national party even more to the center. In the House of Representatives, the Squad lost two members and the Progressive Caucus made no net gains. On the other hand, 23 of the 33 newly elected House Democrats joined the centrist New Democratic Coalition, making it the largest caucus in the House by far.

If that wasn't a bad enough sign, the New Dems picked conservative Blue Dog Brad Schneider as Chair. Any hope that

this bunch will either do serious battle with Trump or improve the party's economic and social policies is a fantasy.

The Democrats may take back Congress in 2026 as a result of the reaction against Trump's excesses. That contest, however, will be fought in a little more than 40 districts (out of 435) that are at all competitive.³⁸ Many of these are in disproportionately well-to-do suburban Congressional districts where the "message" will be a moderate one, so any shift to the left is ruled out. The party's handpicked "frontline" candidates who will defend competitive Democratic districts are always overwhelmingly moderate New Dems.

This means a continued cycle of center-versus-right winning the House, or worse, the growth of the right with or without Trump, rather than any hope of a progressive development. That is, unless grassroots opposition grows rapidly and the left takes seriously its own rhetoric about building a workers' party, even if it's only a few experiments in that direction in 2026. ■

A Setback for Auto Workers' Solidarity *By Dianne Feeley*

THE UAW STATEMENT "In a Victory for Autoworkers, Auto Tariffs Mark the Beginning of the End of NAFTA and the 'Free Trade' Disaster" posted on the UAW website, presents a faulty understanding of the impact NAFTA had on the restructuring of the auto industry. It then outlines a disastrous strategy for auto workers, similar to a previous UAW administration's call on members to save their jobs by voting for two-tier contracts.

In the 1990s corporate restructuring meant increased automation, selling off auto parts plants and opening up plants in states that successfully walled off union organizing. Instead of using its muscle, the union leadership sold the membership on the need to find concessions that limited the pain. That meant voting for half wages, inferior working conditions and fewer benefits, not for ourselves but for the next generation.

Told this was the way to keep one's job, even those who voted for two-tier chafed against what they saw as obvious inequality. Over the next several contracts, members raised ending tiers as a central contract demand. And because cutting health care and pension benefits was so profitable, corporations eventually restored the wage rate — while stonewalling on benefits.

Faulty Analysis

The UAW March 27, 2025 "Victory" statement identifies a two-million-unit-per-year decline in Big Three production as the result of increased integration of the North American auto industry.

It cites NAFTA as growing corporate profits while U.S. autoworkers were laid off, but ignores the other factors — multi-tier wages, increased automation, and the reorganization of the auto parts sector.

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The statement also ignores the existence of foreign-owned companies that set up their plants in "right-to-work" Southern states, cutting into what was once mainly the Big Three market. This combination means that today only 40% of U.S. auto workers are covered by union contracts.

Although the UAW statement demands that companies not be allowed to close factories, that seems to mean only U.S.-based plants. And while it demands a North American minimum wage and greater labor rights for Mexican autoworkers, it offers no innovative solutions on how this could be accomplished.

The USCMA agreement replacing NAFTA — negotiated during the first Trump administration — has proven toothless. It contained a minimum wage law and established a Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM). This investigative and enforcement mechanism was to ensure workers' rights to unionize and negotiate contracts.

But even when auto workers voted and won an independent union (twice) at VU Manufacturing — a Michigan-based interior auto parts company that operated a plant of 400 on the Mexican side of the border — the company retaliated and eventually closed down. It ignored the RRM, stiffed the final 71 workers of their severance and made sure the workers were blacklisted.

What Strategy?

Union contracts are only enforceable when backed by the active participation of the workforce. Trade agreements are similar.

How has the UAW worked with unions in Canada and Mexico to enforce USCMA? *Dead silence.* Instead, the go-it-alone UAW statement endorsed the Trump administration's slapping 25% tariffs on parts and fully assembled vehicles coming from Canada and Mexico. Since then Stellantis has imple-

mented layoffs of auto workers in all three countries. And while the longer-term impact of North American auto tariffs is unpredictable, clearly they will quickly result in higher prices and job losses.

Until 1984 Canadian and U.S. autoworkers belonged to the UAW on both sides of the border. But when the UAW leadership advocated concessions, Canadian workers refused to go along.

Given what happened then, UAW members should look at the big picture. And since Trump just blatantly annulled the contracts and bargaining rights of federal workers, falsely claiming that "national security" requires it, isn't it absurd to imagine that Trump cares about workers' lives?

In the era of Artificial Intelligence and climate catastrophes, why count on a stagnant market of individual car and truck production? Why not transition to a sustainable mass transit system and demand the work/life balance we need? It's time to reduce the work day, re-raising the old UAW demand of "30 hours work for 40 hours pay."

Instead of viewing Mexican and Canadian autoworkers as competitors, we need to unite with all who produce and distribute what we make. Instead of surrendering our union's potential power, we need to forge a powerful unity beyond borders — and across manufacturing industries.

An integrated North American auto industry suggests that workers can carry out effective slowdowns and strikes to equalize wages and working conditions — not simply set minimal standards.

This means organizing workers — often employed by the same company — across borders. We must remove labor costs from business calculations by eliminating competition between workers. In today's corporate climate, cross-border worker mobilization is an essential tool. ■

"Always Historicize!"

Fredric Jameson's Innovative Marxism By Michael Principe

SINCE HIS DEATH on September 22 of last year at the age of 90, Marxist theorist and cultural critic, Fredric Jameson has been the subject of numerous tributes and remembrances. Arriving from divergent spaces, they include left and liberal publications like *The Nation* and *Jacobin*, Marxist theorists Alex Callinicos (for *Socialist Worker*) and Boris Kagarlitsky from prison in Russia (for *Links International*), and many others.

Noteworthy too are the approving remembrances published by such heavy hitters of the bourgeoisie as *The New York Times* (with two separate pieces) and *The Washington Post*. All of this is appropriate for a writer who consistently produced an astonishing amount of insightful and at times groundbreaking material over his career.

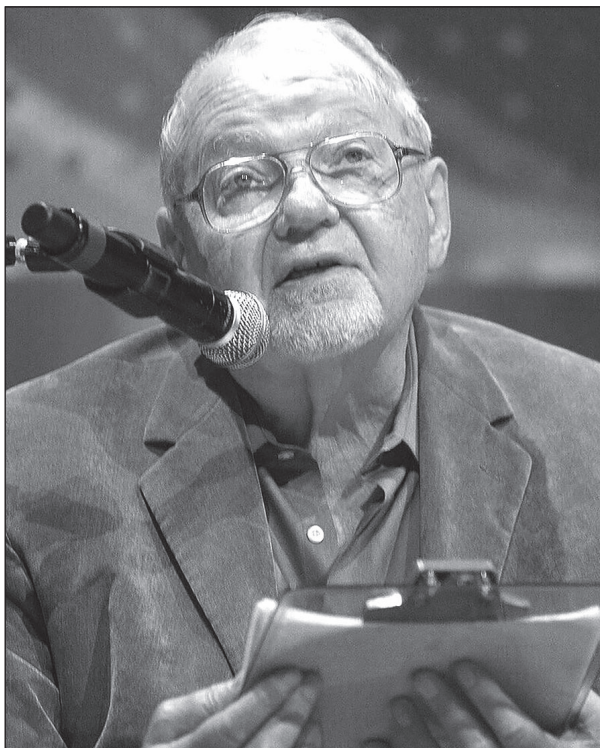
As one might expect, these tributes engage with Jameson's Marxism in a variety of ways. Kate Wagner writes in *The Nation*, "The outpouring of mourning that followed (his death) seemed to unite even the most fractious of intellectual combatants within the broader left."¹

A.O. Scott in *The New York Times* describes him as "the most prominent Marxist literary critic in the English-speaking world. In other words, he was a fairly obscure figure..."² Scott, while full of praise for Jameson, personally distances himself from Jameson's Marxism: "I'd like to say something about why, as a critic, Jameson mattered to me. And maybe, more generally, to the nonacademic, not necessarily Marxist brand of criticism that I and some of my comrades try to practice..."

Why Jameson Matters

Someone unfamiliar with Jameson may wish to go beyond the obituaries and ask, what makes him important to such a large audience? A reader of a certain sort may ask

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more specifically, how does Jameson's work relate to Marxist theory?

Further, we can ask, what do the answers to these questions have in common? Let's attempt something of a response.

Interestingly, one point of entry into Jameson's extensive, rich and varied body of work, is by considering the establishment press's positive evaluation of a figure who regularly and in no uncertain terms proclaimed his Marxism, labeling it the "untranscendable horizon" of critical thought, uniquely capable of subsuming (but also preserving) other critical perspectives.³

Would Jameson be surprised to be celebrated by these mainstream publications? By his praise across the various political positions of the "fractious left"?

Almost certainly not. Actually, such attention usefully illustrates important aspects of Jameson's work, starting with his analysis of the postmodern, one of Jameson's major theoretical contributions, and the one by which he is now best known.

While Jameson published his first book (on Jean Paul Sartre) in 1961, the work on postmodernism began in the early 1980s and

was solidified with the publication of *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* in 1991.⁴ The works that followed deepened and extended this analysis.

If the question is how to fit Jameson's Marxism with his mainstream appreciation, we might ask, more generally, how in the current (postmodern) moment we are to judge whether something fits into or is placed properly within a given context? For Jameson, the space for any sort of response is historical. The first sentence of *The Political Unconscious* (1981) is "Always historicize!"⁵

The first sentence of the postmodernism book, by contrast, speaks to the context in which any such work must occur: "It is safest to grasp the concept of the postmodern as an attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place."⁶

The postmodern is in part characterized, for Jameson, as a space where, lacking a larger historical narrative, it is difficult to envision things "fitting" together. The proper, i.e. totalizing perspective is lacking.

The "whole" cannot be represented. Seemingly, anything can go anywhere. So it is, for example, with aesthetic pastiche and collage or the loss of distinction between high and low art. Jameson in the *New York Times*? Sure.

What makes Jameson's intervention into the postmodernism debates strikingly original is that as a Marxist, his project is not the rejection of postmodern theory (nor is it an acceptance). Terry Eagleton and Alex Callinicos each have produced valuable book-length Marxist takedowns of postmodern theory.⁷

Jameson's subject matter is different, a difference that Jameson laments has caused "some to conclude that, in my own case, having 'become' a postmodernist I must have ceased to be a Marxist in any meaningful (or in other words, stereotypical) sense."⁸

Perry Anderson has characterized Jameson's project as one intended to "capture" postmodernism for Marxism.⁹ Douglas Kellner writes that Jameson attempts "to show that a reconstructed Marxian theory can pro-

vide the most comprehensive and penetrating theory of postmodernism itself."¹⁰

Culture and Economy

Jameson, sometimes slyly referring to himself as a "vulgar Marxist," sees his project as grounded in the economic base, here characterized as "late capitalism."

Jameson attempts to roughly align himself with Ernest Mandel's periodization of capitalism, where capitalism can be characterized as moving from market capitalism to the monopoly/imperialist stage to the current stage of late capitalism, characterized by multinational capital and globalization, really the purist form of capitalism with commodification penetrating previously uncommodified areas and to which Marx's critique straightforwardly applies.

To these Jameson aligns his own cultural periodization of realism, modernism, and post-modernism. Crucial to the entire analysis is the idea that culture has become barely distinguishable from economy.

Jameson insists against some of his critics that the notion of the postmodern under discussion is not a purely cultural one, but rather that "postmodernism" names a mode of production. One way to think about this is as a totalizing version of Horkheimer and Adorno's "Culture Industry."

In Jameson's 1990 book on Adorno, he writes that "It now seems to me possible ... that Adorno's Marxism, which was no great help in the previous periods, may turn out to be just what we need today."¹¹

Adorno's desperate pessimism and search for moments of subjectivity within a totalizing system is, for Jameson, relevant in a way it was not in a previous period with its ascendent radical activism, utopian sensibilities, and anti-colonial struggles.

Lost in the current period is the "semi-autonomy" of the cultural sphere. Jameson often contrasts this with the view expressed in Marcuse's 1937 essay, "The Affirmative Character of Culture." While it may then have been true, as Marcuse asserts, that high culture played a role which placed it psychically outside the economy, taking "up the historical demand for the general liberation of the individual,"¹² this is no longer the case.¹³

In the current era, for Jameson, everything (i.e. the global economy and all of social life) is culture: "with the eclipse of culture as an autonomous space or sphere, culture itself falls into the world, and the result is not its disappearance but its prodigious expansion, to the point where culture becomes coterminous with social life in general...everything has at length become cultural, from the

superstructures down in to the mechanisms of the infrastructure itself."¹⁴

For Jameson, the literature of modernism generally stood apart from and was critical of the market. Postmodern literature is part of the market and may even celebrate it.

Characteristic of the postmodern is "a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense..."¹⁵ Observable in Warhol's portraits and in postmodern architecture such as the Wells Fargo Center in Los Angeles, such depthlessness applies to human experience as well, yielding individuals more likely to be recognized as fragmented or schizophrenic than alienated.

Postmodern Subject and Class

While poststructuralism in its various forms swims in the conceptual sea of anti-humanism, proclaiming "the death of the subject," thereby foreclosing the possibility of its liberation, Jameson's approach is more nuanced, dialectical, and decidedly Marxist.

As with poststructuralism and other postmodern theory, Jameson holds that in the postmodern period, the bourgeois self, which characterized modernity, is eclipsed. In contrast, Jameson sees in a painting like Edward Munch's *The Scream* "a canonical expression

of the great modernist thematics of alienation, anomie, solitude, social fragmentation, and isolation..."¹⁶

While poststructuralism would suggest that such a centered, self-conscious subject was an illusion all along, Jameson sees its demise as a product of late capitalism. This consequence can yield the playfulness of postmodern cultural artifacts, liberated from alienation and anomie, but also in part liberated from all deep emotion, what Jameson calls

"the waning of affect."

Cynicism, detachment, and the easygoing acceptance of extreme violence and sexuality in film and elsewhere is common. While this may constitute a real loss, Jameson makes clear both in the cultural items with which he engages and with his own affirmations that he enjoys much postmodern aesthetic production. Here, again, we glimpse Jameson's dialectical thinking.

Jameson doesn't reject or say "no" to postmodern culture. Instead, he suggests that we need to look at what might emerge from

it. Any current state of things, regardless of its afflictions, can be a fruitful ground for its own dialectical negation. Jameson likes to remind his readers that, of course, Marx saw socialism as dialectically emergent from capitalism.

With older forms of the economic sphere being restructured on a global scale, he suggests toward the end of *Postmodernism*... that "a new international proletariat (taking forms we cannot yet imagine) will reemerge from this convulsive upheaval..."¹⁷

In a rather traditional Marxist manner, Jameson sees this as requiring class consciousness, though what he means by this is less traditional. Here, Jameson introduces his concept of "cognitive mapping," a concept he describes as a "codeword for 'class consciousness — only...class consciousness of a new and hitherto undreamed-of kind..."¹⁸

He writes elsewhere that this notion was "meant to suggest that our task today as artists or critics or whatever is somehow to attempt to recapture or reinvent a new form of representation of this new global totality."¹⁹

Capitalist Stages

The term itself comes from Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City* (1960). The alienated city for Lynch is one where its inhabitants are unable to retain an image of where they are and how they can find their way about.

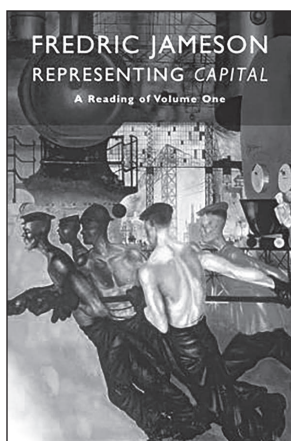
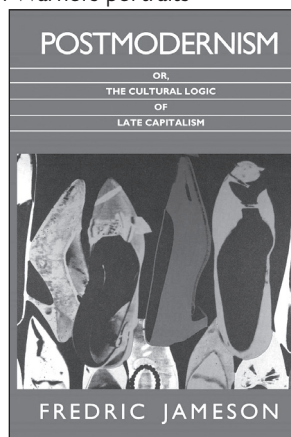
Jameson greatly expands upon this idea. Essentially, Mandel's stages of capitalism all carry with them different spatial sensibilities.

Aesthetic production, for Jameson, reflects this. In the market capitalist/realist phase, people oriented themselves toward the nation-state. In this context, they live in smaller cities, know who their enemies are, who stands socially above and below them, etc. This is Cartesian, grid-like space and coincides with the rise of the novel.

With the monopoly/imperialist stage, the nation expands beyond its borders, predominately by way of colonialism. Parts of the inside are now outside. Parts of the outside are now inside. Modernism, for Jameson, reflects this economic development, i.e. it becomes harder to illustrate the social totality.

