

HOW THE WESTERN MEDIA SELLS GENOCIDE | Chris Hedges
FORGOTTEN RACIAL HISTORY OF ALLIGATOR ALCATRAZ | Mark Borrow
SMALL TOWNS DEFY DATA CENTRE PLANS | Gwen Frisbie-Fulton

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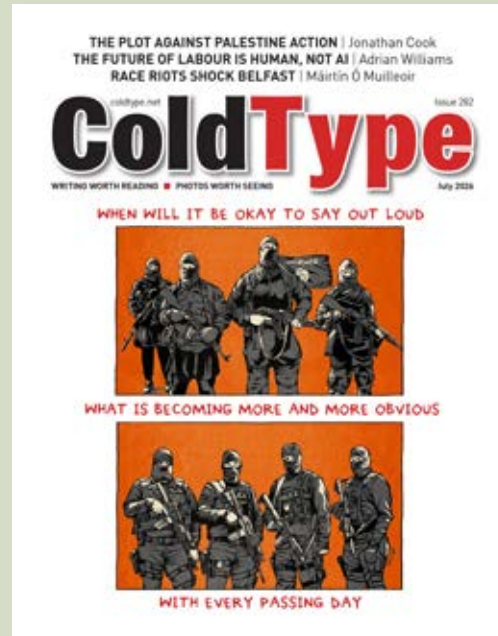
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AN ALTERNATIVE HISTORY OF THE 21st CENTURY September 2026



'THE MOST IMPORTANT HALF HOUR IN MY LIFE'

After a four-day trial at Kingston Crown Court in England ending on Friday, August 21, 2026, UK political activist **Tony Greenstein** was acquitted of inviting support for a proscribed terrorist organisation [Hamas] under Section 12(1) of the Terrorism Act 2000. The charges related to three blog posts he made following the Hamas-led attack on Israel in 2023. Facing up to 14 years in prison after describing the breakout from the Strip as a "Gaza ghetto uprising," Greenstein delivered an impassioned closing speech to the jury that we reproduce in full in an 8-page Special Report – **SEE PAGES 26-33**



AN ALTERNATIVE HISTORY OF THE 21ST CENTURY

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**STOP ALL ARMS
SALES TO ISRAEL**

MEDICAL AID FOR **PALESTINIANS**

INSIGHTS

American film-maker George Lucas is one of the latest to indicate he's open to AI in the movie industry.

In a recent interview, the director said resistance to the technology was “very much like sitting here saying: ‘Well, I believe the horse and the buggy is really where it's at. These cars, they break down, they need gas, there's all kinds of problems with them and pretty soon they'll be making them into tanks, and then they'll be killing people. It's terrible.’”

The *Guardian* story was headlined: “George Lucas likens AI sceptics to luddites clinging to horses and carts.”

“Luddites” have sometimes stood in for enemies of progress: those destined to be swept aside in the forward march of history.

The label of “neo-Luddism” or “digital Luddite” is also being reclaimed by people concerned about labour conditions, society and democracy in an era of AI expansion twinned with personal profit.

But who exactly were the Luddites? They were a collective reaction to the traumas of the Industrial Revolution, in early industrial England.

Their legacy has been profound,



FIGHTING PROGRESS? Engraving of Ned Ludd, 1812

► BRIAN LEWIS

Who were the Luddites – and why do they matter?

as suggested by both negative and positive polemics related to them in intellectual and cultural commentary, art and literature and popular histories produced as digital technology continues to grow.

As the new political economy, fuelled by transatlantic slavery and colonial extraction, began to transform work practices in England and introduce new forms of mechanisation, skilled artisans and weavers resisted. They sought to protect their livelihoods, their ways of life and their communities.

Trade unions were illegal and the workers did not have political representation. Co-operative societies did not yet exist and state welfare was a distant dream. The only alternative to acquiescence was what historian Eric Hobsbawm memorably called “collective bargaining by riot.”

Food riots, destroying machinery or setting fire to factories were in-your-face ways to get employers and local authorities to pay attention to their legitimate grievances.

When the English cartoonist Charles Williams depicted a veterinarian and a blacksmith violently attacking dandies on bicycles for undermining traditional horse-drawn transportation in 1819, the blacksmith's smashing with a

INSIGHTS

mallet was a clear reference to the spasm of machine-wrecking earlier in the decade.

Williams's caricature came within a few years of the mass outbreak in Britain when the terms Luddism and Luddite became commonplace.

Historians agree that the most famous episode of Luddism began in 1811 in Nottinghamshire in the English Midlands.

A group of stocking weavers formed a secret organisation, purportedly led by a certain Ned Ludd, a fictitious figure also styled as Captain, General or King Ludd.

In the context of widespread economic misery caused by the war against Napoleon, the weavers blamed new, wide-frame knitting machines for stealing their jobs, reducing their earnings and making a bad situation worse. In targeted attacks, they smashed more than 1,000 of the stocking frames, and the property destruction then spread to the textile weaving and spinning districts of Lancashire and Yorkshire.

Fearing the revolutionary potential of this wave of violence – and that English plebeians might follow the French example and overthrow the old regime – the government cracked down hard. It sent in 12,000 troops to quell the riots, and members of Parliament voted overwhelmingly to make frame-breaking a hanging offence.

The ruling classes managed to restore order, despite sporadic outbreaks until 1816, punctuating their

clampdown with exemplary hangings and sentences of transportation to Australia. Their determination to prevent revolution, protect property and enable unfettered economic expansion was patently clear.

So do the Luddites deserve such a bad rap? As a historian who has examined industrial-era English history, along with many others, I say: absolutely not. The Luddites were not blindly lashing out but sending a message; to some extent at least, that message was heard. Along with the political radicals and the labour campaigners over the course of the 19th century, they took part in a prolonged struggle waged for rights, dignity and justice. That struggle partially succeeded, forcing the ruling classes to compromise rather than continuing to rely on brute force.

As historian E.P. Thompson famously put it in his book *The Making of the English Working Class*, the Luddites need to be rescued “from the enormous condescension of posterity.”

One of the few aristocrats to express sympathy for the Luddites was the poet Lord

Byron. In his maiden speech in the House of Lords, Byron lamented that “absolute want” and “unparalleled distress” had provoked the riots and, rather than compassion or an attempt to remedy wrongs, all the government could propose was “dragoons and executioners.”

A few months later, he penned a biting satirical poem in a London newspaper with a similar message: “Some folks for certain have thought it was shocking,

*When Famine appeals, and when Poverty groans,
That life should be valued at less than a stocking,
And breaking of frames lead to breaking of bones.”*

Fellow poet Percy Bysshe Shelley reacted with similar rage. His 1813 poem *Queen Mab*, a paean to a utopian future, combined an attack on the state, organised religion and the soul-destroying capitalism of the new machine age.

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, wife of Percy and daughter of feminist philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft, was also inspired by Luddism in her writing of the 1818 novel *Frankenstein*. Victor Frankenstein's creation, the Monster, like Ned Ludd, only became violent and destructive when horrendously mistreated.

The message was clear: technological progress was not necessarily in itself evil, but if the outcome was a vicious zero-sum game of winners and losers, then industrial capitalism was deeply inhumane and resistance was inevitable.

These were just the earliest writers who reacted to the Luddites. Notable later novelists tilling the same furrow included Charlotte Brontë and Samuel Butler.

Brontë's 1849 novel *Shirley*, set in the Yorkshire textile district in 1811-12, combined sympathy for the plight of the workers with a criticism of violence and a call for paternalism from the mill owners.

Butler's 1872 novel *Erewhon*, the ultimate Luddite fantasy, featured a society that outlawed machines and destroyed inventions to prevent them from taking over and enslaving humanity.