Works like Joyce's *Ulysses*, according to Jameson, attempt to solve this unsolvable problem: "the premise of all modernism is that language cannot express these things — that finally the human psyche is too complicated, you can't trace the map of society, you can't position yourself outside of an individual life and look down at totality from above — and yet this is exactly what Joyce tries to do. This then is a necessary failure..."²⁰

The complexity of the global economy, free-floating capital, new kinds of profits and



financial transactions radically exacerbate the difficulties of representing the totality. This is the situation within the postmodern:

*"I take such spatial peculiarities of postmodernism as symptoms and expressions of a new and historically original dilemma, one that involves our insertion as individual subjects into a multidimensional set of radically discontinuous realities..."*²¹

Politically, this is expressed in the enormous challenge of coordinating local, national, and global political action. For Jameson, "The political form of postmodernism, if there ever is any, will have as its vocation the invention and projection of a global cognitive mapping on a social as well as a spatial scale."²²

"Absent Totality"

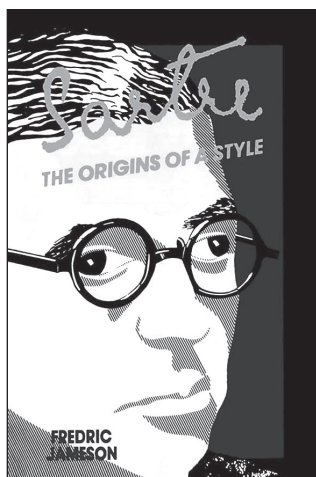
Accordingly, Jameson's criticism often seeks to illustrate how a work relates to this unrepresentable totality. For example, in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* (1992), his discussion of director Alan J. Pakula's 1976 film *All the President's Men*, concludes with an analysis of the scene where Jameson describes the film as taking a "cosmological" turn:

*"...in which, as in the pre-Socratics, a virtually spherical vision of the nature of the universe comes into view. This is of course the famous and seemingly gratuitous shot of the Library of Congress, which literally rises from the very small (the reading room call slips) to the social totality itself... For it is in the impossible vision of totality — here recovered in the moment in which the possibility of conspiracy confirms the possibility of the very unity of the social order itself — that is celebrated in this well-nigh paradisaical moment... The mounting camera shot, which diminishes the fevered researches of the two investigators as it rises to disclose the frozen cosmology of the reading room's circular balconies, confirms the momentary coincidence between knowledge as such and the architectural order of the astronomical totality itself, and yields a brief glimpse of the providential, as what organizes history but is unrepresentable within it."*²³

The "absent totality" within late capitalism for Jameson is, of course, capital itself, which he describes as akin to "Spinoza's God or Nature, the ultimate (indeed, perhaps the only) referent, the true ground of Being of our own time. Only by way of its fitful contemplation can its future, and our own, be somehow disclosed."²⁴

The aspiration here is toward something like Lukács' "standpoint of the proletariat," the only one capable of knowing the totality of the system, of recognizing the fetish character of all commodities. For Jameson, though, there is currently no possible representation of the whole under late capitalism.

The mode of Marxist criticism reflected here is typical of Jameson's work from the



very beginning. He generally emphasizes the form, style, and structure of presentation rather than the content of the work. This is illustrated even in the titles of his first two books separated by a decade: *Sartre: The Origins of a Style* (1961) and *Marxism and Form* (1971).

The latter work contributes to another of Jameson's major achievements, bringing attention to Hegelian, dialectical, "western" Marxism amid the positivistic and analytic thinking dominant in the American academy, but also in contrast to French post-structuralism. In it, he devotes chapters to figures (Sartre, Lukács, Bloch, Marcuse, Benjamin and Adorno) whom he groups together dialectically and which continue to be, along with others added later (Lacan, Althusser), theoretical touchstones going forward.

Utopia Against the Gloom

While one can find a bit of Frankfurt School style gloom in Jameson's work, the overriding mood of his writing is more upbeat. This includes his engagement with Utopia, a kind of dialectical other to the gloom. The concept of utopia appears early in Jameson's writing and is developed throughout, though the role that he sees it playing has varied even over the timespan of his writing career.

In 1971, he echoes Marcuse, writing that for Marx, "Utopian thought represented a diversion of revolutionary energy into idle wish-fulfillments and imaginary satisfactions, in our own time the very nature of the Utopian concept has undergone a dialectical reversal."

In 1971, says Jameson, "The Utopian idea, on the contrary, keeps alive the possibility of a world qualitatively distinct from this one and takes the form of a stubborn negation of all that is."²⁵

In 2005, he reflects on utopia's evolving meaning. During the cold war, he writes that mainstream thinking took utopia as something like a perfection that could only be imposed by authoritarian means, exemplified by Stalin or the Gulag.

The rejection of utopia continued through the anti-authoritarian left's embrace of "difference" as a slogan, adopting anarchist criticisms of Marxism as uniformly leveling and authoritarian. He does think (in 2005) that "Utopia seems to have recovered its

vitality as a political slogan and a politically energizing perspective."

The importance of utopia for Jameson can be appreciated in the context of the remark famously attributed to him, "It's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism."²⁶ Indeed, "one cannot imagine any fundamental change in our social existence which has not first thrown off Utopian visions like so many sparks from a comet."²⁷

Accordingly, Jameson has devoted considerable attention to science fiction literature, which he reads as a literature of the mode of production.

An early champion of Philip K. Dick, whom he has called "the Shakespeare of science fiction,"²⁸ Jameson has written incisively about the differences between science fiction and fantasy literature — the latter generally involving castes rather than classes — how class struggle is reflected in the science fiction of extended life, and much more.

Instances of social connectivity evoke for Jameson the utopian. Certainly, class consciousness counts as such. But so does the collective mourning in the United States after the Kennedy assassination, which "gave a collective glimpse into some collective communicational 'festival' whose ultimate logic and promise is incompatible with our mode of production."²⁹

With "An American Utopia,"³⁰ Jameson even offers up his own speculative utopia, based on a transitional project to socialism that he sees as neither reform nor revolution. Instead, Jameson explores candidates for dual power, an idea associated with Lenin's theorization of the coexistence of soviets (workers' councils) and the Russian provisional government.

Jameson also links it to projects like the food kitchens, health care, and such provided by the Black Panthers or Hamas. Rejected as candidates to grow dual power are labor unions, churches, the professions, and the post office. Jameson settles, in a move sure to surprise his leftist readers, on the military.

In a kind of thought experiment, he starts by suggesting that every citizen between the ages of 16 and 60 be conscripted into the army. Along with full employment (working a minimum number of hours), key is the now universal healthcare provided by the Veterans Administration.

Considerable imaginative speculation follows, all of which is intentionally provocative. While much might be criticized here, we can also observe the openness to the new and unconventional that characterizes Jameson's work more generally.

While some may see this as too abstract, Jameson at the very same time (2015) engages with the quite concrete when contributing the Foreword to Darko Suvin's book on socialist Yugoslavia, writing that it would be hard to imagine a radical movement to

overthrow capitalism “without some serious reconsideration of the success as well as the failure of the once famously ‘actually existing socialism.’”

Criticizing the role of the IMF and others, he writes, that the now former Yugoslavia has “something to tell us about capitalism, as well as about the unique socialism...”³¹ assessed by Suvin. From imagined utopias to Yugoslavia, Jameson’s dialectic is expansive.

Constant Movement

When finding one’s way through Jameson, helpful is his own remark: “The peculiar difficulty of dialectical writing lies indeed in its holistic, ‘totalizing’ character: as though you could not say any one thing until you had first said everything.”³²

The ease with which Jameson moves through discussions of Lyotard and Foucault to Raymond Chandler or Laurie Anderson, often in rapid succession, is remarkable. The vitality of this constant movement is sometimes dizzying. The feeling of loss reflected in Jameson’s obituaries tells us how much that wild ride will be missed.

Engaged readers of Jameson can feasibly follow paths through his work in a kind of “choose your own Jameson” adventure. With so many dialectical connections available from any one starting point, readers whether coming from a Marxist or non-Marxist perspec-

tive may arrive at something like their own personal Jameson.

Certainly, the published remembrances suggest that quite a few folks coming from different worlds have found their Jameson. ■

Notes

1. Kate Wagner, “The Gifts of Fredric Jameson (1934-2024)” *The Nation*, September 26, 2024.
2. A.O. Scott, “For Fredric Jameson, Marxist Criticism was a Labor of Love,” *The New York Times*, September 26, 2024.
3. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 10.
4. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).
5. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 10.
6. Jameson, *Postmodernism...*, ix.
7. Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Wiley-Blackwell, 1996), Alex Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique* (Polity: 1991).
8. Jameson, *Postmodernism...*, 297.
9. Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London & New York: Verso, 1998), 47-78.
10. Douglas Kellner, “Introduction: Jameson, Marxism, Postmodernism” in *Postmodernism: Jameson: Critique* (Washington, DC: Maisonneuve Press 1989), 2.
11. Fredric Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno or the Persistence of the Dialectic* (London & New York: Verso, 1991) 5.
12. Herbert Marcuse, “The Affirmative Character of Culture,” in *The Essential Marcuse*, edited by Andrew Feenberg and William Leiss (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007), 212.
13. Jameson makes this reference a number of times, including *Postmodernism...*, 48, “Periodizing the 60s” in *The Ideologies of Theory* (London & New York: Verso, 2008) 501, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London & New York: Verso, 2005) xv.

14. Jameson, “Periodizing the 60s.” 506.
15. Jameson, *Postmodernism...*, 9.
16. *Ibid*, 11.
17. *Ibid*, 417.
18. *Ibid*, 419.
19. Fredric Jameson, *Jameson on Jameson: Conversations on Cultural Marxism* edited by Ian Buchanan (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2007, 85.
20. *Ibid*, 142.
21. *Postmodernism...*, 413.
22. *Ibid*, 54.
23. Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995) 78-79.
24. *Ibid*, 79.
25. Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974) 110-111.
26. This is the condensed version Mark Fisher gives in *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (London & Washington D.C.: Zero Books, 2009) 2. Fisher attributes the remark to both Jameson and Slavoj Žižek. Jameson’s own words from *The Seeds of Time* (1994) are “It seems to be easier for us today to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism; perhaps that is due to some weakness in our imaginations.” He also writes enigmatically, in “Future City,” “Someone once said that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism.” (*New Left Review* 21 May-June 2003, 97 also found in *The Ideologies of Theory*, 573). He repeats the latter line in “An American Utopia” (2016), 3.
27. Jameson, *Archaeologies...*, xii.
28. *Ibid*, 345.
29. Jameson, *Postmodernism...*, 355.
30. Fredric Jameson, “An American Utopia,” in *An American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army*, edited by Slavoj Žižek (London & New York, 2016).
31. Fredric Jameson, “Foreword” to Darko Suvin, *Splendour, Misery, and Possibilities: An X-Ray of Socialist Yugoslavia* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2015) xxi.
32. Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, 306.

Vets Mobilize vs. DOGE — continued from page 3

that beds, units or programs in their facility had been closed due to local staffing shortages and budget deficits, even in places with continuing patient demand.

Life and Death Stuff

Three years later, VHA managers — not just union members — foresee such conditions getting much worse, not better. They express a particular concern about how cuts to research and direct care will adversely affect patients undergoing cancer treatment.

Patients on clinical trials or even undergoing traditional cancer treatment at the VHA can’t just switch providers overnight. If there is no longer sufficient staff to provide care, their clinical trial will be ended, with no guarantee of its continuation outside the VHA. Outside the veterans healthcare system, there can be much longer waits for an appointment with an oncologist.

“This is life and death stuff,” a VHA medical center administrator told us. “We don’t treat cancer because it’s benign, we treat it — and right away — because it can kill you right away.”

One 50-year old Army veteran well aware of the need for that kind of timely treatment is Jose Vasquez, executive director of Common Defense. On March 6, his group held a national emergency Zoom call on saving the

VA with more than 350 participants from around the country.

Many on the call were surprised to see Vasquez lying in bed and dressed in a hospital johnny. “I am coming to you live from the Manhattan VA,” he explained. “I’ve just had surgery for pancreatic cancer and the idea that the Trump Administration would want to cut 83,000 positions and fire that many people from VA facilities is ludicrous. The VA just saved my life.”

“It’s getting real,” he warned. “They’re coming after our veterans’ benefits but we’re not going down without a fight” — a message echoed by other vets on the call. They pledged to rally their fellow vets and bombard politicians and the press with their own stories of life-changing experiences with VA programs and services.

One Common Defense activist already doing that is Vedia Barnett, a disabled vet who has received VA care for 25 years, including rehabilitation from a major stroke. As she told readers of *Time* earlier this year:

“I am not just concerned for myself — I am terrified for our senior veterans, those with severe combat injuries, survivors of military sexual trauma (MST), and those battling PTSD. They will all bear the brunt of this cruel decision... leaving our most vulnerable without the care they desperately need and deserve.” ■

The following is an excerpt from Mahmoud Khalil’s March 18 statement:

I WAS BORN in a Palestinian refugee camp in Syria to a family which has been displaced from their land since the 1948 Nakba. I spent my youth in proximity to yet distant from my homeland. But being Palestinian is an experience that transcends borders. I see in my circumstances similarities to Israel’s use of administrative detention — imprisonment without trial or charge — to strip Palestinians of their rights....

I have always believed that my duty is not only to liberate myself from the oppressor, but also to liberate my oppressors from their hatred and fear. My unjust detention is indicative of the anti-Palestinian racism that both the Biden and Trump administrations have demonstrated over the past 16 months as the U.S. has continued to supply Israel with weapons to kill Palestinians and prevented international intervention. For decades, anti-Palestinian racism has driven efforts to expand U.S. laws and practices that are used to violently repress Palestinians, Arab Americans, and other communities. That is precisely why I am being targeted. ■

REVIEW

Not A Renaissance, But A Zombie Invasion: The New Nuke Revival

By Cliff Conner

Nuclear is Not the Solution:

The Folly of Atomic Power
in the Age of Climate Change

By M.V. Ramana

Verso, 2024, 272 pages. \$29.95 hardcover.

LIKE THE PROVERBIAL bad penny, the threat of nuclear power keeps popping up, over and over again. No matter how many times the population of the Earth rejects it, every generation seems to be confronted by a fresh “renaissance” of this abominable idea that just won’t die.

From the perspective of the general public — our perspective — it’s not a glorious renaissance but a recurring zombie invasion.

When book browsers come across M.V. Ramana’s title *Nuclear Is Not the Solution*, some may wonder: “The solution to what?” But anyone who has followed the many-decades-long controversy over the generation of nuclear power for civilian purposes will quickly know the answer: “climate change,” or more to the point, “global heating.”

Unlike the false debate between climate scientists and climate-change deniers, the renewed dispute over nuclear power derives from a genuine problem that cannot be ignored — the fossil-fuel-driven climate crisis.

The proposal of nuclear power as the antidote to an existential danger is serious and worthy of thoughtful consideration: *Is nuclear energy THE ANSWER to saving the Earth from ecocide by fossil fuels?*

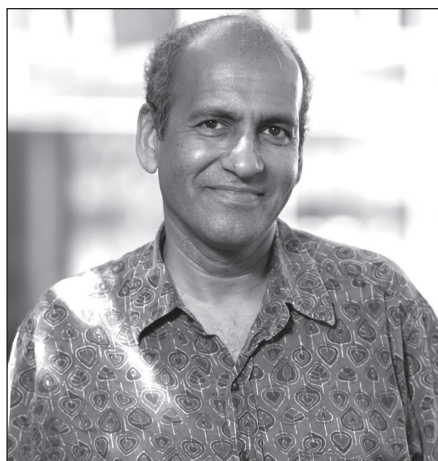
Advocates of nuclear power are trying to resurrect its moldy carcass once again by repackaging it as the only way to combat the existential threat of climate change. They aim to mobilize the youthful energy of environmental activists whose fear of global warming outweighs concerns about the dangers of nuclear power.

By doing so, they hope to create a groundswell of public opinion that will open the way to a new generation of nuclear reactors.

The SMR “Solution”

The industry is also offering a new technological gimmick: SMRs, or “Small Modular

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M.V. Ramana cautions environmental activists taken in by pro-nuclear propaganda.

Reactors.” Unfortunately, some young environmental activists have been persuaded by this propaganda and are once again breathing new life into the nuclear zombie. Nuclear power, they believe, is now “cool.”

The purpose of physicist M.V. Ramana’s new book is to demonstrate exactly how uncool it really is.¹

Those of us who have lived through a few “nuclear renaissances” may be tempted to think that Ramana can only be rehashing the same-old-same-old arguments we’ve heard before. We would be remiss to do so.

The case Ramana presents is as fresh and valuable as ever, because he has updated and extended the evidence and analyses of the past to fit the needs of the present moment. Anyone who encounters eager-beaver pro-nuke activists can enlighten them with the wisdom Professor Ramana has distilled into this relatively concise volume.

Historical Context of the Controversy

Nuclear energy made its first dramatic appearance on the stage of history with the Trinity atomic bomb test in July 1945. Less than a month later it was used to obliterate two Japanese cities and hundreds of thousands of their inhabitants, and it has ever since been a fearsome sword of Damocles hanging over the heads of all humanity.

President Eisenhower’s proposal of an international “Atoms for Peace” program in late 1953, however, initiated the prospect of a civilian use of atomic energy that would be enormously beneficial to humankind rather

than an existential threat.

While many people did not question the promise of nuclear power as a potential source of unlimited, clean, safe, inexpensive energy, many others were skeptical and warned that its safety was unproven and could not be merely assumed.

A public debate ensued, resulting in a grassroots antinuclear movement of massive proportions that succeeded in imposing sharp limitations on the size and spread of the nuclear power industry.²

The movement’s warnings were vindicated by a number of nuclear disasters and near-disasters, most notably the meltdown and massive escape of deadly radiation at a nuclear plant in Chernobyl, Ukraine.

Meanwhile, the privatized, heavily subsidized nuclear energy industry had built and was operating dozens of electricity-generating plants driven by nuclear reactors throughout the United States and in a number of other countries.

In the wake of a frightening meltdown at Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania (1979) and the subsequent catastrophe at Chernobyl (1986), the nuclear industry encountered massive public pushback and went into eclipse. Although never shutting down entirely, its energy-producing capacity was significantly curtailed.

Investors who had put millions of their dollars into nuclear energy were loathe to simply write off those highly profitable investments, and kept up a massive public relations and lobbying effort to convince public opinion of the safety and “cleanliness” of their product. The opposition to nuclear energy, over time, waned and the nuclear industry began to recover its lost ground.

Its comeback, however, was cut short by another massive accidental escape of radiation in 2011 at a nuclear power plant in Fukushima, Japan, and once again the international nuclear energy industry went into a tailspin. Germany closed eight of its oldest reactors and promised to phase out all of them; its last three nuclear power plants were shut down in April 2023.³ Switzerland pledged to do the same by 2034.

In the United States, the industry had already been in decline for economic reasons; the Fukushima disaster accelerated that trend. It had remained in the doldrums until recently, when the bad penny popped up

again in the form of a major PR and lobbying campaign promoting the innovative SMR technology.

The antinuclear movement has begun to shake off its complacency and push back, declaring, as Professor Ramana convincingly explains, that SMRs are nothing more than the same old nuclear technology operating on a tiny scale. They can be expected to produce more radioactive waste per megawatt hour than large reactors.

The industry's claim that SMRs will be more economically viable is especially ludicrous, because their only innovation deprives them of economies of scale.

Is Nuclear Power "Clean Energy"?

The pro-industry propaganda utilizes a familiar debater's ploy by importing the desired conclusion into the terms of the debate itself. They use the term "clean energy" as a synonym for "nuclear energy," but if nuclear energy is unambiguously "clean," then the debate is over and nuclear energy is indeed the solution to the climate crisis.

The cleanliness of nuclear energy, however, refers only to the fact that, unlike fossil fuels, it does not add greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide or methane to the Earth's atmosphere. That is a powerful argument in its favor; but unfortunately nuclear reactors introduce another highly undesirable pollutant into the environment: ionizing radiation that poses a severe threat to human and nonhuman health.

The antinuclear movement has long insisted that the radiation danger makes nuclear power the dirtiest of all energy sources. Ionizing radiation enters the food chain, exposing organisms that eat the food to increased risks of cancers and other diseases, as well as to harmful genetic mutations that are passed on from generation to generation forever.

The Nuclear Waste Crisis

The radiation danger is twofold: not only from the possibility of catastrophic releases into the atmosphere, but also from the routine day-to-day operations of nuclear plants producing nuclear waste that irradiates the soil and groundwater.⁴ As Ramana explains:

"Nuclear advocates reject concerns about radioactive waste. Bill Gates is a good example. In a February 2023 interview with CNBC, he dismissed waste as 'not a huge problem,' because it can be put into deep boreholes underground 'where it stays geologically for hundreds of millions of years' . . . But the confidence expressed by the founder of Microsoft is misplaced. We don't really know, and we cannot know, if the waste will really stay put for hundreds of millions of years." (50)

Despite the false assurances of the nuclear industry, the radioactive waste problem has long been out of control in the United States. In 1982, more than four decades ago, the *Congressional Quarterly* reported

that a solution was then already almost four decades overdue:

*"Although there had long been broad general agreement on the need for legislation to establish a comprehensive national policy for the disposal of highly radioactive nuclear waste, no such legislation had been enacted during the nearly 40 years that nuclear waste had been generated in the United States."*⁵

In 2002 the U.S. Congress finally approved a plan to build a national nuclear waste repository at Yucca Mountain, Nevada. The state of Nevada, however, objected to being the national nuclear dumping ground, so the project went into limbo. As of December 2023, the Environmental Protection Agency reports, "The future of the Yucca Mountain repository is uncertain."⁶

Ramana's assessment is more explicit: "That project is essentially dead." (98)

Meanwhile, more than 80,000 tons of spent fuel will presumably continue to be stored in pools or dry steel-and-concrete casks at a hundred or so separate sites across the country — the ones that had been running out of space in 1982, and that had never been designed for long-term storage in the first place.

Civilian and Military Nuclear Energy

Another widespread public fear is proliferation of nuclear weapons. Pro-nuke advocates have in the past downplayed that highly rational fear by minimizing the intimate links connecting the commercial nuclear industry with the military-industrial complex.

Physicist Ramana, however, reminds us of "the reality that nuclear energy cannot be separated from nuclear weapons." (195)

Making a nuclear weapon requires weapons-grade fissionable material, either enriched uranium or plutonium. The same technology that can enrich uranium can enrich it enough to make weapons, and all nuclear reactors produce plutonium. "What a country does with the plutonium is its decision," Ramana comments. (172)

He also points out an unexpected turn in the discourse on this subject:

"After decades of trying to maintain that there was a clear separation between civilian and military nuclear technologies, supporters of nuclear power have been switching the argument in the last couple of decades, especially whenever the nuclear industry is in economic distress. Then nuclear power advocates highlight the connection and make the case that a healthy nuclear power industry is essential to the production of nuclear materials for war...."

"Perhaps the greatest irony is the argument's use in the one country that has suffered from the use of nuclear weapons in war. In 2011, as the Japanese nuclear industry was reeling from the catastrophic Fukushima accident, an official from the Liberal Democratic Party, which has dominated Japanese politics for decades, argued

that Japan's capabilities in nuclear power and 'leading-edge rocket technology' make it 'possible to create nuclear weapons in the relatively short time of several months to a year.'" (188)

Artificiality of Nuclear Industry Economics

Consider this apparent paradox. On the one hand, "The nuclear industry has had decades to try and establish itself as an economical source of energy, and it has failed." (95) But then "why do corporations get involved in this enterprise at all?"

The answer is that "they do so only when the public can be made to bear a large fraction of the high costs of building nuclear plants and operating them, either in the form of higher power bills or in the form of taxes." (97–98)

That still doesn't explain how investors can expect taxes to make their investments profitable. Why should the government expend money taken in from taxation to subsidize a chronically failing industry?

Ramana explains: "Understanding the specific connections between nuclear weapons and nuclear energy is essential to comprehending why governments continue to support nuclear power, despite the myriad problems associated with the technology." (195)

The immense governmental subsidies for the U.S. nuclear power industry continue to be driven by the military's desire to disguise its secretive nuclear operations as "atoms for peace" as much as possible.

The commercial nuclear industry is motivated, like all of corporate America, by a quest for profits, but its profitability has from the beginning been entirely dependent upon massive government subsidies. This particular example of governmental largesse is rarely acknowledged in the public discourse for the same reason that military spending in general is deemed sacrosanct.

Factoring in those subsidies renders irrelevant the false claim that the new SMR technology can make the nuclear industry economically viable. (This is a key consideration in a society in which an industry must be profitable to exist. A society that prioritizes human needs over corporate profits would pay whatever costs are necessary to avoid a terminal planetary climate catastrophe.)

The civilian nuclear industry has never been financially self-sustaining and is highly unlikely to ever be. For one thing, if commercial nuclear power plants had to pay the costs of their nuclear waste storage themselves, their profitability would be an impossible dream. For another, if they had to finance their own insurance risk, they simply could not survive.

Without endlessly increasing government subsidies and legislation limiting its liability for catastrophic accidents, the industry would be

unable to function.⁷

No Technological Fix for Climate Crisis

The most general flaw in the nuclear renaissance propaganda is that it reduces a political and economic problem to an engineering problem. A solution to the global climate crisis will certainly include technology inputs, but no “technological fix” can solve the problem in the absence of fundamental societal change.

The solution requires getting rid of fossil fuels entirely, and that will not happen simply by making a technological alternative available. The oil, coal, and gas industries are trillion-dollar industries. The investors who own them will not simply walk away from trillions of dollars of their wealth.

As Professor Ramana makes clear in his book’s conclusion, the global climate crisis is systemic, by which he means it is endemic in our current social and economic systems.

“Absent fundamental changes, the impacts of the extractive processes associated with any form of electricity generation will only continue

to accelerate. Capitalism is based on continuous economic growth. For this continuous economic growth to take place, capitalism needs energy and materials to feed ever-expanding production. But material and energy use cannot keep growing continuously on a finite planet.” (242)

The solution to the climate crisis — an all-out global Manhattan Project-scale effort — is incompatible with capitalism. It would require the advent of governments that prioritize solving it above the profit interests of the corporate entities that now control them.

Notes

1. M.V. Ramana is Professor and Simons Chair in Disarmament, Global and Human Security at the School of Public Policy and Global Affairs at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada, and the author of *The Power of Promise: Examining Nuclear Energy in India*. Ramana is a member of the International Panel on Fissile Materials, the Canadian Pugwash Group, the International Nuclear Risk Assessment Group, and the team that produces the annual World Nuclear Industry Status Report. He is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship and a Leo Szilard Award from the American Physical Society.
2. The largest antinuclear demonstration in U.S. history took place on June 12, 1982 in New York City. See: <https://www.armscontrol.org/blog/2018-06-10/fight-continues-reflections-june-12-1982-rally-nuclear-disarmament>
3. Not surprisingly, nuclear power investors are already pushing for a “nuclear renaissance” in Germany. See: “Restarting Germany’s Reactors: Feasibility and Schedules.” <https://www.radiantenergygroup.com/reports/restarting-germanys-reactors-feasibility-and-schedule>
4. In addition to the radioactive waste produced by nuclear reactors is the waste produced by uranium mining. See EPA.gov, Radioactive Waste From Uranium Mining and Milling: “In the past, the waste rock produced by underground and open pit mining was piled up outside the mine. This practice has caused problems, including on Navajo lands where more than half of the small, abandoned uranium mines from the middle of the 20th century and their wastes remain. Wind can blow radioactive dust from the wastes into populated areas and the wastes can contaminate surface water used for drinking. Some sites also have considerable groundwater contamination.”
5. *Congressional Quarterly*, “Comprehensive Nuclear Waste Plan Enacted,” 1982.
6. Environmental Protection Agency, “Frequent Questions: Radioactive Waste,” [epa.gov](https://www.epa.gov/radiation/frequent-questions-radioactive-waste#yucca-mountain), last updated December 8, 2023: <https://www.epa.gov/radiation/frequent-questions-radioactive-waste#yucca-mountain>
7. See: Taxpayers for Common Sense, “Understanding Nuclear Subsidies — In Brief,” March 21, 2021; and US Nuclear Regulatory Commission, “Background on Nuclear Insurance and Disaster Relief,” last updated April 11, 2022.

Columbia Jewish Students for Mahmoud Khalil

“JEWISH STUDENTS AT Columbia University chained themselves to a campus gate across from the graduate School of International and Public Affairs Wednesday, braving rain and cold to demand the school release information related to the targeting and ICE arrest of Mahmoud Khalil, a former SIPA student.

“Democracy Now! was at the protest and spoke to Jewish and Palestinian students calling on the school to reveal the extent of its involvement in Khalil’s arrest.”

The following excerpts are from statements of students in the protest, from the rush transcript of the broadcast. The full text is at www.democracynow.org/2025/4/3.

—“Democracy Now,” April 3, 2025

PROTESTERS: Release Mahmoud Khalil now! We want justice! You say, “How?” We want justice! You say, “How?” Release Mahmoud Khalil now!

CARLY: Hi. My name is Carly. I’m a Columbia SIPA graduate student, second year. And I’m chained to this gate today as a Jewish student and friend of Mahmoud Khalil’s, demanding answers on how his name got to DHS and which trustee specifically handed over that information.

We believe that there is a high chance that our new president Claire Shipman handed over that information. And we, as Jewish students, demand transparency in that process....

(A)s Jewish students and to the Jewish people at large, being political pawns in a game is not a new occurrence, and that’s something that we very much so are here to say, “Hey, you cannot weaponize antisemitism to harm our friends and peers.”

We are now in a situation where, for many of us, our good friend is in ICE detention. And as Jewish students, we feel we need to do more.

I’m a human rights student, and (Mahmoud and I) were classmates and friends. And it’s been a deeply troubling few weeks. And, you know, everyone at SIPA, the students at SIPA, we really are just hoping for his safe return. And for me as a graduate in May, I truly hope we get to walk together at graduation.

SARAH BORUS: My name is Sarah Borus. I am a senior at Barnard College. So the government, when they abducted Mahmoud, they literally put — Donald Trump put out a post that said, “Shalom, Mahmoud.” They are saying that this is in the name of Jewish safety. But we are not the ones that are being targeted by the government. It is Muslim students, Arab students, Palestinian students, immigrant students being targeted.

I have been involved in these protests for my last two years here. The community of Jewish students that I have found is one of the most wonderful in my life. To call these protests antisemitic, honestly, degrades the Jewish religion by making it about a nation-state instead of the actual religion itself.

SHEA: My name is Shea. I’m a junior at Columbia College. I am here for the same reason.

AMY GOODMAN: *You’re wearing a keffiyeh and a yarmulke.*

SHEA: Yes. That’s standard for me.

AMY GOODMAN: *Are you willing to be expelled?*

SHEA: If the university decides that that is

what should happen to me for doing this, then that is on them. I would love to not be expelled, but I think that my peers would also have loved to not be expelled....

This is — I obviously worked very hard to get here. So did Mahmoud. So did everyone else who has been facing consequences. And, like, while I obviously would prefer to, you know, not get expelled, this is bigger than me. This is about something much more important....

MARYAM ALWAN: My name is Maryam Alwan. I’m a senior at Columbia. I’m also Palestinian, and I’m friends with Mahmoud. I’m here in solidarity with my Jewish friends, who are in solidarity with all Palestinian students and Palestinians facing genocide in Gaza.

We are all here today because we miss our friend, and it’s inconceivable to us that the board of trustees are reported to have handed his name over to the federal government, and the fact that these board of trustees have now taken over the university.

I was part of Students for Justice in Palestine when it was suspended, and we were working alongside Jewish Voice for Peace from day one.

(T)he fact that my Jewish friends are still to this day fighting, no matter what the personal cost is to them — I’ve seen the way that the university has delegitimized their Jewish identity, put them through trials, saying that they’re antisemitic, when they are proud Jews, and they’ve taught me so much about Judaism. So it just means a lot to see, like, the solidarity between us even almost two years later now. ■

REVIEW

Power in the Darkness By Owólabi Aboyade

Dark Days

By Roger Reeves
Graywolf Press, 2023, 240
pages, \$26 hardcover.

IT IS QUITE possible that between the writing of this essay and your reading it, the United States will have entered a dark age. At the least, this darkness refers to our sudden plunge into a state of not knowing what's happening, who is being harmed, and how to prepare.

This uncertainty, being kept in the dark, evokes all the fears: What are Musk and Trump doing? What are they slashing now? Who are they firing? Who are they courting or hailing? Disrespecting, eliminating or degrading?

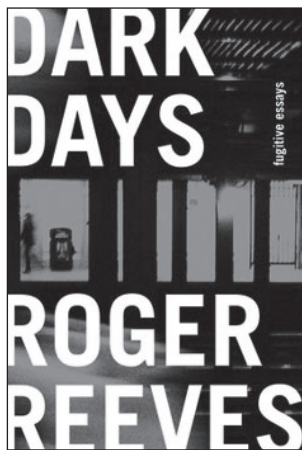
The darkness also refers to the dimming of the light of education, the capability of scientific solutions to public problems, and free discourse.

We are under no impression that the United States was a model for a commitment to educating all of its citizens. Hell, I'm from Detroit where students are too often compulsorily warehoused in public education and had to sue for the right to quality education.

I'm from Detroit where we know that mainstream media lies about Black communities stokes feelings of mistrust, and often cheerleads for the devastating gentrification of our communities.