The Luddites may have partly lost the battle in Regency England;

**The weavers
blamed new, wide-
frame knitting machines
for stealing their jobs,
reducing their earnings
and making a bad
situation worse**

INSIGHTS

the state and the propertied classes may have prevailed. But it's a mistake to see them as no more than victims crushed by industrialisation.

Caricatures of the Luddites as history's losers are simply false.

We have not stopped talking about them ever since. **CT**

Brian Lewis is Professor of History at Montreal's McGill University. This article was first published at www.theconversation.com

Royal Air Force



STEALTHY: US Air Force B2 Spirit, from RAF Fairford in Gloucestershire, flies above the countryside near Dover

► WILLIAM ASTORE

The militarised insanity of this American moment

There's so much militarised craziness in America today that it's entirely overwhelming. Here's a "top ten" list:

1. The illegal and unconstitutional war against Iran.

Remember when Trump told us he wouldn't start wars? Remember when attacks on Iran began, the Trump administration said they'd be over in a matter of days, perhaps a few weeks, ending in Iran's total defeat? Instead, the US government and military is engaged in yet another disastrous losing undeclared war unsupported by most Ameri-

cans. As if our opinions matter!

2. The continued blanket support of Israel's genocide against Gaza, pogroms in the West Bank, and demolition/seizure of land in Lebanon.

The Trump administration remains committed to the project of a "Greater Israel," no matter how many Palestinians suffer and die in the process.

3. The obscene \$500 billion increase in military spending in FY2027.

The US military hasn't won a major war since 1945. It's failed eight audits in a row. The "punishment" is a vast increase in military spend-

ing in the next fiscal year.

4. The escalatory and nearly impossible Golden Dome proposal.

The golden dome missile defence system is a golden boondoggle for weapons makers. It's unlikely to work, and if it does, if only partially, it may make nuclear war more likely.

5. The unnecessary "modernisation" of the nuclear triad at a projected cost of \$2 trillion.

US militarists still believe the nuclear triad is the Holy Trinity. It isn't. Land-based ICBMs and nuclear bombers should be scrapped as obsolete. The Navy's Trident-missile-firing submarines are all the US needs for nuclear deterrence.

6. The continued headlong pursuit of artificial intelligence (AI) and the ongoing empowerment and enlargement of the surveillance state.

AI combined with ever-more intrusive cameras and digital monitoring is creating a dystopic "Big Brother" state. Imagine sweeping AI with a steroidal Homeland Security; now imagine the total disappearance of privacy.

7. The war against the ICC and UN and any real check on US/Israeli aggression.

As the US and Israel engage in global aggression, they attack institutions such as the International Criminal Court and the United Nations that attempt to limit and stop that aggression.

8. Related to (7), the proposal to merge the US military with Israel's for research and development, intelligence sharing, and the like.

The Trump administration is proposing a merger between the US and Israeli militaries that would compromise US national security at the highest levels of classification. Obedient to Aipac and Israeli imperatives, Congress seems prepared to support it.

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9. Continued environmental damage due to war and military operations and the complete disregard of climate change.

Rarely in the US do you hear talk of how war and global military actions accelerate global warming and environmental damage.

10. The abandonment of the citizen-soldier tradition in the US, the embrace of a warrior ethos, and the increasing contempt for diversity within the military.

The last war America won (with help from allies like the Soviet Union) was World War II, the last time America had a true citizen-soldier military. Since then, America has increasingly embraced a warrior ethos. And while diversity used to be a hallmark of the US military, it is now under attack as “woke” by Pete Hegseth.

There you have it: 10 signs of America’s increasingly militarised madness. Greater sanity would involve the reversal of all of these. **CT**

William J. Astore is a retired lieutenant colonel (USAF). He blogs at Bracing Views at www.bracingviews.com

► **STEPHEN LAND & BOB LORD**

Elon Musk’s fortune comes from not paying taxes

DonkeyHoley



TAX BENEFICIARY: Elon Musk

The valuation trends up and down, but one thing’s for sure: Elon Musk became the world’s first trillionaire this summer. At the height of the SpaceX IPO he was briefly worth around \$1.45 trillion.

Then SpaceX stock tanked, rallied, then tanked again. But the

most important thing about Musk’s wealth isn’t whether it stays above the 13-figure threshold – it’s that 94 percent of it comes from not having to pay taxes on unrealised gains.

That’s right: Musk’s fortune effectively comes from not paying taxes.

It’s no exaggeration to say that trillionaires (Musk likely won’t be the last) are creatures of the tax code. They ought to be called “taxilionaires.” If it weren’t for laws that permit the wealthy to endlessly defer paying taxes by keeping their gains unrealised, there would be no trillionaires – and many fewer billionaires.

According to Musk’s own account, when he sold his stake in PayPal in 2002, he netted \$180 million, invested it all in SpaceX and Tesla, and borrowed to pay his living expenses. To get from \$180 million to a trillion today implies annual returns of over 40 percent (returns that would be considered impossible for ordinary investors).

Allowing these returns to compound untaxed supercharges growth.

Musk paid some taxes along the way, when he exercised stock options or sold some Tesla shares, but any taxes he paid are insignificant compared to his wealth. By contrast, for most working Americans earning a good salary, total state and federal taxes are significant – typically around 40 percent.

They can put limited amounts in

► **BY THE NUMBERS**

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47.4%

The expected increase in S&P 500 profits in the 2nd quarter of 2026, compared to a year ago.



Meanwhile, real average hourly earnings for U.S. workers increased only 0.1% from June 2025 to June 2026.

Sources: FactSet, July 31, 2026, and Bureau of Labor Statistics, July 14, 2026

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tax-deferred IRAs, 401(k) plans, and the like. But most of their savings comes from net paychecks after withholding for federal, state, local, Social Security, unemployment, and Medicare taxes. Musk is effectively exempt from these taxes.

But he doesn't have to be.

Suppose he were subject to the same taxes on his annual wealth increase that most higher-earning Americans pay on what they make, and had to sell some Tesla and SpaceX shares to pay those taxes. We crunched the numbers based on the latest figures, and found he'd be worth around \$47 billion today – rich enough to afford the most lavish lifestyle imaginable, but not a trillionaire, and not richer than the GDP of most countries.

It's the same story for Jeff Bezos, Warren Buffett, and other multibillionaires.

The vast bulk of their fortunes came from not paying taxes on their wealth as it grew. Without endless tax deferrals, they would have only a tiny fraction of what they own today (although that tiny fraction would still be a huge amount of money). Yet as things stand today, nothing stops them from wielding the power and influence their wealth buys to benefit themselves.

In the 2024 elections, Musk was the largest campaign donor, giving \$291 million. That's chump change for him, but it bought unprecedented power: lucrative contracts, the suspension of investigations of Musk's businesses, access to government data, and the authority to dismantle government programs – including disruptions to foreign aid which are projected to result in over 14 million people dying from preventable diseases.

It's a vicious cycle of wealth begetting power which begets more wealth, diverting it from the needy and vulnerable. We're in the grip of unprecedented power accumulated by private, superrich individuals.

We can check their power by fixing the untaxed wealth problem. We should end the practice of funding billionaires' and trillionaires' accumulation of power at public expense by letting them amass yet larger fortunes without paying taxes. We should adopt sensible policies requiring them to pay their fair share, such as the Billionaires Minimum Income Tax Act introduced in Congress in 2023.

Over the next decade, we will

face crisis-level national debt and unmet needs for healthcare and retirement income. That will force us to decide whether to leave the vast pool of billionaire and trillionaire wealth untouched, or tax them like the rest of us to curb their influence and address public needs. The choice is ours. **CT**

Stephen Land is a retired tax attorney and former Chair of the New York State Bar Association Tax Section. Bob Lord, an associate fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies, currently serves as Senior Vice President for Tax Policy at Patriotic Millionaires. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org

► LEE CAMP

Why Europe is pushing for war against Russia

We all know the real reasons the US created the proxy war with Russia initially. It allowed the deteriorating US empire to cut Russia off economically from the consumer base of Europe – especially when it came to “energy” – thereby strengthening the petrodollar. (If sanctions didn't do it, the US could always just blow up the Nord Stream pipeline, but we would never do that. Heh heh heh, ermmmm...)