I'm a chronically-ill writer from Detroit where we know that American health disparities have long meant that going to an emergency room or a maternal delivery unit means we and our loved ones run extra risk of not making it home. We converted an entire public island park, the "jewel of Detroit" to a monument for those who passed from the Co-Vid virus under Trump's first run as American President.

Owólabi Aboyade (William Copeland) is a cultural worker (Creative Calabash, AWE Society) and MC (Will See Music) from Detroit who served as Local Coordinator for the 2010 US Social Forum. He is a co-creator of Bullet*Train, a magazine chronicling Detroit's revolutionary culture. Owólabi was a 2021 Radical Imagination Fund fellow advancing Detroit's culture of racial justice via arts. Lee, Young Lee is his newest poetry book.



Trump didn't invent the darkness, only harnessed it. Nor did he create the Western imagination that associates darkness with ignorance, brutality and incivility.

This overwhelming public discourse, while important, cannot be the only way that we talk about this moment, the darkness of these days. That would give the impression that the significant actions to be taken are by elected officials and billionaires with titles.

Social media and journalism offer a barrage of frantic energy,

"What will the Democrats do in response?"

"We need a national leader like Kamala to say something!" "Hurry and contact your elected officials!" We have become less conversant in imagining that there can be any power in our own responses.

Dark Days is a new collection of essays by poet Roger Reeves that inspires us to feel power in another imperative: to sing and to create while surviving together "the ongoing catastrophe of trauma."

Partially written during the first Trump administration when the President was merely encouraging American militias and vigilante violence and testing the boundaries of the American political system like a stubborn teenager, this collection of "fugitive essays" connects to this imperative towards justice by drawing upon lineage as a primary orientation.

In drawing careful attention to literature, language and Black cultural work throughout the book, Reeves challenges the unspoken assumptions that the move towards "light" and visibility is the only thing called for in dangerous times.

Reeves looks to lineage to connect to the survival strategies practiced by folk who survived enslavement, citizens who snuck encouragement to each other while appearing to comply with dictatorial mandates, parents who prepare their children for life in a nation that would broadcast their killings before preventing them.

This survival work is more than just rebellion against dominant institutions (as if collective survival were ever a small accomplishment). Reeves calls for creative work based upon practices of metaphorical thinking, keen attention to social position, and collectivized

criticism or "readings." These other ways of being and communicating help create new spaces of possibility.

Moving through Dark Days

The book moves the reader poetically and stealthily through three parts. In the first, Reeves considers the transcendent, the funky joyous, the unstoppably creative in the midst of the United States' threats of violence.

"Inhabiting ecstasy in the middle and muddle of abjection is not only an aesthetic act but also a political one. Ecstasy as protest. Ecstasy as a type of protest aesthetic. Insisting upon itself in the middle of the wound, the ecstatic subverts and opposes the disciplining and oppressive act."

He connects legacies of Black writing, expression and art to the lyric poetry of T.S. Eliot and others, such as a woman defiantly singing in dictatorial Chile. Transcendent art, he offers, "promises another possibility."

A single essay "Peace Be Still" makes up the second section. Here Reeves makes personal the legacy of the hush harbors, a nature-based practice where enslaved Africans snuck away to pray by streams or under the darkness of wild groves, placing them in the context of his daughter's fear of being targeted whenever she heard police sirens.

"Where is there to go when our deaths feel so imminent, as if waiting for us in front of the case of oranges in the produce aisle at the grocery store, when they're in my daughter's every question, in her face when a siren comes blaring past the car? How did our people build peace during slavery when they were spied on and speculated flesh?"

Let's consider the irony of being forced to convert to Christianity while being forbidden to read the Bible or to pray. More than irony, consider the deception, the hypocrisy involved. If we aren't attentive, even that which is most sacred can be reduced to a system of control. We all can be commodified, posting our business with the visibility of social media, which the tech industry uses to teach advertisers how to best exploit our attention.

The need for a hush harbor continues to the present. We need a place to sneak away to escape surveillance, to unburden each other from the lies we are surrounded by, especially the lies that denigrate and disempower us.

Thus the hush harbor, this practice of stealing oneself is a type of study, a collective investigation into the situation we find ourselves up against and who we can become.

The book's final section reframes collective creative action in light of vulnerability and intimacy. Reeves cites examples of published poetry and feature films, but what makes "transcendent art" is not just its content. He uplifts creativity that can do work to intervene and interrupt entrenched patterns of thinking.

He specifically calls for "parrhesia," which is not characterized by emotional vulnerability as much as a vulnerability that comes from social risk.

These art actions are defined by how the social placement of the speaker is as much of the demonstration as the content of the utterance. He gives the examples of a slave writing a book about the brutality of the plantation while a fugitive on the run, or an undocumented immigrant giving testimony at a hostile public convening.

These acts are more than mere vulnerability. They function as an interruption to narratives of supremacy that constitute the regular functioning of a society that operates most efficiently with exploitation and exclusion. They are a voice from outside society's accepted chorus of interlocutors. Or as Deborah Cox sang, "Nobody Supposed to be Here."

In *Dark Days*, we are given encouragement to be Nobody so that we can be found No-where. This culminates in this third section by his meditation on what it means for Black folks to go underground:

"We must go underground not merely to escape our deaths (or at least delay them) but to figure out who we are, what we want, and what we mean to each other. Therein is our freedom, our liberation."

Reeves continues his practice of doubling meanings. To "go underground" is a metaphor which is more than just a means of escape; rather, it is actively creating conditions for the type of intimacy necessary to create collective meaning and plot new courses together.

To go underground means to put aside the normal patterns of public discourse and create conditions for solidarity across race, culture and nation that acknowledges how we have hurt each other and creates space for us to make room for each other in our visions.

Uplifting Lineage

Reeves uplifts lineage to challenge the mythology that the United States has ever been a democracy. He disputes the notion that our accomplishments as Black people reflect anything about the United States; we have created culture in spite of the violence of this society. He calls for us to take back our own creativity and cultural acumen:

"To give jazz, the blues, hip-hop over to America is akin to giving Frederick Douglass's master partial credit for writing Douglass's slave



Author Roger Reeves chronicles ecstasy, protest and survival. Roger Reeves

narratives and autobiographies."

In "Notes on the Underground," Reeves confesses he feels "let down" by James Baldwin's exhortation in *The Fire Next Time* that "we can make America what America must become." That's a false promise, he asserts. We should know our own history enough not to be foolishly optimistic about this place.

This country already used us for labor, for profits. To Reeves, Baldwin's line of thinking continues that annihilation, this time voluntarily tossing our lives into the maw of the country for its improvement, not necessarily our own.

Reeves writes and creates with awareness of lineage, "...as a native son and a great-grandnephew of Baldwin, Wright, Malcolm X, and Georgia Gilmore, Fannie Lou Hamer, Ella Baker, and Queen Mother Moore...." and also as a parent who actively points out to his daughter that the stories told in her social studies class about civics, and cops, and checks and balances are falsehoods.

He takes her to protests when Black people are (too often) killed by police. He participates in lineage, not just by what he has inherited but also by what he leaves for future generations to survive, navigate, and imagine new paths forward.

Reeves also claims kinship with OutKast and Sun Ra. He claims lineage too with the men in the barbershop, his grandmother, the Black professors whose houses she cleaned and her lineage of mothers who snuck away to make their own root medicines, and with the working-class saints of the Full Gospel Church of God "where the Blackest among us want to be washed whiter than snow."

I remember some of what I learned from my mother and my grandfather. My mother was a school social worker here in Detroit. I remember her as being tall, slim, dark and elegant. Her father painted buildings; during the week he painted Veteran's Hospital, and on weekends he painted the homes of friends and neighbors for his family's side hustle.

In her job, my mother worked to find resources for children of overworked parents, children who were snatched in and out of state systems, children who were dismissed or given up on, children who were taken in by extended family after chronically painful moments.

With a twinkle in his eye, my grandfather brought up from the basement books on Black history by Carter G Woodson, J.A. Rogers, Chancellor Williams, and many others.

They invited us to seek out American stories that told the brutal truth of how this country did its damndest to use us until our bodies were spent, African stories where we could feel togetherness, dignity before and beyond compulsion and whatever scraps of citizenship were tossed our way.

After I was hospitalized with kidney failure in middle school, my mother would help me carry up boxes of dialysis solution from the basement, our arms full, our legs slowly pumping up two flights of stairs.

We would mask up together, in shared sterile procedures to connect me for nightly treatments. What saved my life, what became known to me as care: both stories and collaborative action.

In the lineage Reeves draws upon, our first responsibility is not to the structures of government, nor the institution of this society. It is to help our people survive the country itself, and now the tearing down of that country, the disruption of expectations in this country, the transformation of this country.

Communal Wisdom

Activists may criticize this book for centering art, and not promoting "strategies" on how to fight the right wing. This criticism misses the point and misunderstands Black History, which unfortunately is too common in Western leftist organizing. In *Dark Days*, Reeves draws from a deep pool of Communitarian wisdom, ancestral if you listen for it.

In *An Anthropology of Marxism*, Cedric Robinson proposes that socialism did not begin with Karl Marx (and will continue beyond Marxism). The book argues that the socialist ideal was embedded both in Western and non-Western civilizations and cultures long before the onset of the modern era and did not begin in response to the existence of capitalism.

Robinson notes the idea of socialism, the socializing of resources which challenges the accumulation of wealth can be found in the West as early as the 13th century. These visions, the resulting organizing, and their rebellions have diverse roots in the "politically secular, the mystical, and the heretical."

Socialism is often interpreted today in ways that prioritize the de-spirited ideal of science. This dominant rationality has the unfortunate effect of removing much of the

funk — the same style and grime that Reeves beautifully observes has always made up our collective navigation, survival, meaning making — from how our collective future is imagined and discussed by today's radicals.

Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* points towards a diversity of political states that made up the African continent. Some had elements of hierarchical structures and misunderstood the ways of the colonizers as being compatible with their values, playing roles as slavers and henchmen until it was too late and they were betrayed.

When we were brought to this "New World" many of us brought communal wisdom, practices that well preceded the encounter and were formed not only in response to exploitation or brutality.

When Reeves reflects on our lineages and how we survived and built community that encouraged each other during the dark days of our enslavement, he is pushing our understanding of ourselves beyond society's victims or even people in mere rebellion:

"In other words, to think of the Black, brown, or disabled body not simply as a body only in pain but also as one complicating and contesting pain and subjection."

We see ourselves as sophisticated architects of social technologies that develop "person centered care" or "sense of belonging" for the "underappreciated" or those at "most risk" and allow us to create our own objectives under conditions of unimaginable stress.

We are syncretic people; this too is our lineage; we use the scraps we were given, including even the "social justice language" we see in the media and what, until recently, were well-funded organizations, and cook up soulful dishes, food for the soul, music to the ear, power to the people. (These phrases in quotes are also on the list of words being removed from organizations receiving federal funding.)

Conclusions

In *Dark Days*, Roger Reeves invites us to sing "into the Silence of the State." This is silence ongoing, connecting the violence of the families that view us as property and their enslaving state to the brutality of the police license to kill human beings with our darkesses, our culture. The silence is also

an inability or a refusal to hear the screaming and recognize it as language.

The silence belongs to the state, to the constructs of race, belonging, amnesia, and citizenship that the United States has been built upon. It is forced upon us by those who can't hear us unless they are tokenizing or commodifying us or our creative projects.

"What is the song that can be sung to soothe a fretting child in a bomb shelter? What is the song sung to disrupt a State-imposed curfew? What is the necessity of singing during a catastrophe, whether State-created or virus-induced?..."

"What is the poem, the singing that can console and be with us while a city burns, and the people die in the burning, die on gurneys in the hallways of the hospital, die and disappear because our politicians are too in love with their mouths, which they mistake for beauty?"

When we sing into that silence, we show ourselves and our loved ones, those who walk with us or live beside us, that the silence isn't everything. Nor is it all-powerful, even if it comes from a system that legislates obedience.

It's important for Roger Reeves and for the denizens of the underground that this breaking up and breaking through takes the shape of a song. Or a poem, or a chant. Not because these can be published and packaged as art, no. Rather because they are invitations to beauty in the midst of forceful ugly.

I recently spoke at a Detroit commemoration of Red Books Day, a celebration of socialist literature. The speakers talked about how they took inspiration from reading personal narratives from Cuba, China, the U.S. prison system and other working-class struggles.

Detroiters for Tax Justice wished us all a Happy Black History Month and then warned the gathering audience about how the current United States regime is making international connections that also embolden white supremacist and far-right parties across Europe and India. They salute each other, speak in codes and whistles, and talk about what turning back the clock means to them.

When it was my turn to grab the mic, I read the above quote from Reeves which asks what song, what lyric, what creativity we need for "Dark Days" and invited the assembled to consider how in our Black traditions,

the working class is the most aesthetic, the most slangful, the creators of cultural resonance. So if our group has a vision of working-class victory, then we shouldn't speak only in the formal tones of the upper crust and the merely academically educated.

My Granny told us not to be "educated fools." It would be foolish to abandon lineage and all the survival (and yes the pain) that comes with it.

In writing a book of essays, Roger Reeves is sharing his reflections on the ethics and the aesthetics of survival that nourished us when we were unpaid labor, when we were segregated citizen, when we were acceptably targeted for official violence and neglect.

Yes, these fugitive technologies come from Black cultures. Reeves also shows their resonance with other creative people trying to make their way through domination. As these patterns of exploitation, systemic neglect and brutality continue, these lineages of creativity continue to generate power.

In *Dark Days*, to go underground is an act of refusal, primarily to refuse to be defeated — to refuse to concede that the power brokers and power-hungry play all the cards.

This book is not an official document, not the language of officials, and you won't find here policies that will restore the American Constitution, reconnect the United States with its traditional allies, or renew American institutions of science, environment or education.

For some, "dark days" is a negative, folks think that darkness is bad to be avoided like "a blacklist" or the "black market." We are the people who are dark as the blues. Perhaps we will survive to find the darkness of our days to come is also what we'll see when we submerge ourselves underground and sing together.

Then we might just wield a cultural force based not only on opposing the decision-making power of people who want to see our faces in the mud, whether bowing down or dying, but we'll bring together the raw materials of what we've learned and who we've become as survivors and strategists.

We will feel "not just dirt — but the grime, funk, and get-down of it. The mischievous, rebellious, opaque, smart, signifying dirt of us, our rebellious bodies and mouths and language at the end of it." ■



REVIEW

Racial Capitalism Dissected By James Kilgore

Against Racial Capitalism:

Selected Writings of Neville Alexander

Edited by Salim Vally and Enver Motala

Pluto Press, London 2023, 320 pages. \$31.95 paperback.

IN 1991 I moved from Harare, Zimbabwe to Johannesburg, South Africa. The move was occasioned by a job offer from Khanya College, which operated under the slogan "Education for Liberation."

Like many radical educational initiatives of the day, Khanya was a brainchild of legendary socialist and former political prisoner Neville Alexander. Though the details of my experience are for another day, suffice to say that my time at Khanya transformed my understanding of socialism and popular education for life.

Though I only occasionally encountered Neville during my time at Khanya, his influence and imagination were everywhere. This self-described "non-dogmatic Marxist, Pan Africanist, and internationalist" has a considerable profile in South Africa, especially within the Left, but he deserves far greater international recognition as a revolutionary actor and thinker.

This volume will help widen his reputation. *Against Racial Capitalism* is a collection of his writings, edited by two of Alexander's close South African comrades, Salim Vally and Enver Motala. It offers both a biographical sketch of his remarkable life and a wonderfully representative collection of his work.

The writings cover not only his theoretical interventions on racial capitalism, the language issue in South Africa and his critical analysis of the African National Congress (ANC) strategy of two-stage revolution. The volume also includes his op-eds as well as texts of his public talks and essays.

James Kilgore is an activist and writer based in Urbana, Illinois. He lived in South Africa from 1991-2002 where he was a lecturer and Director at Khanya College, an institution founded by Neville Alexander. He currently serves as Director of Advocacy and Outreach for FirstFollowers Reentry Program in Champaign, Illinois and as a Building Community Power Fellow for Community Justice Exchange. He is the author of six books, including Freedom Never Rests, a novel about post-apartheid South Africa and Understanding Mass Incarceration which drew on his experience of six years of incarceration in the United States.

A Life for Liberation

Neville Alexander was born in Cradock in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa in 1936, the eldest of six children. Riding

the waves of his brilliance and the support of anti-apartheid educators among the "coloured" (mixed race in apartheid jargon) population of the Cape, Neville carved out a path to success like few black students of the day.

He graduated from the University of Cape Town at age 19 in 1955, then won a fellowship to study in Germany at the University of Tübingen, where he completed a Ph.D. on German drama in 1957.

Upon his return to South Africa, Neville became an active member of the Non-European Unity Movement of South Africa, a socialist formation founded in 1943 that offered a left critique of and organizational alternative to the Soviet-aligned South African Communist Party and the ANC.