The US rulers thought they could sanction Russia into oblivion and then easily create regime change – Push out Putin and then put in a puppet. (Yes, I'm happy with that pun.) Once effectively puppeteered,

Russia would cut ties with China and shift entirely to acting as another vassal state of the US empire, as the European nations already were.

Some of it worked. Most of it did not. But if that's why the US has been crafting this proxy war in Ukraine for at least 15 years, why have the UK and EU supported it and recently even led the charge at provoking a larger war with Russia? Well, my friend and favourite economist Professor Richard Wolff recently elucidated what he believes to be the answer.

Since World War II, Europe has lost most of its colonial territories. Subjugating and extracting those lands was how Europe built its

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wealth. The US, Europe, and other rich countries have extracted roughly \$152 trillion from the global south since 1960. But Europe has largely maintained that wealth by being a junior partner to the US empire. However, now the US is in decline and acting increasingly erratically.

So, as Professor Wolff said: “Inside each nation, rich and powerful minorities use their social positions to sustain their wealth and power while the masses bear most of the burdens of decline offloaded onto them by the rich and powerful. The problems flowing from these cumulative developments are approaching points of social explosion. ...[And] the shock of Trump’s abandonment of Europe as the US economy’s junior partner accelerated Europe’s decline.”

The rich ruling elite need to find a way to either enrich Europe anew or, at minimum, convince the unwashed masses to accept the coming harsh austerity. Russia is their answer to both, or either. If their plan works, not only will the rich keep their heads, they might even keep their riches.

Europe’s leaders believe they can accomplish this by pumping up mass anxiety and fear around urgent preparations for a war against Russia. To that end, they demonise Russia beyond even the levels achieved against Stalin and Stalinism during the Cold War.

A terrified public is far easier to control, especially when economic times are rough. The great bogeyman of Russia is by far the easiest threat to dust off and reintroduce. Of course, the crown jewel would be to actually destroy, melt down, and sell the largest country by landmass in the world.

Longer-run hopes entail imagining Russia’s military defeat and consequent *de jure* or *de facto* dismemberment. The resulting subunits of old Russia would then offer Western Europe a new colonial opportunity, a vast expanse for profitable investment to obtain food, raw materials, and possibly workers to rejuvenate Western European capitalism.

This explains why the ruling elite of the UK and EU are pushing towards a completely unneces-

sary, bloody war that could result in a nuclear exchange killing most of humanity – Their repulsive wealth depends on it. And as we’ve seen with climate crisis, the rich and powerful are fine with putting the future of humankind at risk if there’s a lot of money to be made in the death spiral. **CT**

Lee Camp is a stand-up comedian and host of the Unredacted Tonight webcast at www.realleecamp.substack.com

➤ **NORMAN SOLOMON**

‘Moderates’ support extreme injustice



ALARM BELLS: Progressive candidate Abdul El-Sayed beat Haley Stevens

We’ve been hearing a lot of panicky warnings lately after Democratic primary voters chose socialists and other leftists instead of “moderates” in several major elections. The alarm bells

got louder this month after Michigan’s progressive Senate candidate Abdul El-Sayed defeated Rep. Haley Stevens – who was, the *New York Times* reported, “the moderate establishment-backed candidate.”

The soothing “moderate” label routinely goes to candidates like Stevens who’ve supported continual arming of Israel. She “benefited from about \$62 million in advertising spending from half a dozen outside groups,” the *Times* noted. “Over half of that sum came from the super PAC arm of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the country’s most influential pro-Israel group.”

What’s so “moderate” about supporting genocide?

Politicians are also routinely dubbed “moderate” when they’re running interference for extreme income inequality and deadly healthcare inequities – help-

INSIGHTS

ing to block popular policy options like tax hikes on the rich and Medicare for All, which is supported by three-quarters of Democrats.

The Democratic base is fed up with a system that gives inordinate power to the wealthy and to large corporations. In the real world, the so-called “moderates” are aligned with a status quo that continues to inflict widespread suffering and preventable death at home and abroad.

To hear timeworn party strategists like James Carville and Paul Begala tell it, leftwing candidates are duping the Democratic electorate. As AUGUST began, Carville threatened to leave the party. Begala made headlines by declaring, “I don’t like the socialists. I can’t stand them.”

But a month earlier, a CNN poll found that “about a third of Democrats and Democratic-leaning adults identify as democratic socialists.” At a time when defeating the fascistic Republican Party is imperative, any strategist’s prescription that would denigrate or seek to exclude them amounts to political malpractice.

Treating so many Democratic voters like interlopers to be scolded might play well with corporate donors. But it’s a feeble swim against the political current. Polling shows that the younger Democratic voters are, the more favourable they’re apt to be toward socialism. “Younger adults are more likely to be in groups on the left, while older adults tend to cluster in more conservative groups,” the Pew Research Center noted.

Drawing on the results of its new public opinion survey, Global Strategy Group just reported that “socialist Democrats skew young-

er, with 57 percent of them being between the ages of 18 and 44.”

Another poll, released a month ago by Tufts University’s Center for Information and Research, found that two-thirds of young people “said that their political views have changed in some way in recent years” – and “youth whose views did shift were almost twice as likely to become more liberal/progressive instead of more conservative.”

As socialists and others on the left prevail in many high-profile races, the refrains of condemnation coming from some of the Democratic Party establishment are potshots in a losing battle. By definition, young voters are the future of the party. Its prospects for winning elections are diminished to the extent that younger voters are made to feel unwelcome, or even vilified.

To the ears of many young Democratic voters, derision about how they cast their ballots is coming from out-of-touch party elders who treat crucial problems as abstrac-

tions or matters worthy only of lip service. Millions of Americans in early adulthood are facing financial stress with bleak outlooks for jobs and careers. College tuitions are often prohibitive, and college debt can be debilitating. Rents and mortgages are high. Everyday expenses are worse than a challenge. The climate crisis is real.

Such realities cast a shadow over the future. The last thing those voters want is arrogant leadership that refuses to grasp the urgency of this political moment. **CT**

Norman Solomon is the national director of RootsAction and executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy. The paperback edition of his book War Made Invisible: How America Hides the Human Toll of Its Military Machine includes an afterword about the Gaza war. His new book, The Blue Road to Trump Hell: How Corporate Democrats Paved the Way for Autocracy, is free in e-book formats (See details on Page 25)

► GREED AT A GLANCE

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1,500
The estimated lives federal workplace heat protections could save per year.

Corporate lobbyists recently won House committee approval of a bill to ban federal heat standards.

Source: Common Dreams, July 24, 2026.

INSIGHTS

► JOHN QUEALLY

Actor refutes antisemite charges in merger row

Mark Ruffalo, the actor known worldwide for both his role as the Incredible Hulk in the *Avengers* movie franchise as well as his work as a dedicated humanitarian and voice for social justice, did not back down last month after his criticism of the pending merger between Paramount Skydance and Warner Bros. was cast as antisemitic by executives at Paramount, largely owned by billionaire Larry Ellison and run by his son, David.

While Ruffalo has been outspoken in his opposition to the Paramount-Warner Bros. deal for months – warning like many other critics that further consolidation by such media behemoths will hurt consumers, squeeze workers in the entertainment industry, minimise the range



Gage Skidmore

NOT ANTISEMITIC: Actor Mark Ruffalo

of viewpoints and creativity available, and further entrench right-wing control of the nation's media system – what apparently sparked the accusation against him was the recent sharing of a years-old video clip of Paramount board member Safra Catz discussing “really profoundly scary technologies” that Oracle, which offers software and database services and the company upon which Larry Ellison built his vast wealth, provided to the Israeli military over recent years.

While the Instagram post Ruffalo shared has expired, the clip of Catz has been circulating on time for quite some time, seen as evidence of the close and well-documented ties that Oracle has had with the Israeli military.

In Ruffalo's post, in which he reportedly warned that the Ellisons were “powering some of the most

destructive and inhuman forces in the world,” he also made reference to the genocide in Gaza being carried out by the Israeli military as well as the apartheid under which Palestinians live in the Occupied West Bank.

Noting Catz's comments in the video about Oracle, Ruffalo said, “This is the company that Larry Ellison is using to fund his son David's Warner Bros acquisition.” And the “really profoundly scary technologies” that Catz mentioned, he continued, “will most likely be merged into one of the largest media conglomerates in the world and one day used on you. Look how she revels in what we now have come to see as a genocide, which was built on an apartheid system of oppression powered by Oracle.”

In apparent reaction to Ruffalo's post, which *Variety* characterised as the actor going “scorched earth on Paramount-Warner Bros. merger,” a spokesperson for Paramount issued a statement on August 22 saying the company is “troubled when antisemitic tropes are invoked in purported service of a business dispute. Words like ‘genocide’ and ‘apartheid,’ applied to a corporate transaction, aren't just wrong – they're a bridge too far, and they cheapen the very real suffering those words are meant to describe. This doesn't deserve a response in kind – and to be clear, we don't tolerate prejudice of any kind, against anyone.”

In response to these accusations of antisemitism, Ruffalo issued a new post on social media:

“The accusation that I am antisemitic is appalling and fundamentally dishonest. Criticising the actions of the Israeli prime minister, a military technology contract



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INSIGHTS

or the executives who supply it is not the same as criticising Jewish people. This critical and necessary dialogue is then dishonestly framed as being anti-Israel. To be clear, my views come from my own political convictions and should never be interpreted as hostility toward Jewish people, for whom I have deep love and respect. Everything I know about acting, activism and humanism has been profoundly shaped by the Jewish friends, colleagues and loved ones who have been integral and family throughout every point of my life.

“This merger has real consequences for real people, and for the entire country. Scrutinising the Ellisons, including Oracle’s business built on data, surveillance technology and government contracts, and the serious threat to editorial freedom and the loss of a livelihood for thousands of families, is fair and necessary. The \$111 billion deal would hand one family control over CNN, HBO and Warner Bros., backed in part by foreign money whose influence on editorial decisions has never been fully explained to the public.

“Lawmakers on both sides of the aisle have called for serious national security review, and regulators still haven’t given the public a real answer. Until they do, the merger shouldn’t move forward. Now is the time to dive boldly into all these issues, not step back or concede.”

Commentators on social media also came to Ruffalo’s defense, calling Paramount’s accusations nothing more than a smear against well-founded criticisms of Oracle’s business model, the crimes of the Israeli government, and warnings about what powerful, right-wing billionaires like the Ellisons could do

with what could become one of the largest media corporations on the planet.

“Despicable to call Ruffalo antisemitic,” said John Abrams, an entertainment editor. “Hi, I’m Jewish. I will be the one to tell you when something is antisemitic, you dishonest clowns. It is not antisemitic to decry Israel’s crimes. In fact, it is our moral obligation – as Jews, and as human beings.”

Journalist Mehdi Hassan called the accusations “truly cynical, shameless, and dangerous. Israel’s own leading human rights groups say it’s a genocide. But sure, it’s antisemitic for Mark Ruffalo to say so (!)”

“The Israel crybully lobby will try, as they always do,” wrote author and media critic Adam Johnson, “to make an example out of Ruffalo because he had the temerity and integrity to note the Ellisons’

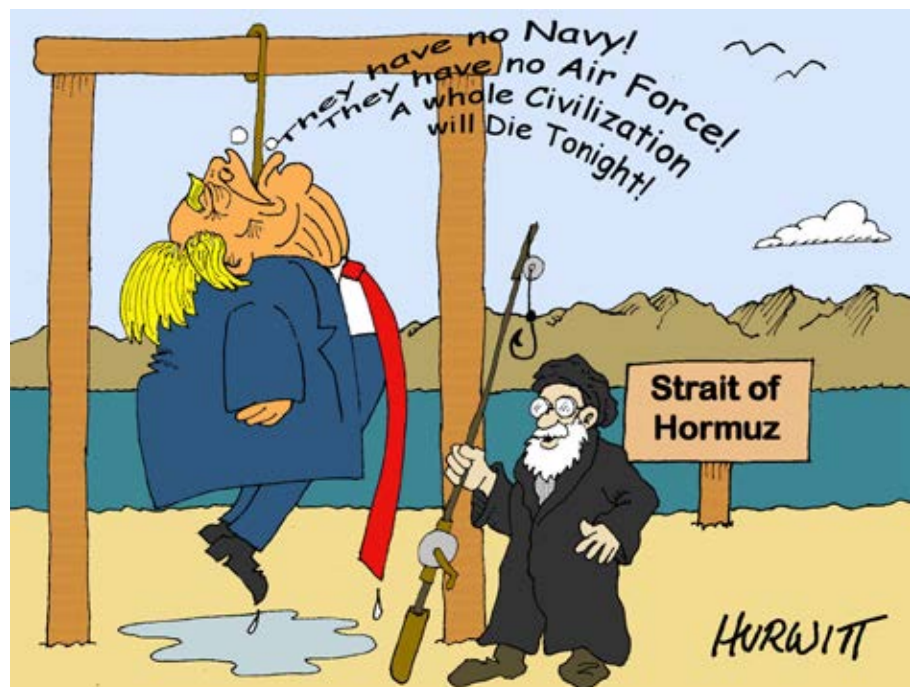
open advocacy and financial support for a military every major human rights group on earth had determined committed genocide.

“My unsolicited advice,” Johnson continued. “Don’t give these cynical assholes an inch. Don’t accept their ‘antisemitism’ shrieking as good faith.”

Noting that “Ellison put out a press release **EXPLICITLY BOASTING** about how his Paramount purchase would be good for Israel and his financial support for the IDF,” Johnson argued that somebody “cannot do this **THEN CRY ANTISEMITISM** when they are held responsible for the actions of the state and military they support.” **CT**

Jon Queally is managing editor of Common Dreams. – www.commondreams.org – where this piece was first published

► HURWITT’S EYE



How the Western media sells genocide

Western media, by employing double standards, censorship, deceptive language, amplifying Israeli lies and dehumanising Palestinians, facilitates Gaza genocide

The Western media manufactures consent for genocide. It normalises Israel's decades-long military occupation and apartheid. It erases Israel's flagrant violations of international law. It perpetuates the fallacy of Israeli victimhood. It betrays, discredits and demonises the work of Palestinian journalists and media workers in Gaza, at least 220 of whom have been killed by Israel between Oct. 7, 2023, and August 2025. It supinely accepts draconian Israeli censorship. It acquiesces with tepid letters of protest at Israel's refusal to allow foreign reporters in Gaza – an effort by Israel to mask its war crimes. It amplifies Israeli lies, from beheaded babies to widespread sexual assault of Israeli women on Oct. 7, to obfuscate the truth.

When writing about Gaza, verbs are in the passive tense. There is no subject. No one is accountable. Genocide, it seems, is an act of God. No different from an earthquake or tsunami. Clichés and opaque adjectives such as the “cycle of violence” or “clashes” distort and falsify reality.

“If thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought,” George Orwell warned.

Terms such as “genocide,” “atrocities,” “ethnic cleansing” and “occupied territories” magically disappear from media reports on Pal-

estinians, whose resistance is routinely described as “savage” and “barbaric.” *New York Times* reporters are instructed by editors to avoid terms such as “Palestine,” “genocide,” “carnage,” “refugee camp,” “slaughter” and “massacre,” when referencing Palestinians.