At the time when Nelson Mandela was joining with the ANC's armed forces of *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, Alexander was moving down a parallel path among a subset of Unity Movement cadre under the name the *Yu Chi Chan* (guerrilla warfare) Club.

Like Mandela, Alexander's foray into guerrilla warfare didn't last long. He ended up serving 10 years on Robben Island. During his years on "The Island," among many activities, Alexander worked closely with Mandela and other ANC-aligned prisoners to form the Society for the Rewriting of South African history. They offered classes to other prisoners and even to some of the guards. Alexander's specialty was history, whereas Mandela taught the law.

Upon his release from prison in 1974, Alexander was placed on house arrest for five years. Despite his restrictions, he remained politically active. When the Soweto uprising took place in 1976 under the leadership of Steven Biko's Black Consciousness Movement, Alexander saw an opportunity to forge a revolutionary left outside the Stalinist tradition of the ANC and the SACP. However, before such a unity could come to fruition, the South Africa Police murdered Biko.

Critique of ANC Politics

Once he completed his house arrest, Alexander delved into a range of political,

educational and academic ventures. Nineteen seventy-nine saw the publication of *One Azania, One Nation*, which Alexander penned under the pseudonym *No Sizwe*.

The book was a harsh critique of the ANC in which he refuted the "propagation and proliferation of bogus nationalisms, the main purpose of which is to dissipate the force of the class struggle by deflecting it into channels that will nurture the dominant classes." For Alexander, these "bogus" categories were apartheid-inspired distractions. For him, a liberated South Africa would unite the entire population under the name Azania. By contrast, the ANC's analysis posited that the dissolution of apartheid would be a two-stage process in which a bourgeois revolution would bring in a democratically elected parliament, much like European nations, to be followed by a working-class-led state.

This was anathema to Alexander, and his critique of the two-stage schema of revolution would remain a point of ideological tension between Alexander and his followers and the ANC-led government until his death in 2012.

Apart from debating the national question, Alexander directed his political energy into two major organizing projects — the construction of the National Forum (NF) in 1983 and the building of the Workers Organization of South Africa (WOSA) in 1990.

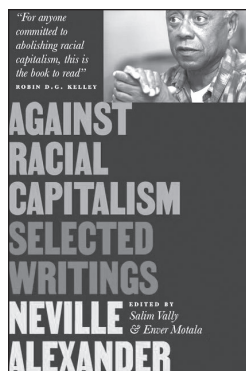
The NF brought together over 200 liberation forces across the nation. The NF was the socialist left reply to the ANC-led United Democratic Front, which was founded in 1983 with more than 400 members.

Similarly, WOSA ran candidates in the country's first democratic election under the Worker's List Party in 1994 but pulled a mere 4000 votes and ended up with no members in parliament.

Education for Freedom

Apart from his political organizing, Alexander was a dedicated educationist. In 1979, he joined with several radical education activists to form the South African Council on Higher Education (SACHED), a multi-pronged nonprofit that offered a host of programs and courses that opened the doors of higher education to black students previously excluded due to apartheid restrictions.

SACHED followed a Freirean methodology in their programs and adopted Education for Liberation as their slogan. SACHED's projects included community learning centers



and academic initiatives like Khanya College, a bridging program to facilitate Black student entry into historically white universities.

In the field of education, Alexander will most likely be remembered for his contributions to politics and pedagogy of language. In a country with 11 official languages, Alexander viewed the continuation of language and ethnically based schools as a perpetuation of apartheid dynamics even under a democratically elected government. He constantly agitated for reshaping language policy under the umbrella of a national consciousness, rather than the racialized and ethnicized approach of apartheid education or the moderate reforms introduced by the ANC when it came to power in 1994.

But Alexander's theoretical interventions went far beyond language. As the editors point out, Alexander constantly emphasized how nationhood "might be constructed against the long history of racist division and the entrenchment of its forms of consciousness."

For Alexander this construction did not

imply a negation of the existence of other forms of oppression. He constantly emphasized the "indivisibility of the multifaceted nature of oppressive and exploitative regimes."

He never adopted the notion of non-racialism which was the hallmark of the ANC critique of apartheid, nor did he concur with their acceptance of granting political power to "traditional" leaders such as Zulu Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi.

Rather, Alexander, along with other groups that aligned with the Black Consciousness and/or Trotskyist positions, held that "we are of the view that we should operate as one united whole toward the attainment of an egalitarian society for the whole of Azania. Therefore, entrenchment of tribalistic, racialistic, or any form of sectional outlook is abhorred by us. We hate it and we seek to destroy it."

Committed Internationalist

Finally it is important to note that Alexander, as an internationalist, applied radical concepts from the global socialist context to the

South Africa reality. Alexander was a major elaborator of the notion of *racial capitalism* long before the concept gained widespread acceptance in South African circles.

Similarly, he built on the Unity Movement's long-standing critique of race as a biological category to deconstruct the non-racialism of the ANC and advance the importance of an anti-racist stance.

As a socialist and a public intellectual, Alexander's paradigm of liberation extended to aggressive opposition to neoliberalism, both in South Africa's 1996 shift to the free market economic framework known as GEAR (Growth, Employment and Redistribution) and the ANC government's moves toward globalization and structural adjustment driven by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

This volume does a wonderful job of capturing the breadth and depth of Alexander's work and vision, one that should find a place in the archive of all those attempting to imagine and fight for socialist and abolitionist futures. ■

Guatemala Human Rights Update

[The following excerpts are taken from an April 11, 2025 "Update on Recent Developments in Guatemala issued by the Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA (ghrc-usa@ghrc-usa.org). Politics in Guatemala are sharply divided between president Bernardo Arévalo and institutions supporting the former rightwing administration —ed.]

GUATEMALA IS SUBJECT, like the majority of its neighbors in the region, to the new U.S. tariff plan imposed by President Trump on April 5th. Under the plan, Guatemalan products entering the United States will be hit with a ten percent tariff. According to Guatemalan analysts, the new tariffs will hit three sectors especially hard: textiles, bananas and coffee.

Guatemalan business leaders have asked Guatemalan President Bernardo Arévalo to "urgently obtain the exclusion of Guatemala from the plan of ten percent universal tariffs." The tariffs put additional pressure on the Arévalo administration, which has tried to maintain favor with Guatemala's business sector while at the same time attempting to address inequality and corruption.

UN Human Rights Report

The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in its latest report on the human rights situation in Guatemala emphasizes persistent challenges in access to justice and the erosion of judicial independence. Key concerns include persistent barriers to justice, threats to judicial independence, and ongoing harassment of human rights defenders.

Despite efforts to strengthen institu-

tions, many defenders face criminalization and are often denied access to their case files. At least 63 justice officials have been forced into exile, and politically motivated prosecutions continue, particularly against anti-corruption figures.

The report also points to setbacks in transitional justice, with delays, annulments, and acquittals in high-profile cases related to the armed conflict. The closure of the National Reparations Program left over 28,000 claims unresolved. Indigenous communities remain excluded from land rights discussions, despite a 2024 agreement to address land conflicts. The OHCHR documented multiple forced evictions, including instances of sexual violence against Indigenous women, affecting over 500 families.

Struggle for Democracy

Judicial persecution of the Semilla party has intensified. On February 27, Salvador Noé Batz Chuc, Secretary of Finance and Transparency for the Semilla Party, was arrested over alleged irregularities in the party's formation. Since its unexpected success in the 2023 elections, the Semilla party (known in Spanish as the *Movimiento Semilla*), led by President Arévalo, has been consistently under attack.

The Attorney General's Office has initiated at least 17 investigations against high-level government officials, and at least six times asked the Supreme Court to strip President Arévalo of his immunity so that he can be criminally investigated. Concerns have arisen over the political nature of these legal actions, with fears that party members are being coerced into guilty pleas.

In March, renowned journalist José Rubén Zamora, who had been granted house arrest, was once again imprisoned. An appeals court overturned his house arrest order on March 4, and Zamora was arrested and returned to jail on March 10. His legal team has appealed the decision before Guatemala's Supreme Court.

The judicial persecution of Zamora has drawn widespread outcry from both national and international observers, who argue that Zamora's prosecution represents a broader attack on press freedom in Guatemala. On March 26, international organizations submitted an *amicus curiae* to the Supreme Court in his defense, while U.S. Congresswoman Norma Torres in a tweet urged the court to grant the appeal in his case and denounced his detention as a violation of fundamental rights.

In recent months, a campaign of criminalization and disinformation targeting the Guatemalan media outlets *Prensa Comunitaria* and *Ruda* has been unleashed. The media outlets are facing unfounded lawsuits and intimidation and threats of additional spurious allegations against them.

A cyber attack campaign involving net-centers and accounts connected to groups within the Public Ministry has been accessing reporters' private information, such as photos, and then posting this information on social media sites, together with threats. Journalist Nelson Rivera, of *Prensa Comunitaria*, has been particularly targeted. The criminalization stems from *Prensa Comunitaria* and *Ruda*'s role in exposing high-level corruption and human rights violations. ■

REVIEW

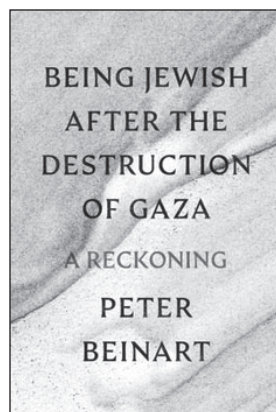
After Gaza:

An Important Critique of Zionism

By Samuel Farber

Being Jewish After the Destruction of Gaza. A Reckoning.

By Peter Beinart
New York: Alfred A. Knopf,
2025, 172 pages,
\$26 hardcover.



PETER BEINART HAS a highly varied history. More than 20 years ago, he worked for a decade for the conservative-leaning liberal weekly *The New Republic* where he became its principal editor from 1999 to 2006. He has moved a great deal to the left since those days and is currently one of the editors of *Jewish Currents*, a Jewish socialist and anti-Zionist publication.

During the last years, he has also become one of the better-known American Jewish critics of the state of Israel and of the American Jewish community's organizational Establishment. While doing so, he often draws on Jewish religious sources and traditions, especially in his attacks on what he calls the "state idolatry" of Israel that prevails among Jews in Israel and abroad.

Despite its ambitious coverage, this book is short — comprising only 125 pages of text accompanied by 45 pages of notes, confirming it as a thoroughly researched project — beefing up its arguments with numerous contemporary as well as historical references. The book is well balanced in the specific sense that it systematically tries to debate and refute contrary arguments and evidence other than its own.

Its comprehensive treatment includes important historical materials on the very oppressive practices endured by Palestinians in what was then the new state of Israel of the late 1940s and early '50s. These practices were covered up by the lies and distortions of Israeli leaders, among them the untruthful

assertions making it appear that Palestinians had left the country of their own accord following the instructions of the Arab leaders.

In fact, most of these Palestinians were expelled by the Haganah (the principal and "official" Zionist army). As Beinart tells us, during Israel's war of independence the Zionist armed forces emptied approximately 400 villages, many of which were looted, and most destroyed. (23)

Similarly, Beinart exposes and denounces in detail the system of Apartheid that has been implemented in the West Bank after it was taken over (together with Gaza and the areas in and around Jerusalem) by Israel after the 1967 war. (24-31)

A Turning Point

But it's the massive destruction and genocide by the Israeli state that, as the book's title suggests, is one of the central foci of the book.

"The story Jews tell ourselves to block out the screams," Beinart writes, "enables our leaders, our families, and our friends to watch the destruction of the Gaza Strip — the flattening of universities, the people forced to make bread from hay, the children freezing to death under buildings turned to rubble by a state that speaks in our name — and shrug, if not applaud." (9)

Beinart is indignant as he describes Israel's destruction and damage of most of Gaza's hospitals with, among other disastrous effects, the inability to effectively identify and report the number of dead in their morgues.

By the end of April 2024, the Gaza Health Ministry concluded that almost 35,000 Palestinians had been killed. Beinart also notes that even the Israeli army considered the Health Ministry's total casualty numbers so reliable that it frequently cited them in its internal briefings.

Moreover, scholars from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine who analyzed the Gaza's Health Ministry's reports determined that 68% of those killed in the war were women, children and the elderly.

Subsequent analysis by Michael Spagat, a British economist who specializes in measuring war deaths, claimed that the proportion of women, children and the elderly constituted around 60% of the deaths. While this was

somewhat lower than the number claimed by the Gazan authorities, Spagat still found the data coming out of Gaza far more dependable than Israel's. (59-60)

Of course, we must add to the number of Palestinian casualties and deaths, the massive destruction of housing, and widespread homelessness created by it. Thousands of Gazans have been forced into a desperate search for shelter, food and medical care among other vital needs such as schooling and education.

"My hope is that we will one day see Gaza's obliteration as a turning point in Jewish history," Beinart writes. Alongside the long accounts of Jewish persecution and disasters, "We must now tell a new story to answer the horror that a Jewish country has perpetrated, with the support of many Jews around the world..."

"We are not hardwired to forever endure evil but never commit it. That false innocence, which pervades contemporary Jewish life, camouflages domination as self-defense." (10)

"Ways of Not Seeing"

This is the title of Chapter 3, with the author's focus concerning the reactions of the Jewish communities, both in Israel and in the United States, to the war in Gaza. This is an analysis of what could be called an indifference and callousness that paradoxically claims to be virtuous.

As Beinart sees it, the spirit animating these reactions is based on a redefinition of Judaism as a purely tribal creed, with the unmistakable message that the lives of Israelis matter in a way that the Palestinian lives do not.

Any lame excuse will do in applying this ideology in practice to Israel's invasion of Gaza. Thus, for example, AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the central pro-Israel lobbying organization) refused to attribute any responsibility to Israel for Palestinian casualties and deaths, on the spurious grounds that Hamas used the Palestinians as "human shields."

As Beinart explains, under international law using civilians as human shields means forcing them to live alongside military targets. It does not mean fighting in areas with civilians around, as Hamas does. "No guerrilla force puts on brightly colored uniforms, walks into an open field, and takes on a vastly more powerful conventional army." (61)

Samuel Farber was born and raised in Cuba and has written extensively about that country as well as the Russian Revolution and U.S. politics. He is an Emeritus Professor of Political Science at CUNY (City University of New York) and resides in that city. He is also a member of Jewish Voice for Peace. His article "Zionism: A Sui Generis Settler Colonialism" appears in the Winter 2025 issue of New Politics (www.newpol.org).

These apologetics by AIPAC, ADL (Anti-Defamation League) and their allies cover up the reality that in the first days of fighting alone, Israel bombed more than a thousand “power targets” including high-rise apartment buildings, banks, universities and government offices, which “it struck not because of their military value but merely for psychological effect” (62) — which should be understood in plain English as meaning intimidation and terror.

There are similarities between the nationalist attitudes of a majority of Israeli and American Jews and those of other right-wing nationalists, particularly those that are supported and upheld by formerly oppressed peoples.

In the case of Poland, for example, in January 2018 the right-wing Law and Justice Party then ruling the country approved a law criminalizing any mention of Poles being complicit in the crimes committed by the German Third Reich. Since Poles suffered a great deal under Nazi rule, no question or doubt should appear to place into question their honor and virtue.

This view in turn is related to the nationalist competitive computations (sometimes called “victimhood Olympics”), where more suffering confers rights with a superior moral value to that of other oppressed groups that may have suffered less. Thus, the degree of suffering, rather than the intrinsic political, social and economic merits of the cause of an oppressed group, seems to be decisive.

No wonder then that people like Elie Wiesel want to take Jews out of the competition, by asserting a sort of monopoly power on victimization. That meant that the Jewish Holocaust (in its infinite record of martyrdom) could not be subjected to historical analysis and compared to similar experiences suffered by other peoples.

As political scientist Corey Robin put it, “more than anyone, Wiesel helped sacralize the Holocaust, making it a kind of theological event that stood outside history. ‘The ultimate event, the ultimate history, never to be comprehended or transmitted,’ was how he once put it.” (*Jacobin*, July 6, 2016)

Compare Wiesel’s approach to that of Primo Levi, an Italian Jewish concentration camp victim who took exactly the opposite approach of Wiesel, refusing to reify and deify the Holocaust or romanticize its victims, while adopting a much more critically objective and humanist position toward the incredible human disaster which he and millions of others had experienced.

For the great majority of Israeli Jews and a very large proportion of U.S. Jews, Israelis can do no wrong. The actions of the Israeli Army are thus to be judged by a criterion that is not subject to factual verification — whether by independent human rights organizations, journalists, international humanitarian

organizations such as the International Red Cross, or anybody else.

The doctrine of “purity of arms” that supposedly guides the behavior of all members of the Israeli Defense Force is uncritically assumed to describe reality, particularly in regard to the principal definition of the doctrine:

“The IDF servicemen and women will use their weapons and force only for the purposes of the mission, only to the necessary extent and will maintain their humanity even during combat. IDF soldiers will not use their weapons and force to harm human beings who are not combatants or are prisoners of war and will do all in their power to avoid causing harm to their lives, bodies, dignity and property.”