The media slavishly regurgitates what Israel feeds it. Saturation bombing becomes “surgical air strikes.” Israel's weaponisation of famine becomes a “food shortage.” The killing of unarmed civilians – including children – becomes “clashes.” The hilltop fortress-like compounds of Jewish colonists becomes “neighbourhoods.” Extrajudicial assassination of a journalist or a doctor becomes “died.”

Genocide, referred to as the “Israel-Hamas war” is justified as “self-defence,” part of the mantra of Israel's “right to defend itself.” When schools, hospitals, clinics, ambulances, mosques, churches and other civilian targets are obliterated, they are labelled “Hamass command

Missile attacks on tent cities or hospitals are blamed on Palestinian armed groups firing errant rockets

centres” or targeted because Hamas is “using civilians as human shields” – something Israel does routinely, when the army binds detained Palestinians and forces them to enter potentially booby-trapped buildings and tunnels ahead of Israeli troops.

When Israelis are held by Hamas, they are “hostages,” even if they serve in the military. When Palestinians – including children – are held without charges or trial and disappeared into Israeli detention centres, where torture is “widespread” and “systematic,” they are “prisoners.”

Missile attacks on tent cities or hospitals are blamed on Palestinian armed groups firing errant rockets. If Israel acknowledges the attacks – which very rarely happens – they are described as a “tragic mistake.”

Civil institutions in Gaza are characterised as “Hamas-run” to cast doubt on the veracity of what they report. The *New York Times* routinely qualifies announcements from the Gaza Health Ministry by noting it “does not distinguish between civilians and combatants,” masking the slaughter of tens of thousands of civilians.

The result is some of the most



convoluted writing in the history of journalism, including the Nov. 5, 2023 *New York Times* headline that reads: “Explosions Gazans Say Was Airstrike Leaves Many Casualties in Dense Neighbourhood.”

“When Middle East Eye journalists Mohamed Salama and Ahmed Abu Aziz, along with Reuters photo-journalist Hussam al-Masri, and freelancers Moaz Abu Taha, and Mariam Dagga – who had worked with several media outlets, including the Associated Press – were killed in a “double tap” strike – designed to kill first responders arriv-

ing to treat casualties from initial strikes – at Nasser Medical Complex, how did Western news agencies respond?” I asked in my column *The Betrayal of Palestinian Journalists*.

“Israeli military says strikes on Gaza hospital targeted what it says was a Hamas camera,” the Associated Press reported.

“IDF claims hospital strike was aimed at Hamas camera,” announced CNN.

The camera belonged to Reuters, which said Israel was “fully aware” the news agency was filming from

the hospital.

“When Al Jazeera correspondent Anas Al Sharif and three other journalists were killed on Aug. 10 in their media tent near Al Shifa Hospital, how was it reported in the Western press?” I asked.

“Israel Kills Al Jazeera Journalist It Says Was Hamas Leader,” Reuters titled its story, despite the fact al-Sharif was part of a Reuters team that won a 2024 Pulitzer Prize.

The German newspaper *Bild*, published a front page story headlined: “Terrorist disguised as a journalist killed in Gaza.”

“The linguistic gymnastics employed by the media went as far as redefining words, making them meaningless,” writes Assal Rad in *Don't Say Palestine: How the Media Manufactured Consent for Genocide*:

“Mainstream media failed to describe Israel's repeated breaches of the ceasefire with the language of violation. Instead, the coverage followed the same patterns of rationalizing Israel's attacks and uncritically parroting Israel's claims to justify its actions. As Palestinians continued to be killed – during a ‘ceasefire’ – and the flow of aid did not reach the level of need or what was agreed to, Western media framed these flagrant violations as ‘tests’ or ‘challenges’ to a ‘shaky ceasefire.’ As leading human rights organisations like Amnesty International warned that the genocide was, in fact, not over, legacy media continued to frame it as a war with a “fragile ceasefire.”

Words matter. Words justify actions. If there is no genocide, if Israel is defending itself in a war, the US and Israel's European allies have the right to provide tens of billions of

dollars in military aid. If this is a war begun by Hamas on Oct. 7 then it is possible to lament the obliteration of Gaza and mass slaughter by Israel as the regrettable result of the Hamas attack.

This corruption of language is designed, as Orwell noted, to defend the indefensible:

Things like the continuance of British rule in India, the Russian purges and deportations, the dropping of the atom bombs on Japan, can indeed be defended, but only by arguments which are too brutal for most people to face, and which do not square with the professed aims of political parties. Thus political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness. Defenceless villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants driven out into the countryside, the cattle machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary bullets: this is called pacification. Millions of peasants are robbed of their farms and sent trudging along the roads with no more than they can carry: this is called transfer of population or rectification of frontiers. People are imprisoned for years without trial, or shot in the back of the neck or sent to die of scurvy in Arctic lumber camps: this is called elimination of unreliable elements.

Adam Johnson in *How to Sell a Genocide: The Media's Complicity in the Destruction of Gaza*, examined over 12,000 anti-

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cles from the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, CNN.com, Politico, Axios, *USA Today*, and the Associated Press, along with 5,000 TV segments aired on CNN and MSNBC. His

carefully researched book is a damning indictment of the “liberal” media's justification of the genocide.

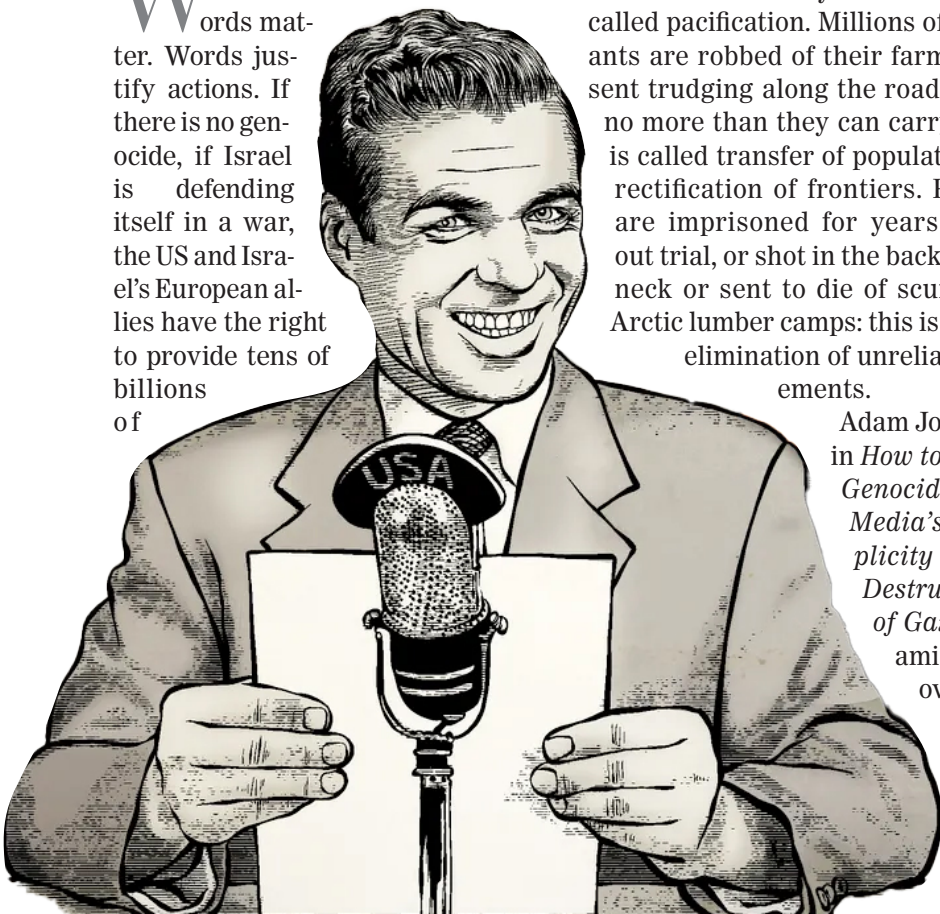
CNN and the *New York Times* instructed their editors and journalists that attacks could only be attributed to Israel after confirmation from the IDF and GPS coordinates. Johnson quotes a source at CNN:

“Whether it's in the newsroom or in the field, we couldn't credit anything to Israel unless we were held to this impossibly high bar of having to call it an ‘explosion,’ until we geolocated the site of the explosion, sent the coordinates to the Israelis and asked them for comment.”