Tell that to the Palestinians who were injured, or to the relatives of those who were killed because of the above mentioned “power targets” bombed by Israel for “psychological effects.”

As Beinart points out, for the American Jewish Establishment “Israel is the perpetual target of aggression, never its author.” (19) Moreover, Jews in Israel and abroad “have built our identity around this story of collective victimhood and moral infallibility.” (107)

In his Prologue, Beinart anticipates and rejects an assumption that “exempts Jews from external judgments. It offers infinite license to fallible human beings.” (10)



Peter Beinart, editor of *Jewish Currents*, has emerged as a powerful critic of the practice and ideology of the Israeli state and government.

About Hamas and October 7, 2023

Beinart has explained that he consciously chose as the book’s title not “Being Jewish After October 7,” but *Being Jewish After the Destruction of Gaza*.

Beinart takes up the Hamas attack on southern Israel on October 7, 2023 that provided the excuse and opportunity for the Israeli government to unleash its highly disproportionate, massive and totally destructive response (“To Whom Evil is Done,” 33-54) He fully recognizes the difference between the oppressor Israeli nation and the two million Palestinians living in an enclave that Israel has for many years subjected to intolerable living conditions.

As I pointed out in an earlier essay I wrote for this journal in its May-June 2024 issue, before the outbreak of the recent hostilities, Israel totally controlled the entry and departure from the Gaza zone, aided by the Egyptian authorities that enforce the border controls in the south of Gaza.

Fishing, traditionally an important activity for the people living in the area, has been re-

duced by order of the Israeli government, to a maximum of 10 kilometers from the coast. Gaza is not allowed to have a port or an airport, and neither does the Israeli government allow the import of many machines and materials that they claim could be potentially used for military purposes.

Long before October 7, Israeli border controls were also damaging to the few thousands of workers who were allowed to participate in the Israeli labor markets. Gazans needing to go to Israel or anywhere else for medical attention faced many difficulties crossing the border. Importing food into Gaza was already reduced to a minimum necessary for the inhabitants’ survival.

As seen since the beginning of hostilities, Israel can deprive Gaza of water, electricity, and access to cell phones and the Internet. In other words, Gaza

became a virtual open-air prison for its Palestinian inhabitants.

And as Beinart pointed out in connection with the Palestinian resistance, “violent dispossession and violent resistance are intertwined.” (40)

For reasons such as these, Beinart rejects the analogy that compares the Hamas attack to an anti-Jewish pogrom (in Tsarist Russia), let alone to the Holocaust — considering as a minimum that in those historical instances Jews were powerless victims, a situation radically different from the enormous and oppressive power in the hands of the Israeli state on October 7.

Beinart goes on to suggest that October 7 had more in common with tragic explosions of rage such as “the murder, torture and rape of thousands of Europeans in newly independent Haiti in 1804, or the Fort Mims massacre of white settlers by Creek Indians in what is now Alabama in 1813.” (39)

Although insightful, I believe Beinart’s analogy is flawed in one important respect. The examples mentioned above mainly refer to elemental and largely spontaneous explosions of very justified popular anger.

The October 7 attacks on a large number of unarmed Israeli civilians, hundreds of whom were spectators at a large rock concert, were shot at in nearby highways or at a kibbutz, were carried out by Hamas, a well-organized, politicized and disciplined group with a well-defined political and religious ideology and practices (including a record of repression of Palestinians dissidents under its jurisdiction).

Beinart cites the example of South Africa, where the armed violent attacks by the African National Congress (ANC) in Apartheid South Africa “were largely restricted to

military and industrial sites.” (52-53)

It is worth emphasizing here that the explicit objective of the *Umkhonto we Ziswe* (MK), the armed wing of the ANC, was not to target civilians or white people as such. Nevertheless, most of the casualties of armed South African black rebels were in fact civilians. Although some of these civilians were regarded by the ANC as legitimate targets, others were unintended victims such as passersby when bombs were detonated outside buildings housing security forces. (The O'Malley Archives, March 3, 2003.)

Again, creating terror among white South Africans as such was not the *aim* of these violent actions. This should not be surprising considering the clear (and radical) multiracial program, which explicitly included whites, adopted by the ANC as its Freedom Charter in June 1955.

Many details about October 7 remain unclear, but terrorizing Israeli civilians was undeniably part of Hamas' objectives, although not the only one. It is clear that Hamas has to assume responsibility for the deeds committed by people under its command.

Accusations of Antisemitism to Avoid Criticisms

As Beinart puts it so clearly, Israel's defenders often “deploy charges of antisemitism to try to silence criticism of a war whose morality they can't defend.” (77) At least until the foundation of the Israeli state in 1948 and even until the so-called Six Day War in 1967, Zionism was generally seen in the Jewish community as a political position among several competing for Jewish support.

This dramatically changed immediately after the war of 1967, with Israel monopolizing Jewish American support. Moreover, the aftermath of that war coincided in the American late 1960s with the rise of Black Power and other developments such as the 1968 teacher's strike in New York that pitted the Black community against what was then a union with a predominant Jewish membership and leadership.

From then on, it could no longer be assumed that there existed a long-time friendly relationship between the Jewish and Black communities. Changes in the policies of Jewish organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League were representative of the new trend according to which the political left was no longer seen as a natural ally of the Jewish community, but in the eyes of the ADL equally likely as the right to hold “antisemitic” views.

Today, the ADL sees criticisms and attacks on the Israeli government's policies regarding Palestinians as clear evidence of antisemitism. Thus, Jonathan Greenblatt, the CEO and principal spokesperson for that organization, openly claimed in November of 2023 that “Zionism support is fundamental to Judaism.” (86)

For Beinart, this amalgam of politics and religious identity represents a move to worship of a state — indeed, worship of the power of a state — that constitutes idolatry. In this regard he echoes the warning of the Israeli religious scholar Yeshayahu Leibowitz, who way back in 1967 argued that attributing qualities of “holiness” to the land and the state would pave the road to what he openly called “Judeo-nazism.”

“There are similarities between the nationalist attitudes of a majority of Israeli and American Jews and those of other rightwing nationalists, particularly those that are supported and upheld by formerly oppressed peoples.”

For its part, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), an intergovernmental organization, is only slightly more nuanced than the ADL. While claiming that criticism of Israel that is no different from what would be applied to any other country or government is by itself not antisemitic, it insists that claiming the State of Israel to be a racist endeavor, is to deny the Jewish people their right to self-determination, and therefore an antisemitic act.

But what about Palestinians, and supporters of their right to self-determination, who see the Nakba (catastrophe) initiated by the establishment of Israel as placing into doubt the legitimacy of that state. Whether right or wrong, are they therefore racists or antisemites?

Beinart cites the research of political scientists Eitan Hersh and Laura Royden about the extent of antisemitism in the United States, who found that “the vast majority of progressives distinguish their feelings about Israel from their feelings about American Jews.” Even when made aware that most American Jews have favorable views regarding Israel, “respondents on the left rarely supported statements such as that Jews have too much power or should be boycotted.” (82)

What often happens on the sites of protests, most visibly at elite universities such as Columbia, UCLA and NYU among others, is that most of its young suburban Jewish students, including the liberals among them, very possibly grew up attending synagogues (including events such as weddings and Bar Mitzvahs) and other Jewish community institutions with some frequency.

In such spaces they were very unlikely to have heard criticisms of Israeli policy, much less outright opposition to the very existence of a Jewish-supremacist state. For them, support for Israel, even if not necessarily intense and infrequently ideologically and politically developed, came to constitute Jewish com-

mon sense.

Suddenly these young people are confronted by very intense, eloquent and more politically developed students (sometimes Jewish themselves) who are very critical if not hostile to Israel and Zionism not only at rallies but also in campus classrooms, cafeterias and even recreation areas.

Of course they feel threatened, not by a threat of physical violence but from the growing insecurity produced by their uncertainties and often by their superficial acquaintance with the specific issues at hand.

They also feel great frustration that while they in fact know a certain amount about Israelis, and to a much lesser extent about Palestinians, they cannot come up with an adequate reaction much less an intellectually cogent response. But as Beinart notes, it is important for them to “distinguish between being made *uncomfortable* and being made *unsafe*.” (93, emphases added))

While in fact some antisemites may and do show at anti-Israeli demonstrations and rallies, they are far more likely than not to be marginal and unrelated to the protests. The protesters themselves may lack understanding of the roots of the immense tragedy that took place particularly in the late forties and early fifties, as one group of recently highly oppressed people ended up systematically oppressing another group: namely the Palestinian people — a phenomenon that unfortunately has been and can be reproduced elsewhere.

Because of the then recent Holocaust, the foundation of the state of Israel received a great deal of support from world public opinion, including large sections of the international left. This even helps to explain the relative scarcity of left criticism of Israel in the United States even at the time of the 1967 War 30 years later, except for dissident figures such as I.F. Stone and Noam Chomsky.

The growing divorce between the U.S. left and the mainstream Jewish community during the following half century tended, for understandable reasons, to impoverish the U.S. left's understanding — which of course does not at all entail approval — of the Jewish community's support for Israel.

The situation of Palestinians and other Arab and Muslim peoples in the United States is different and indeed far more complicated than that of the mainly white Jewish and other actual or potential supporters of the Palestinian cause.

Be that as it may, Beinart maintains a sense of proportion, sympathy and support for the tens of thousands of Palestinian victims of the Israeli invasion of Gaza. He is entirely right when he asserts that it is “hard to ask Palestinians to care about the feelings of pro-Israel students while Israel slaughters and starves their families.” (92) ■

REVIEW

What's Possible for the Left? By Martin Oppenheimer

Everything Is Possible

Antifascism and the Left
in the Age of Fascism

By Joseph Fronczak

Yale University Press, 2023, 249 pages +
notes and index, \$35 hardcover.

EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE is a fascinating, thought-provoking if somewhat convoluted history of the “left,” as Joseph Fronczak, a Princeton history professor, defines it. It is not always easy to follow as people and events appear and reappear several times in different contexts. His prose tends on the florid side and his enthusiasms sometimes overwhelm.

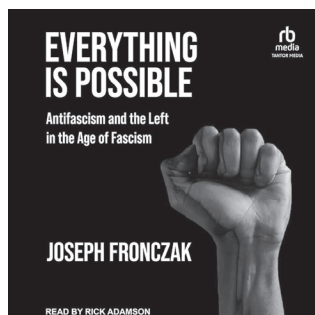
For Fronczak the left is a historical phenomenon, perhaps a *Zeitgeist*, (not his word) evolving out of the antifascism of the early 1920s. He describes its evolution from early battles against Italian fascism to the election of Popular Front governments in the mid-1930s, to its zenith in the Spanish Civil War.

Although the traditional parties of the left play their part, the “grammar” of the left is more: it is the crowds, rallies, strikes, speeches, street battles, volunteers such as the *Arditi del Popolo* and the Lincoln Battalion that fascinate him. “I belong to the Left,” George Orwell said in 1945, despite his bitter experiences with segments of it in Spain (244) and so, clearly, does our author.

Fronczak’s thesis is that this left was born in anti-fascism as a worldwide response to the rise of fascism in the aftermath of World War I. Before that, he tells us, it meant little more than a location in parliamentary seating, as in the First French Republic. But then through the 1920s and early 1930s, anti-fascism as it developed internationally scaled up into idea that there was some kind of a “global collectivity called the left.” (39)

However, a good case can be made that the left, including the term, came first and fascism followed. There were mass Socialist parties (often with left wings) in many countries (including in Czarist Russia) long before the term “fascist” had been invented.

Following the First World War both fascist and “red” (socialist, anarchist and com-



munist) formations arose in response to deep social crises (especially unemployment, inflation and parliamentary chaos). The serious possibility of leftist uprisings in several European countries including Germany, Italy and France, especially after

the 1917 Russian Revolution, prompted a few sectors of the European ruling classes to support fascist elements so as to undermine this prospect.

All fascist organizations almost from their initial moments, then and now, wrapped themselves around the banners of anti-Bolshevism, anti-communism, anti-socialism and against whatever passed locally as the left (including ordinary republicanism).

Facing the Fascist Danger

As fascism grew more dangerous, the Communist, Socialist and other left groupings began to organize anti-fascist fighting organizations. In Italy socialists and fascists fought it out in the streets as early as January, 1921. (48)

Soon antifascist demonstrations cropped up in other countries, initially among Italian emigre communities as in the United States. On April 10, 1923, five months after Mussolini’s “March” on Rome, the Anti-Fascist Alliance of North America was founded. This was hardly an impromptu gathering, since it included members of the Socialist Party, the IWW, several unions, and the underground Communist Party’s above-ground formation, the Workers Party.

“By choosing to become antifascisti,” Fronczak says, “they were taking an early step toward eventually becoming leftists.” (59) But weren’t they already leftists?

Meanwhile the German left, split following the Great War between the somewhat discredited pro-war Social-Democratic Party (SPD) and the new pro-Soviet Communist Party (KPD), confronted the rapid growth of the Nazi movement.

Fronczak gives a somewhat meandering history of the Comintern’s early struggles to understand the nature of fascism. We are introduced to Clara Zetkin, who came out of the antiwar left wing of the SPD and who, as early as 1923, called for a “united front” against the fascism that was now expanding

its influence into Germany. (82)

Zetkin’s appeal was to no avail, since the Comintern’s thesis of “social fascism” soon held sway, the idea that social-democrats and others on the left were, consciously or not, enablers of fascism.

Nevertheless, in 1924 socialists and even centrist groups managed to organize a broad coalition named after the colors of the Weimar Republic (black-red-gold) to defend it. According to the German historian Richard Rohrmoser, this organization had more than 1.5 million members at the point it was outlawed by the Nazis in the Spring of 1933. It had refused collaboration with the KPD.¹

The SPD had set up an allied fighting group, the Iron Front. The KPD had its separate group, the Red Front. Then came the now famous “Antifa,” the acronym for *Antifascistische Aktion*, officially founded on May 25, 1932 on orders of the KPD’s Central Committee following a physical brawl between Communists and Nazis in the Parliament a few days before.

The KPD’s intention was to use Antifa to recruit from the SPD’s rank-and-file and create a “United Front from below” to fight the Nazis. (65) This did not sit well with the SPD’s leadership, and membership in Antifa was forbidden.

Still, Antifa was able to organize strikes in November, 1932 and a march of some 80,000-100,000 in Berlin as late as January 25, 1933, just days before Hitler’s appointment as Chancellor. But the rifts between the two mass workers’ parties were too deep, in the end, for Antifa to create a broad united front against Nazism.

Missing from Fronczak’s narrative is any mention of the chief advocate for a united front of German workers’ parties, Leon Trotsky. He had been expelled from the Soviet Communist Party in 1927, but he and his anti-Stalin followers still considered themselves members of its “left-opposition.”

Trotsky viewed the KPD as the only party capable of stopping the Nazis and pressed it to adopt a united front “from above” with the SPD leadership. He penned a whirlwind of articles from 1930 to 1933 pleading for the Communists to change course from their disastrous “third period” policy.² Again, tragically, to no avail.

Popular Fronts and Labor Strikes

Stalin’s strategy was only reversed after Hitler’s triumph. It came following Georgi Dimitrov’s famous speech at the Seventh

Martin Oppenheimer is a member of Central New Jersey DSA and a retired sociology professor. In the 1960s he was a member of Philadelphia CORE. He is co-editor of Sociologists and the Movement (Temple) and has written many articles about the 1960s in numerous left publications.

Comintern Congress in 1935. Suddenly the Communists embraced antifascist solidarity in the form of Popular Fronts (note: not United Fronts of workers' organizations) even with yesterday's "social fascists." (154) But by then it was too late for Germany.

It was not until the middle of the Great Depression, the years that led up to the Spanish Civil War, that "the left as we know it today" coalesced, Fronczak contends. A major contribution in that direction was the "Hands Off Ethiopia" movement, a response to Mussolini's program to make Italy great again through expanding Italy's colonial empire in 1935.

There were mass protest meetings in many countries as Mussolini prepared for the war: "To support Ethiopia is to fight fascism" became the slogan of the day. (164) Fronczak points to the "interconnectivity" of the Hands Off Movement with antifascism and the fight against "Jim Crow" in Chicago and elsewhere.

On October 3, 1935 Italian troops invaded from its colonies in Eritrea and Somalia. Their modern weaponry prevailed and Ethiopia became an Italian colony in February, 1937.

Hands Off Ethiopia was one of many "transnational" protest movements going back many years. One of the best known had grown up in defense of Sacco and Vanzetti, the Italian-American anarchists framed for murder and executed in 1927. Each movement "stirred together some initial elements of the global left to come." (153)

The links among labor actions, strikes, sit-downs and antifascism are clear when it comes to France, Spain and many other countries. Fronczak describes the leadup to the 1936 General Strikes that convulsed the British Mandate in Palestine and French Mandates in Syria and Lebanon.

A bi-national working-class Antifa group in Palestine had called for a strike uniting Arab and Jewish workers, but the wider Arab Nationalist Uprising then "spun the situation away" from them. (200) The politics of a "shared future made by a shared struggle" was over.

During the 1936-37 GM autoworkers' sit-downs in Flint, Michigan the workers held up antifascist signs including "They Shall Not Pass" and "raised their fists in antifascist salutes." (197)

Yet it was the economic crisis that led to global waves of protest, not least in the United States. The Veterans' Bonus March, strikes among farmworkers, general strikes in Toledo, San Francisco and Minneapolis, the Harlan County Coal War, the formation of the Unemployed Councils, are only a few examples.

There is little evidence that anti-fascism as such played more than a minor role in the struggles in U.S. fields and factories

during the Depression. But there is a lot of evidence that members of the Communist and Socialist Parties and other left formations were deeply involved in helping labor organizing, leading strikes, and trolling for members during organizing campaigns. Some of these would soon be heading to Spain.

In 1936 "the antifascist moment hit its peak" and "the political world was

rearranged..." (178-9) A wave of strikes and factory seizures in France was followed by victory for a Popular Front ticket in France. The creation of other Popular Fronts followed: "combining all parties of the left... even beyond that...by incorporating the people themselves without any distinction of ideologies." (184)

"*Tout es possible*," wrote Leon Blum, the French socialist prime minister — until it wasn't. Blum's Popular Front government was undone by multiple crises: The Depression, the fanatics on the Right, the threat posed by Hitler, the Spanish civil war that deeply split French opinion, internal disputes, all contributed to the dissolution of his government in the Fall of 1938.

Fronczak spends much of Chapter 5 enthusing about the development of Popular Fronts. It was antifascism that "fueled" them, he says, with the Depression a secondary factor, at least in France.

Although the Comintern now supported such formations, he thinks the idea had grown beyond its control. The problem was that Popular Fronts downplayed class issues in order to include "bourgeois" parties, thereby potentially alienating the more radical sectors of the working class and poor peasants.

Defeat in Spain

The book's centerpiece is the Spanish Civil War, where again a Popular Front coalition confronted reactionary forces, this time on the battlefield. A Popular Front including republican parties, Socialists, Communists and even anarcho-syndicalists upset expectations and was elected in February, 1936.

Although the government was following a fairly safe, non-revolutionary program, conspiracies to overthrow the Republic commenced at once. An uprising led by a group of generals began in July. A month later Germany decided that General Francisco

Franco would be their man and sent aircraft to assist his troops.

It is impossible in this book review to detail the catastrophic circumstances that ultimately led to the defeat of the Republic after three years of fighting. Fronczak presents us with a cast of characters worthy of ten Shakespeare productions. They run from the famous (Simone Weil, Sylvia Pankhurst, Orwell, Dolores Ibarruri of "No Pasaran!") to a long list of rank-and-file volunteers such as Oliver Law, a Black American Communist volunteer in the Abraham Lincoln Battalion, killed in action July 9, 1937.

The "Lincolns" were part of the 15th International Brigade, mainly recruited by the U.S. Communist Party.

The author is not shy in condemning the role of the Comintern in suppressing, indeed engineering the murder, of elements of the left not in sync with its policies in Spain. The Spanish Communist and Socialist Parties acted to assure the government's bourgeois allies, as well as the West (which failed anyway to come to its help), that no real revolution would stem from the Popular Front's government.

Fronczak understands that "the politics of unity that had pressed together so many incongruent parts into 'the left' had always been a fragile project..." These contradictions burst forth in the events of April, 1937 in Catalonia. His brief description misses that much of Catalonia was in control of workers' and peasants' unions and their militias.

The red and black flag of the *Confederacion Nacional de Trabajo* (CNT) flew over Barcelona's telephone exchange. On May 3 the CNT and its anarchist allies, the *Federacion Anarchista Iberica* (FAI), plus the *Partit Obrer d'Unificacio Marxista* (POUM) called for a seizure of power throughout Catalonia, in short, a complete social revolution.³

After some debate among the revolutionary forces in the face of military attacks by Loyalist forces, the CNT backed down and entered negotiations with the Central Government, to the dismay of Trotsky and his followers. "After the May Days, the Spanish Republic's efforts to consolidate control of the war effort led to an intensified political repression" of the anarchist and POUM militias. (227)

Meanwhile the war between Franco's forces and the Loyalist Army including the International Brigades ground on.

Although the war did not end formally until April 1, 1939, the International Brigades were withdrawn from fighting on September 1, 1938. On November 1 they staged a farewell parade to the cheers of some 250,000, in Barcelona. The book contains several photos of this event by the famous Robert Capa.

Fronczak sees the "paradox." Thousands had come, "their sacrifices amounted to



"Manifesto of Antifascist Action," German Communist Party, July 1932.

one of the great shows of human solidarity in world history,” but the effects of the war undermined the cause of antifascism. (228)

The left was fractured and many were disillusioned. Some would turn their disillusionment into pro-Western anti-communism.

As he closes his book, the author adopts a valedictory mode: “The left has given the modern political world a never-ending lesson on the meaning of struggle. That alone is a worthy gift.”

Fronczak tries to make the case for an all-encompassing left, including revolutionary wars “that were at times liberatory and at

times murderous disasters.” (247)

This sidesteps a lot. Is the common denominator of antifascism sufficient to define the left as he seems to think?

Historically the left has always been torn between movements committed to democratic structures versus those committed to elitist processes. Do these belong under the same rubric? Is there a historical moment when they cease being part of the left?

The left has suffered many defeats since Spain. Fronczak cites Allende’s Chile among other “heroic” defeats that “paradoxically instilled leftists with more confidence of their

eventual glory.” (247)

But “everything” is not really possible, despite the book’s title. We are limited by historical circumstance in how we struggle, as has become clearer than ever since Trump’s victory. Fortunately the book was in press prior to that sad event. ■

Notes

1. Richard Rohrmoser, *Antifa, Portraet einer linksradikalen Bewegung*, Verlag Beck, 2024, 44-45.
2. Trotsky, *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*. Intro. by Ernest Mandel, Pathfinder Press, 1971.
3. Felix Morrow, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain*, Pathfinder Press, 1938 and 1974, ch. 10.

Plague-Pusher Politics — By Sam Friedman

AS SHOULD BE evident by now, the Trump administration has begun a full-scale attack on much of public health in the United States and globally.

Some of this is ideological — for example, when Kennedy, the United States Secretary of Health and Human Services, attacks vaccines as dangerous and ignores the millions of lives they save. This has been covered extensively in the non-reactionary media.

I want to present here some of the less-obvious implications of what the Trumpires are doing.

Cuts to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), and related programs will reverse our progress in reducing these diseases globally. On March 17, 2025 The Director General of the World Health Organization described some of them including:

- If disruptions continue we could see an additional 15 million cases of malaria and 107,000 deaths this year alone, reversing 15 years of progress.
- Disruptions to HIV programs could undo 20 years of progress, leading to more than 10 million additional cases of HIV and three million HIV-related deaths — more than triple the number of deaths last year.
- On tuberculosis, 27 countries in Africa and Asia are facing crippling breakdowns in their response, with shortages of human resources, disruptions to diagnosis and treatment, data and surveillance systems collapsing, and vital community engagement work deteriorating.

Sam Friedman is an internationally-noted AIDS researcher. His publications include Teamster Rank and File (Columbia University Press, 1982); Grief and Rage: An American Jew’s Poems on Palestine (Central Jersey Coalition against Endless War, 2015); and Seeking to Make the World Anew: Poems of the Living Dialectic (Lanham, Maryland: Hamilton Books, 2008).

As of this writing, it is unclear what cuts may be forthcoming to U.S. HIV/AIDS prevention and care. Dozens of National Institute of Health (NIH) research grants focusing on these topics have received termination letters meaning that all research under them has had to stop immediately. This leaves both research staff unemployed and people who are participants in studies cut off from medicines or services that the studies may have funded.

Potential cuts to Medicaid may also deprive people with HIV and others of access to medicine.

Very importantly: Millions of people living with HIV in the United States and elsewhere are taking medicines that are very good at holding the disease in check. What they do is reduce the number of virus particles in the body to such low levels that patients stay healthy for decades — and in addition, these levels are usually so low that infected people stop being able to infect other people.

When access to these medicines stops, or becomes stop-and-go, these numbers (called “viral loads”) increase. Patients get sick, and in time die. They also become highly infectious, so new infections start increasing fairly rapidly.

In addition, the total “Global Viral Load” (number of HIV particles) will increase rapidly — possibly to hundreds of times current levels — and each new particle produces a risk of being a dangerously mutated strain of the virus.

As the Director General of WHO said, millions will die. And the AIDS pandemic will re-ignite. In the United States, these deaths and new infections will likely concentrate among those the Trumpires are quite willing to see suffer and die: Black people, Latino/a people, Native Americans, and the employed and unemployed poor. Men who have sex with men, people who inject drugs, and members of the sexual networks of these people will suffer most

— which is likely to be quite acceptable to the Trumpires.

New Pandemics and More Deaths

The attacks also may lead to a massive increase in other infectious diseases and to new mega-pandemics. The world is facing many potential pandemics, some of which have received considerable media attention like avian flu and MPOX — but there are a host of other infectious agents that may mutate into pandemic form, and the normal actions of capitalism and imperialism have increased the risk of devastating pandemics enormously over the last generation.

I will not go into the details on this here, since I recently co-authored an easily-accessible article on “Pandemic Futures” that does this. (See *Tempest*, February 3, 2025.)

As I write this article, I just got an email telling me that “the Department of Health and Human Services has abruptly canceled more than \$12 billion in federal grants to states that were being used for tracking infectious diseases, mental health services, addiction treatment and other urgent health issues.”

This means that many more people will die of suicide and overdose deaths, that sexually transmitted diseases will spread rapidly, that people who face emotional difficulties in accessing medical care will get sick and die — including a great many people with HIV/AIDS and with Long COVID.

Also in regard to COVID and Long COVID, the administration is eliminating many services, much research, and much support for testing and treatment. The upshot of this will be more people will get Long COVID that debilitates them for years, and that the odds will increase that COVID will generate a new strain that kills millions of people.

I suppose their slogan now that they are in office again is Make America Sick Again. Even the Biden administration, with its pathetic COVID performance, at least pretended to care. ■

REVIEW

Behind the Immigration Crisis

By Folko Mueller

Everyone Who Is Gone Is Here:

The United States, Central America, and the Making of a Crisis

By Jonathan Blitzer

Penguin Press, 2024. 544 pages. \$21 paperback.

TYPICALLY MISSING IN the charges and counter-charges around the “border crisis” between the two mainstream parties is either empathy or any serious analysis of why nationals deemed “illegal immigrants” embark on the extremely risky journey to the United States.

How desperate does a person have to be to subject themselves and oftentimes their under-age offspring to the prospect of potentially getting robbed, raped or, in the worst-case scenario, even killed?

In *Everyone who is Gone is Here*, Jonathan Blitzer gives us a highly personalized account as to why. The book title refers to the people who leave their homes in Central America and cross the border into the United States.

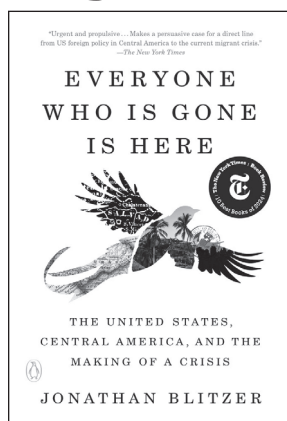
In the 2024 presidential campaign, “illegal migration” and “border security” were constant themes. This was largely due to Donald Trump making this issue front and center. He developed a by now very familiar approach, sort of an anti-immigrant stump speech peppered with his typical lies and falsehoods as well as xenophobic and racist slurs.

These ran along the lines of: “The radical left” is opening our borders to welcome “stone-cold killers,” “monsters” and “vile animals” from countries cleaning out their “prisons and insane asylums,” which Trump repeated endlessly.¹

It is well-documented that immigrants are less likely to commit crime than native-born Americans.¹ These studies notwithstanding, the Democrat Kamala Harris in a noticeable rightward shift also started to deploy tougher rhetoric that culminated in the following statement on the evening of Sep. 27, 2024, after visiting the border in Douglas, Arizona:

“The United States is a sovereign nation, and I believe we had a duty to set rules at our border and to enforce them, and I take that responsibility very seriously.”²

Until 2023 the majority of migrants were nationals from Mexico and Central America, predominantly from the three countries that are collectively referred to as the Northern Triangle — El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala. Studies by the Pew Research



narrative evolves around the ordeals and adventures of Juan Romagoza, from Usulután, in the south-east of El Salvador. Juan’s story is representative of other tens or perhaps even hundreds of thousands of biographies of young Salvadorans coming of age just before and during the turmoil of the civil war, starting in the late seventies and lasting over a decade.

Growing up in a very pious household, Juan initially went and joined a seminary at the tender age of 13. Having witnessed sexual abuse there, he decided to not go back after half a year.

On the other hand, he had seen the effects of unattended medical issues in various family members, including his grandfather’s heart attack at age 52 from which he died before a doctor finally came three hours later.

This caused Juan to shift his entire focus to enter the medical field, and in 1970 he embarked on his medical studies at the University of El Salvador.

Throughout the 1970s El Salvador was rocked by repression, insurgency and increasing clashes between the army-backed business elites and workers who held protests and organized strikes. The university was also impacted and forced to at times close for months on end.

For Juan, this meant that his seven-year degree took 10 to complete. One of his last rotations before earning his degree was a surgery residency at a hospital in Santa Tecla, about 20 miles west of San Salvador. It was here that he made his first direct acquaintance with domestic state terror.

Although already an activist, who provided free healthcare together with other medical students to poor peasants who were forced to flee the countryside due to military

Center show that “Migration from Central America to the U.S. began rising notably in the 1980s,” and not surprisingly as Blitzer shows, “continued to increase in subsequent decades.”³

The Story of Juan Romagoza

Most of Jonathan Blitzer’s

repression, this incident must have undoubtedly politicized him a great deal further:

A badly wounded student protester who had taken police bullets to the neck and stomach was rushed to the emergency room on a gurney. Juan assisted in a four-hour surgery until the patient was stabilized and moved to the ICU. Here he remained at the student’s bedside together with a nurse, to monitor his vital signs.

Sometime after 10 pm a group of half a dozen men, some in army fatigues, some in plainclothes but all armed and masked in balaclavas abruptly entered the room, ordered Juan to get on the ground, and riddled the student with bullets.

After the men left, Juan picked up the spent bullet casings and carried them in his pocket for the remainder of the week. This was an extremely risky undertaking that could have cost his own life had he been randomly stopped and searched by cops, a routine occurrence in 1980s San Salvador.

The idea was to see Óscar Romero, the archbishop of San Salvador, to report this crime, so Romero could in turn record it with Socorro Jurídico, the human rights watch group associated with the church. There was simply nowhere else to turn to.

The Killing of Archbishop Romero

Juan had a previous history with Romero after the Archbishop’s close personal friend Rutilio Grande, a Jesuit priest who had been creating self-reliance groups among the poor, was assassinated on March 12, 1977.

Speaking of Fr. Grande, the previously conservative Archbishop Romero said, “When I looked at Rutilio lying there dead I thought, ‘If they have killed him for doing what he did, then I too have to walk the same path.’”⁴

It was after this turn that Romero learned about the work that Juan and fellow medical students were doing. He asked them to become his “eyes and ears” so he could keep track of people who were tortured and killed and disseminate this information on his hugely popular weekly sermon broadcasts. This was crucial in a country where all news was censored.

A watershed moment for El Salvador was the killing of Archbishop Romero on the evening of March 24, 1980. “If they can get to Romero, no one can be saved.” Juan was told by his neighbor.

Indeed, the assassination meant that

Folko Mueller is a longstanding activist and Solidarity sympathizer living in Houston, Texas.

a “moderate” or negotiated solution was now out of the question and only a military solution remained viable. It was the kickoff for an unprecedented campaign of terror by the government, which included much higher levels of torture.

Juan was forced to do his job virtually underground and had to employ daily survival tactics, going to work in disguises and keeping odd hours at the clinic.

Nonetheless, he and his fellow activist medical students got wind of their names ending up on hit lists assembled by death squads and distributed among military officers. As an American official at the time pointed out: “If your name happens to be on the list and you are taken prisoner, your life expectancy is about one hour.”

In addition to helping other activists in the city who ended up injured after clashes with the police and other government forces at protests, Juan still made extremely dangerous trips to the countryside to help peasants who required medical attention and were trapped due to the ongoing battles between the military and leftist guerrillas.