CNN journalists reporting on Israel and Palestine must submit their work for review to the network's Jerusalem bureau prior to airing. The CNN bureau, like all news bureaus in Israel, is required to abide by restrictions imposed by Israeli military censors.

The very few Palestinians who appear on CNN and other legacy media outlets, are routinely asked – usually before they are even permitted on air – if they “condemn” Hamas. Guests who express even tepid criticism of Israel are asked whether Israel “has a right to exist.”

No one is ever asked if they condemn Zionism, apartheid, ethnic cleansing, genocide or Israel's 100 year war on Palestine. Nor are they asked if the Palestinians have a right to defend themselves – which under international law they do, in-



cluding with weapons.

Our domesticated journalists and news organisations are, as Robert Fisk pointed out, “prisoners of the language of power.” They dutifully parrot the official lexicon. This makes them not only propagandists, but accomplices to genocide.

Those who protest the genocide, including students on university campuses – many of whom are Jewish – are smeared as “ Hamas supporters” and “antisemites.” Journalists ferret out Zionist students, usually found ensconced in campus Hillel houses, who claim to be “fearful for their safety,” because of the protests. The media pays little attention to the rise in anti-Muslim bigotry or the repression meted out to student protestors, which includes not only police brutality and 3,000 detainments and arrests, but suspensions, probations, expulsions, withholding of diplomas and the firing of sympathetic faculty.

Slogans which call for Palestinian liberation – including “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” – along with the Palestinian flag, have been criminalised.

The message is clear: Jewish lives matter. Palestinian lives do not.

“The reports of UN agencies, of respected human rights monitors, of medical journals, and of professional medical personnel, are generally treated with respect and given prominence in the mainstream media,” writes the historian Rashid Khalidi in the introduction to Robin Anderson’s book, *The Complicit Lens: US Media Coverage of Israel’s Genocide in Gaza*:

Not in this war: instead, if such sources are cited at all, equal media treatment is given to the outrageous slanders and calumnies against these organisations and individuals, smears that are produced

in profusion by Israel’s legion of professional propagandists and its myriad of defenders in the US. Besides smearing critics of Israel’s genocide as supporters of Hamas or terrorist sympathisers, the main weapon in their arsenal of defamation is their systematic and outrageous misuse of the deadly accusation of antisemitism.

The massive defections of readers and viewers from mainstream media to social media platforms that do not filter news through the Israel lobby, the US government or corporations, are a stark indicator of the media’s bankruptcy. The response to these defections has been “platformicide” – the use of algorithms, shadow banning, restriction of live streaming capabilities and the closing of accounts by social media giants such as Facebook, Instagram, X, YouTube and TikTok, to dramatically reduce the reach of reporting on Palestine.

This censorship is part of a coordinated effort to hide the horror of the genocide from the public.

By constantly referencing Oct. 7, the Western media decontextualises the genocide. It ignores Israel’s 19-year siege of Gaza. Oct. 7 is characterised in the Western media as “unprovoked.” Israel’s massacres of unarmed Palestinians in Gaza in the winter of 2008 and 2009, along with its attacks on Gaza in 2012, 2014 and during the Great March of Return in 2018 and 2019 are ignored.

The 1948 Nakba – when European Zionists seized more than 78 percent of historic Palestine, violently expelled 750,000 Palestinians, destroyed more than 530 Palestinian villages and killed 15,000 Palestinians – is rarely referenced. Sev-

enty percent of those driven from their homes in 1948 were forced into Gaza.

The Zionist project is predicated on fostering historical amnesia.

“Once Hamas was established as a brutal, terrorist group whose members gleefully tortured, dismembered, and beheaded babies without conscience, no further explanation was needed,” writes Anderson in her book. “The media simply avoided reporting Israel’s history of violence and as a result, establishment media also avoided the conditions of everyday life for Palestinians.”

The fiction that there is currently a ceasefire in Gaza – Israel has killed at least 1,286 Palestinians and injured 4,257 since it supposedly went into effect – has become the excuse used by Western media to turn its back on Gaza. This genocide denial has characterised the coverage since its inception. It masks not only Israel’s crimes, but Israel’s stated intention to ethnically cleanse all Palestinians from Gaza. It effectively neuters international law. And it makes a mockery of the profession of journalism.

When the last act of ethnic cleansing happens, Western media will, I am sure, continue to bombard us with Israeli agitprop, euphemisms and clichés.

It will justify the genocide until the end. **CT**

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The fiction that there is currently a ceasefire in Gaza has become the excuse used by Western media to turn its back on Gaza

The gloves are on! ICE brings out shock weapons

How much more power will Americans be willing to place in the government's hands before they finally recognise what is being built around them?

“Electric shock has long been a common method of inflicting torture or other forms of ill-treatment worldwide. While electric shocks are sometimes inflicted using makeshift equipment – for instance, car batteries, mains wires or cattle prods – a wide variety of electric shock devices are specifically designed for and marketed to law enforcement.”
– Amnesty International

This is what comes of giving a lawless agency unlimited funds to build detention centres, terrorise communities, and act as a secret police force.

Anything goes: Masked raids. Unmarked vehicles. Warrantless arrests. Racial profiling. Sweeping surveillance. Detention camps. Excessive force. Citizens dragged off the streets. Protesters targeted. Congressional oversight obstructed. Government agents operating behind masks while refusing to identify themselves or explain the authority under which they act.

Now add electric shock gloves to the arsenal.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement is preparing to spend as much as \$20 million to equip its agents with thousands of gloves capable of delivering painful electric

shocks through direct contact with a person's skin.

The devices are called G.L.O.V.E.s – Generated Low Output Voltage Emitters – and the government has dressed them up in the predictably sanitised language of the police state as “conductive distraction and de-escalation devices.”

Don't be fooled by the benign-sounding euphemisms. These are pain-compliance weapons.

ICE agents wearing the gloves will be able to touch a person's exposed skin and deliver an electric shock intended to compel obedience.

White House border czar Tom Homan has been remarkably candid about the purpose: “It's another device to help someone get compliant when they are not.”

There is that word again: compliance. It has become one of the most dangerous words in the vocabulary of the American police state.

Increasingly, government agents are being taught – and the public conditioned to accept – that refusal

Don't be fooled by the benign-sounding euphemisms. These new gloves are pain-compliance weapons

to immediately comply with a government agent's command is sufficient justification for force.

Question an officer. Hesitate. Pull away. Protest. Demand to know why you are being detained. Refuse to surrender your phone. Attempt to record an arrest. Insist on your constitutional rights. Fail to obey quickly enough.

The government's answer is increasingly the same: comply or die – comply or suffer the consequences. Now those consequences may come through the touch of a gloved hand.

The Trump administration insists that these shock gloves offer ICE agents a less lethal alternative to guns, tasers and pepper spray. Certainly, if the choice were truly between an electric shock and a bullet, the less lethal option would be preferable.

But that is not the real choice confronting us. The question is whether an agency with ICE's record of abuse, secrecy and constitutional violations should be entrusted with yet another tool that makes it easier to inflict pain in order to force submission.

The problem is not merely the weapon. The problem is who will be



wearing it. ICE has already demonstrated what happens when government agents are empowered to treat noncompliance as a threat.

A recent ACLU review of more than 1,200 immigration-enforcement incidents documented hundreds of instances in which agents pushed, shoved, tackled or pinned people, along with dozens of incidents involving tactics capable of restricting breathing. Chemical agents were deployed hundreds of times. The incidents included US citizens caught up in immigration operations and families confronted by armed and masked agents.

Inside ICE detention facilities, the record is equally disturbing. Internal ICE documents reviewed by the *Washington Post* revealed 1,460 re-

ported use-of-force incidents between January 2024 and February 2026. During the first year of Trump's second term, detention staff used force 37 percent more often than during the preceding year, while the number of detainees subjected to force increased 54 percent.

In some cases, detainees were asking for food, water, medical attention or their personal belongings. In others, they were protest-

The Trump administration insists that these shock gloves offer ICE agents a less lethal alternative to guns, tasers and pepper spray

ing the conditions under which they were being confined. One group at a Georgia detention centre was pepper-sprayed after refusing to return to their cells while complaining that they had not received medical care.

The official justification was chillingly familiar: to “gain compliance and control.” That is precisely why ICE’s new shock gloves should concern anyone who cares about civil liberties. Less lethal does not mean less abusive. Indeed, the danger with so-called less-lethal weapons is that because they are perceived as safer than firearms, government agents may become more willing to use them in circumstances that would never

justify deadly force.

A gun is obviously a weapon.

A baton is obviously a weapon.

A taser is obviously a weapon.

An electrified glove can look like an ordinary piece of equipment until the moment an agent lays a hand on you.

The shock ends when contact ends. The devices reportedly do not incapacitate a person in the way a taser can, and supporters emphasize that they generally do not leave burns or obvious contact marks.

That is supposed to reassure us. It should do the opposite.

Any government technology capable of inflicting intense pain while potentially leaving little visible evidence of its use demands extraordinarily strict controls, transparency and accountability.

ICE has demonstrated little reason to believe those safeguards will exist. When accountability disappears, anything goes.

This is an agency whose detention centres remain largely closed to public scrutiny, whose internal reports have obscured or omitted serious uses of force, and whose agents have repeatedly operated in ways that make meaningful public accountability difficult.

Even members of Congress attempting to exercise their constitutional oversight responsibilities have been blocked from entering ICE facilities.

Meanwhile, ICE has built an expansive surveillance dragnet incorporating facial recognition, licence plate readers, cellphone tracking and massive databases capable of locating and monitoring people across the country.

Put all of these pieces together and the picture should disturb Americans regardless of their views on immigration.

Immigrants may be the government's primary targets today. They will not necessarily be the only targets tomorrow

Masked agents. Hidden identities. Mass surveillance. Unmarked vehicles. Expansive arrest powers. Mass detention. Weak oversight. Billions of dollars in new funding. And now the ability to deliver electric shocks at the touch of a hand.

This is no longer merely an immigration enforcement bureaucracy. It is the architecture of a national police force.

Increasingly, ICE is being positioned to serve the role that secret police forces have historically served in authoritarian systems: operating with extraordinary powers, obscured identities, limited accountability, and a broad mandate to identify, track, detain and remove people whom the government has designated as undesirable.

This does not mean America has suddenly become Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia or some other totalitarian regime. History rarely repeats itself so neatly.

What history does teach, however, is that authoritarian governments do not begin with death camps and firing squads.

They begin by normalising powers that once would have been considered intolerable.

They begin by identifying a population that can be stripped of rights with minimal political consequences. They begin by convincing citizens that extraordinary government powers are necessary because the people being targeted are dangerous, criminal, foreign or undeserving. They begin by making government agents harder to identify and harder to hold accountable. They

begin by expanding detention. They begin by expanding surveillance. They begin by lowering the threshold for the use of force.

And they teach the public that obedience is the price of safety.

ICE is serving as the prototype for what a much broader system of authoritarian enforcement could look like.

Immigrants may be the government's primary targets today. They will not necessarily be the only targets tomorrow.

The constitutional danger has never depended on whether one sympathises with the first people subjected to government abuse. The question is whether we allow the government to acquire powers that can eventually be turned against anyone.

Once the government normalises masked federal agents carrying out warrantless sweeps, what prevents those tactics from being used in the name of fighting drugs? Or terrorism? Or political extremism? Or civil unrest? Or public health emergencies? Or whatever crisis comes next?

Once the government builds massive databases capable of tracking people's movements and associations, those systems do not disappear when immigration enforcement changes. Once detention infrastructure is built, it can be repurposed. Once federal agencies are allowed to operate outside meaningful oversight, restoring those restraints becomes extraordinarily difficult.

Once Americans accept the principle that government agents may inflict pain merely to secure "compliance," the Constitution has already lost critical ground.

And once anything goes in the name of immigration enforcement, there is little to prevent those same

powers from being repurposed in the name of the next crisis.

This is why the debate over ICE's electric shock gloves cannot be reduced to a technical discussion about whether one weapon is safer than another.

The gloves are merely the latest manifestation of a far more dangerous philosophy of government.

It is the philosophy that says government knows best. That government commands must be obeyed. That government agents should be feared rather than questioned. That constitutional rights become negotiable whenever officials invoke public safety. That accountability is an inconvenience. And that force is an acceptable substitute for consent.

This is precisely the mentality the Constitution was intended to restrain.

The Fourth Amendment does not say obey first and challenge the government later.

With every expansion of government power we are told that it will be used sparingly, responsibly, against people who deserve it

The First Amendment does not protect only speech that government agents find agreeable.

The Fifth Amendment does not permit government to dispense with due process because officials have decided someone probably does not belong here.

And the Constitution contains no exception allowing government agents to punish people simply because they fail to show sufficient deference.

Yet that is the direction in which the American police state continues to move.

We are told not to worry because the weapons are "less lethal." We are told not to worry because the raids target immigrants. We are told not to worry because the sur-

veillance is necessary. We are told not to worry because the detention centres are temporary. We are told not to worry because good people who follow the law have nothing to fear.

We have heard all of this before. Every expansion of government power comes wrapped in assurances that it will be used sparingly, responsibly and only against people who deserve it.

Then the definition of who deserves it expands.

Government power does not police itself. Neither will ICE.

The gloves are off.

The question now is how much more power Americans are willing to place in the government's hands before we finally recognize what is being built around us.

CT

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‘Let’s just embrace a Mediterranean lifestyle’

Media commentators still won’t accept that their pathetic refusal to accept the reality of climate change won’t help us manage a real threat to humanity

Britain can’t stop climate change. Let’s just embrace a Mediterranean lifestyle.”

This has to be a serious candidate for the most foolish comment ever made publicly by a British newspaper editor. Allister Heath, editor of the *Sunday Telegraph*, opined: “We’ve lost the war against global warming – so we should ditch net zero and learn to handle hot weather.”

One might wonder which trench Heath occupied in the “war against global warming,” given that the *Telegraph* titles have spent decades in the climate-denial camp.

From his privileged position of comfort and wealth, he added: “Yes, climate change will inflict many well-rehearsed costs on Britain, and there will be plenty of losers, but it is pointless seeking to prevent the inevitable.”

And: “It’s time to accept this sobering reality, cut our losses, cease tilting at (and building) windmills, ditch the despicable con that is net zero, and learn to cope with, and whenever possible, even enjoy, a warmer, drier, more volatile Mediterranean climate, if that is indeed to be our fate.”

Capitalism, the very system of planet-devouring economics that brought us here, will, Heath confidently proclaimed, “drive down

emissions, when the time and, crucially, price are right.”

He continued: “Without minimising the severe downsides of global warming, especially on some [sic] poorer nations, many in Britain would enjoy the kind of warmer climate predicted by modellers... construct more pools...plant more Mediterranean vegetation.”

Jason Hickel, an economics anthropologist professor at the Institute of Environmental Science and Technology in Barcelona, noted of Heath’s article: “This grotesque headline is from the *Telegraph*. 3,000 people in Britain have been killed in heatwaves this year so far. 20,000 in Europe.