Capture and Torture

During one of these missions, the military showed up in the middle of his medical exams and opened fire immediately, hitting Juan in his right ankle. Juan fell to the ground and was lucky that he did not get shot dead on the spot. The soldier who came over to shoot him point blank had forgotten to take the safety off and afterwards became distracted.

Juan was, however, taken prisoner on suspicion of being a guerrillero and hauled off to a military installation in Chalatenango, ironically called “El Paraíso.” It was here that he suffered tremendous atrocities. He was stripped down to his underwear, blindfolded and placed on a cement slab, where he would be interrogated for the next 24 hours.

Each denial of guerilla involvement would solicit a beating or shocks from electrodes. He was then transported to the capital San Salvador, where the torture methods grew far more intense. He was tied to iron rungs in such a position that his ankle wound would be further inflamed, sodomized with a metal rod and shocked.

The guards also put out cigarettes all over his body and would hang him by his fingers, wrists and legs until the wire cut down into his bones. One day, he was gratuitously shot in the left forearm, leaving it shattered. The torturer told him: “This is so that you will never practice medicine again.”

After being moved one last time, thinking he was going to get executed, the soldiers pushed him into a coffin where he was to stay for another 48 hours.

Eventually two of Juan’s uncles with ties to the military managed to get him released.

However, Juan’s ordeal was far from over. Oftentimes the death squads would finish the job after a prisoner was released from military custody.

After moving from safe house to safe house for a couple of months, Juan’s ankle injury had become so badly infected that his only option left was to see a specialist in Mexico City for emergency treatment, or he would lose his foot.

A close family friend agreed to smuggle him out of the country into Mexico City, where he arrived in the spring of 1981. While the doctors were able to reconstruct Juan’s foot, the nerve damage in his forearm and hand was untreatable.



Juan Romagoza

After recovering from his surgery, Juan came in touch with Sergio Méndez Arceo, the bishop of Cuernavaca, a city just about one-and-a-half hours south of Mexico City. After the bishop found out about Juan’s medical training, he invited him to help out with a medical clinic the church had set up for indigenous Guatemalan refugees.

Guatemala was also still in the throes of a civil war, which had been raging for decades and specifically targeted the Mayan population whom the Guatemalan military thought to be siding with the insurgent *guerrilleros*.

Crossing the Border

Méndez Arceo practiced liberation theology, using his seminary to train priests to serve the poor and combine bible study with local activism. He also established a network of fellow liberation theologians and activists to help the most vulnerable Guatemalan refugees cross into the United States, where they would be out of reach of death squads.

Juan routinely accompanied the different waves of refugees making the trip to the U.S. border, but was never tempted to cross himself. In Mexico he felt closer to his homeland of El Salvador. This changed when he found out through the Salvadoran expatriate community in Mexico City that his girlfriend

Laura, who stayed behind, had been killed. Laura was a fellow activist from medical school days with whom he had a daughter. He hadn’t seen them in two years.

After hearing the news, he set out for the United States to try and set the story straight for ordinary U.S. citizens who did not know much about the reality of the civil war in El Salvador and hopefully initiate change that way. He was smuggled across the border and arrived in Los Angeles on May 5, 1983.

After three months he moved up to San Francisco where an aunt of his had been a long-time resident. Again his medical skills were in demand here, but he also assumed the role of a community organizer in a group he founded called *Comité de Refugiados* or CRECE, the Central American Refugee Committee and was active in the local sanctuary movement.

He soon gained some notoriety, speaking at church gatherings and to the press as well as leading sanctuary caravans into California. Articles started appearing around his work. When asked if he was scared being so active as an undocumented immigrant, he replied “Part of the therapy is shedding our fear.”

He also routinely appeared on panels with a pro-bono lawyer, Mark Silverman, who finally persuaded Juan to apply for asylum. Juan had never applied himself, since it was never his intention to stay in the United States. However, Silverman found the right angle when he told Juan his application could be a motivation for others to do the same.

Shortly after filing, Juan found himself on his way to Washington, DC with a group of other activists. There that he met Salvadorans from the same region as he was. They introduced him to a local community clinic that catered to immigrants called *La Clínica del Pueblo*. He was smitten by the place, as it was the sort of operation he always wanted to create in El Salvador.

Shortly after he was granted asylum, he got notice that “La Clínica” was on the verge of closing due to a lack of management and too much work for the existing volunteers. When asked if he would be willing to help and run it, he moved to Washington in the summer of 1987.

In 2002, Juan participated in a landmark trial against two men responsible for the worst suffering of his life: José Guillermo García, El Salvador’s minister of defense from 1979 to 1983, and Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova, one of Juan’s interrogators back in 1980.

The lawsuit was filed by the Center for Justice and Accountability, a human rights organization in San Francisco, and one of their attorneys deemed Juan the perfect plaintiff. The idea was to seek redress on behalf of torture victims and since this was a civil, not criminal trial, the perpetrators would have to pay damages if found guilty.

The jury sided with the plaintiffs and the generals were ordered to pay \$54 million in damages. However, for the plaintiffs it was never about the money.

In March of 2008, Juan returned back to his family home in Usulután to live with his 82-year-old mother. After recovering from colon cancer, he occupied himself the only way he knew how — activism and practicing medicine.

From late 2008 to early 2009, Juan volunteered for the Mauricio Funes campaign, a FMLN candidate who was challenging the right-wing ARENA party. One of the central planks of FMLN's platform was reforming the health-care system.

When Fuentes won in March of 2009, the administration started to roll out a network of clinics that would provide immediate primary care, free of charge. Juan ended up overseeing the 34 clinics in the department of Usulután.

Cold War Logic and U.S. Interventions

Blitzer deftly interweaves Juan's anchor story with insights from several U.S. administrations and their handling of the increasing violence in El Salvador, cross-border solidarity efforts by U.S. activists along the U.S.-Mexican border; and the explosion of Latino gang warfare in the late 1980s and early '90s.

This was to a large degree due to the rapid growth of the Mara Salvatrucha, predominantly composed of Salvadoran youth exiles in Los Angeles, a street gang that morphed into organized crime and is better known as MS-13. The growth of MS-13 can be directly traced to the Salvadoran civil war.

Older readers will remember the turbulent 1980s, which saw the United States engaging in wars around the globe fueled by Cold War logic. Particular attention was always reserved for what it still considers "its backyard" — Central America.

From the very beginning, this meant unequivocally supporting any right-wing government, no matter how brutal, against any political candidate or movement that displayed even a hint of sympathy for progressive or social justice policies. We can see this pattern with the U.S.-backed removal of Jacobo Arbenz, the democratically elected president of Guatemala in the early 1950s.

Arbenz won the presidential election primarily due to the promise of an agrarian reform. Once in office he followed through on this promise and passed the agrarian land reform bill after about a year in power.

The bill entailed nationalization of a relatively small percentage of unused agrarian land, a very popular move with most Guatemalans since land ownership continued to be highly concentrated in the hands of a wealthy few. However, it drew the ire of the United Fruit company, the largest landowner in Guatemala and with a high percentage of unused

agrarian land that it retained for its business of shipping bananas.

United Fruit started to heavily lobby the U.S. government into toppling the Arbenz regime. These lobbying efforts, coupled with general anti-communist hysteria among the U.S. administration, paid off and led to the U.S.-sponsored coup d'état in the Summer of 1954.⁵ This set in motion a four-decade genocidal military targeting of Guatemala's largely Indigenous peasant population, claiming at least 100,000 lives.

The latest but most likely not last U.S. intervention to force an alternate political outcome in a Central American country happened in 2009 in Honduras when President Manuel Zelaya was forcibly removed from office. Elected as the candidate for the mainstream Liberal Party, he first started raising eyebrows when he joined the "Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas" or ALBA, as it is known in its Spanish acronym.

ALBA was initially a bilateral agreement between Cuba and Venezuela signed in 2004 and envisioned as an alternative to neoliberal policies, particularly the U.S.-backed Free Trade Area of the Americas (or FTA), which ultimately failed to take off.⁶

The death knell was what when Zelaya was seeking a constitutional amendment. "Zelaya's proposal to hold a referendum on a proposed new constitution was judged 'illegal' by congress, and the army was 'invited' to intervene by the supreme court."⁷ The coup was welcomed by then U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

The result was the return of Honduras to death squad and drug cartel rule under president Juan Orlando Hernandez, who along with his brother are now serving life sentences after extradition to the United States for drug trafficking. The current Honduran administration of president Xiomara Castro faces the task of recovery from the disaster.

Against Amnesia

In his introduction, Blitzer states that "Politics is a form of selective amnesia. The people who survive are our only insurance against forgetting." He has done a fantastic

job capturing the account of one survivor, Juan Romagoza, and putting it in a broader geopolitical context of human beings fleeing from countries destroyed by the United States' imperial actions.

Younger readers, who may not have witnessed firsthand Cold War politics and the zero-sum fear that drove it, should find this book particularly insightful, since it traces back some of the root causes of a 40-year migratory trek from the "Northern Triangle."

The response from U.S. politicians, by and large and across the aisle, has been to "secure the borders of our nation" against the immigrant influx. Yet in human history, the creation of nation states as we know them is a relatively recent phenomenon of the past few centuries.

Fast forward to the age of the Anthropocene in which one species, our own, is destroying its own habitat, planet Earth, and we can quickly see how the notion of defending the interests and borders of one particular nation state against another seems not only antiquated and inadequate but may ultimately become obsolete.

The climate crisis doesn't know national borders. But further, it exacerbates the already existing problems in the Global South, and fuels further migration. Only a concerted transnational effort based on solidarity with emerging countries, and taking the needs and concerns of the global working majority into account, has any chance of stemming the tide. ■

Notes

1. Immigrants less likely to commit crimes than U.S.-born, NPR, "All Things Considered," March 8, 2024.
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3. <https://www.pewresearch.org/race-and-ethnicity/2017/12/07/recent-trends-in-northern-triangle-immigration/#:~:text=Migration%20from%20Central%20America%20to,25%25%20between%202007%20and%202015>
4. Archbishop Oscar Romero Beatified in El Salvador | Jesuits.org
5. Blum, William. *Killing Hope* (The Updated Edition). Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press. 2004.
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7. "Honduras: Back to the bad old days?" by Richard Gott, *The Guardian*, June 29, 2004.

Disappeared in Nicaragua; in Limbo Elsewhere

AMONG FOUR DOZEN political prisoners in Nicaragua under the Ortega-Murillo regime, seven are women, five of them "disappeared" as they are held incommunicado and their whereabouts unknown: Eveling Guillen, Nancy Henriquez, Fabiola Tercero (disappeared), Lesbia Gutierrez (disappeared), Carmen Saenz (disappeared), Eveling Matus (disappeared) and Angelica Chavarria (disappeared).

More than 40 Nicaraguan political prisoners are in migration limbo in Guatemala. Last September the United States negotiated the release of 135 Nicaraguan political prison-

ers, had them flown to Guatemala, but then rejected 45 of them when U.S. immigration agents decided their testimonies lacked credibility against the charges asserted by the Ortega-Murillo regime.

The 45 have the possibility of applying for Spanish nationality for themselves and their families — but that takes time.

This was the fifth release and banishment of political prisoners since February 2023. Two days following their release, the Ortega-Murillo regime unconstitutionally revoked their nationality and confiscated their property and even their pensions. ■

Now seeking asylum in Canada but not disclosing her location to protect her safety, she told CBC News that she had no actual involvement in campus protests (she was apparently spotted in a crowd last spring at a time when her campus residence had been blocked off).

Grant Miner, president of the Columbia graduate student union and a fifth-year doctoral student, was fired from his job the day before bargaining on union's contract began and expelled for pro-Palestinian activity.

Columbia's despicable behavior in suppressing and expelling students last year is now compounded with its cowardly kowtowing to a set of draconian demands from the Trump White House. These measures include enhanced campus police powers, and banning masks and placing its highly regarded Middle East, African and Asian Studies center under external "trusteeship."

It is strongly suspected that members of the university Trustees board actually fingered Khalil to the government. As professor emeritus and renowned historian Rashid Khalidi wrote in *The Guardian* (March 25, 2025):

"After Friday's capitulation, Columbia barely merits the name of a university, since its teaching and scholarship on the Middle East, and soon much else, will soon be vetted by a 'senior vice provost for inclusive pedagogy,' in reality a senior vice provost for Israeli propaganda.

"Partisans of Israel, infuriated that scholarship on Palestine had found a place at Columbia, once named it 'Bir Zeit on the Hudson.' But if it any longer merits the name of a university, it should be called Vichy on the Hudson." [Bir Zeit is the leading Palestinian university on the West Bank. "Vichy" refers to the World War II French puppet regime under Nazi occupation —ed.]

Badar Khan Suri is a Georgetown professor and postdoctoral scholar on religion and peace processes in the Middle East and South Asia, legally in the United States on a research scholarship and professorial visa. An Indian national who lives with his U.S. citizen wife and three children in Rosslyn, Virginia, when he arrived home March 17 after a Ramadan iftar meal celebration, Suri was taken into custody by masked federal agents without being accused of any crime.

In just over 72 hours, he was transferred to multiple immigration detention centers and then to an ICE staging center in Alexandria, Louisiana. Prof. Suri's colleagues suspect that the government's real target is his Palestinian-American wife Mapheze Saleh, who's a citizen and can't be rounded up for deportation.

On March 25, masked DHS agents similarly grabbed Tufts student activist Rumeysa Ozturk from the sidewalk, pulling her into an unmarked car. Like Mahmoud Khalil, Rumeysa was transported to an ICE Louisiana detention center without the knowledge of her lawyers or family.

Using the excuse of "Jewish safety" and the need to combat allegedly widespread and persistent antisemitism (a bonkers exaggeration, if there ever was one) at Harvard, Columbia, etc., should also be seen as a version of a standard rightwing ploy.

It is perversely aimed at getting the targets of these illegal and undemocratic assaults to "blame the Jews." This is being done to deflect from the Right's own agenda (that of MAGA, Christian Zionists, etc.) to destroy the authority

of the liberal academic institutions; to detract attention from genuine antisemitism on the Right and in the Trump administration itself; to prohibit truth-telling about what is happening in Gaza; to engage in a campaign of increasing white supremacist ideology in education and elsewhere; and more.

We must stand up to the capitulators in academe and elsewhere who give credence to this lie, and not allow this crass exploitation of Jewish identity to happen — for the sake of Palestinian lives and for everyone's future. A powerful example was set April 2 by Jewish Columbia students who chained themselves to the campus fence demanding freedom for their friend Mahmoud Khalil.

Crisis and Emergency Fightback

The present course — from rule by executive decree to terrorizing immigrant communities and pro-Palestinian activists to abolishing birthright citizenship — leads toward the substantive destruction of constitutional government in the United States, leaving some decorative wallpaper in place to disguise the rot.

Alongside the cowardice of many college administrations is that of some leading law firms capitulating to Trump. In contrast, civil liberties organizations and attorneys for targets of deportation are energetically intervening in court cases and sounding the alarm in media outlets. But from the top leadership of the Democratic Party comes deafening silence on the destruction of Palestine.

Senator Cory Booker's March 31-April 1 speechathon pointed to multiple Trump-Musk abuses, but found no time to reference the slaughter in Palestine. Nor did this new hero of the Democrats join the 15 Senators who voted for Bernie Sanders' resolution to disapprove the new massive shipment of U.S. weapons for Israel. And while dozens of Democratic members of Congress have issued a letter challenging Mahmoud Khalil's detention, minority leader Hakeem Jeffries' name is conspicuously absent.

To be sure, the repression we're witnessing is embedded in a much broader crisis. It includes the blatant white-supremacist assaults on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion programs; the erasure of Black history and struggle from the Smithsonian museums, the Kennedy Center in Washington DC, the Defense Department website and elsewhere.

There's also the potential for Trump's tariff mania to ignite a U.S., North American and world economic slump. Some of these issues are discussed in this issue of *Against the Current*, including Kim Moody's article on the economy and the Democrats' inability to effectively respond.

The fightback is up to the grassroots, and begins with the defense of all those in the crosshairs of Trump's repressive rampage. Of course, any supporter of basic First Amendment rights should be demanding Mahmoud Khalil's immediate release, whatever their views of activism for Palestine.

At the same time, the agitation and activism for Palestinian freedom and against the genocide will and must continue, inspired by Khalil's own example and courage.

We must insist that the fate of the Palestinian people as a mass human sacrifice on the altar of political cynicism, imperialism and settler colonialism is no isolated matter. It is inextricably tied to the struggles in our own society and the future of us all. ■

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THE ABDUCTIONS OF Mahmoud Khalil and other pro-Palestinian students are leading edges of the sweeping state attack on everyone's most basic rights. Read the editorial statement in this issue as well as Cynthia G. Franklin's report on the "humanities against genocide" struggle for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) in the Modern Language Association.

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