“Even if Britain did get to ‘embrace Mediterranean life,’ what about the actual Mediterranean, what do they get to embrace? What about India?”

Hickel added: “The indifference of the British elite toward mass suffering is astonishing.”

As for “the despicable con that is

**Jason Hickel added:
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net zero,” it is a basic law of physics that to stop global warming, humanity has to cut net emissions of global-warming gases to zero. James Hansen, the NASA scientist who sounded the climate alarm to US Congress in 1988, said three years ago that “we are damned fools” for not acting upon warnings over the climate crisis. According to Hansen, there is a huge amount of global heating “in the pipeline” because of the continued burning of fossil fuels. Moreover, he argued, the Earth is “very sensitive” to the impacts of this; far more sensitive than the best estimates presented by the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

He said: “We are beginning to suffer the effect of our Faustian bargain [in burning fossil fuels]. That is why the rate of global warming is accelerating.”

Hansen added: “We are in the early phase of a climate emergency. Such acceleration is dangerous in a climate system that is already far out of equilibrium.”

A new study by the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research shows that global warming has accelerated sharply since 2015. Stefan Rahmstorf, one of the study’s co-authors, warns that: ‘How quickly the Earth continues to warm ultimately depends on how rapidly we reduce global CO2 emissions from fossil fu-

Britain can't stop climate change. Let's just embrace a Mediterranean lifestyle

We've lost the war against global warming – so we should ditch net zero and learn to handle hot weather

ALLISTER HEATH



Climate change is real, but Britain can do almost nothing about it. The war against global warming has been lost, with only grievous collateral damage to show for it. We have crippled British industry, hammered consumers and pushed the grid to the brink of blackouts, all with no discernible impact on global emissions and the climate. It's time to accept this sobering reality, cut our losses, cease tilting at (and building) windmills, ditch the despicable con that is net zero, and learn to cope with, and whenever possible, even enjoy, a warmer, drier, volatile Mediterranean climate, if

of China. The Communist state accounts for 32.1 per cent of emissions, pumps out 262 per cent more CO₂ than it did in 2000 and is making the most of net zero in Britain and Europe to bolster its own industry and its grip over crucial commodities.

All of our efforts at carbon reduction (and those of the European Union) have been offset many times over by the increase in Chinese emissions; Britain could return to the Stone Age and cut our GDP to zero, and it would still make only a trivial difference.

Even a global government would not have enforced net zero. Forget worthless treaties: such a body would have been controlled not by Western eco-warriors but by a coalition of Chinese, Russian, Indian, African and South American powers desperate for growth.

Our lanyard classes should have known better than to believe they could re-engineer the world from Whitehall, or even No10 North. Net zero represents the pinnacle of arrogance, a case study in the illusion of control, a landmark in human vanity and, in Britain's case, exposes a ludicrously exaggerated view of our own

Yes, climate change will inflict many well-rehearsed costs on Britain, and there will be plenty of losers, but it is pointless seeking to prevent the inevitable. There will also be benefits and winners. We need to help the former group, but focus on maximising the size and gains of the latter.

Adaptation, not useless mitigation, is the rational solution to unstoppable climate change. We need universal air-conditioning and irrigation. We must stop building horrible flats that turn into furnaces in the summer, and construct more pools. We may have to plant more Mediterranean vegetation. We need to maintain our fields and forests to reduce the risk of fires, and purchase firefighting planes – lessons that the French are also promising to take more seriously. We will require water reservoirs, pipelines and desalination plants; for that, abundant, cheap electricity will be a must.

Above all, we need to rid ourselves of the green energy subsidies and grid integration costs that will exceed £40bn a year by 2030-31, according to the Prosperity Institute, as well as the entire apparatus of net zero, from the Climate Change Committee to binding carbon budgets, restrictions

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Without minimising the severe downsides of global warming, especially on some poorer nations, many in Britain would enjoy the kind of warmer climate predicted by modelers, if we (and the authorities) were properly equipped to cope. Millions head to the sun on holiday or to retire. In the era of air conditioning, refrigeration, greenhouses and reverse osmosis, southern regions of the world are blossoming economically and geopolitically, from Dubai to Florida to South-East Asia to Israel.

In the US, the Sun Belt has boomed for decades, with the Snow Belt in decline and millions moving to Texas, Florida and the Carolinas, from the North-East and Mid-West. In France, the population has grown strongly in Occitanie, Nouvelle-Aquitaine and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, while northern regions such as Hauts-de-France have suffered. In Germany, southern states such as Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg have recorded strong population gains since reunification, while many northern and eastern states have declined. There is no point resisting the shift to the south.

Yet fuelled by a neo-Victorian moral

EMBRACE A MEDITERRANEAN LIFESTYLE: 'Foolish comment' by the Daily Telegraph as UK reels under record heat

els to zero."

In his *Telegraph* piece, Heath adopted a classic diversionary tactic: blame China and growing nations of the Global South: "All of our efforts at carbon reduction (and those of the European Union) have been offset many times over by the increase in Chinese emissions; Britain could return to the stone age and cut our GDP to zero, and it would still make only a trivial difference."

He continued: "Even a global government would not have enforced net zero. Forget worthless treaties: such a body would have been controlled not by Western eco-warriors but by a coalition of Chinese, Russian, Indian, African and South American powers desperate for growth."

Heath neglects to mention the great strides that China, for example, is taking in boosting its renewable energy capacity and decarbonising its economy. Moreover, many climate scientists disagree with cyn-

ical attempts to whitewash Britain's historical responsibility for global warming since the Industrial Revolution.

Dr Ella Gilbert, a climate scientist and board member of the Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit, a non-profit UK organisation conducting independent research and analysis on energy and climate, said:

"The climate crisis is a global problem and every country should be acting to reduce emissions and build a greener global economy, especially those with the largest historical responsibility, like the UK. The climate doesn't care where car-

Heath neglects to mention the strides that China is taking in boosting its renewable energy capacity

bon comes from – whether [it's] from multiple countries responsible for smaller proportions of emissions, or China."

She added: "The UK may account for just one percent of current global emissions, but we're responsible for 100 percent of our own emissions, and we have the opportunity to show global leadership by bringing them down."

While Heath pines for a mythical Mediterranean lifestyle, soaking up sunshine and sangria by his pool, in the real world the Mediterranean will increasingly suffer ever more intense and persistent heatwaves of over 40C, with extensive wildfires forcing people to flee from their homes. In Britain, the hard reality is that residents could face food shortages this year after severe droughts in parts of England, as well as climate-driven crop failures in major importing countries.

Heath's article suffered such a severe public backlash that the original title of: "Britain can't stop climate change. Let's just embrace a



RECORD BAKER: UK front pages signal the hottest day on record. But they are still downplaying the future shock . . .

Mediterranean lifestyle” was later changed to: “We’ve lost the war against climate change. Time to scrap net zero.”

A *Medialens* followers on X asked if we could fathom Heath’s mindset. We pointed out the famous dictum by the US writer Upton Sinclair: “It is difficult to get a man to understand something, when his salary depends upon his not understanding it.”

Meanwhile, Andy Burnham, the new Prime Minister and putative saviour of the genocide-participating Labour government, has maintained a stoic silence over the summer’s European wildfires and wider climate breakdown. Instead, he has promised he will take a “pragmatic” approach to oil and gas drilling in the North Sea.

The dictionary tells us “pragmatic” means: “dealing with things sensibly and realistically in a way that is based on practical rather than theoretical considerations.” There

is, of course, nothing “sensible,” “realistic” or “practical” about burning yet more oil and gas, raising carbon emissions and global temperatures, and leading to ever-greater climate emergency death tolls.

Burnham says that: “There is a resource there [in the North Sea]. When people are struggling, we can’t ignore that.”

He would like us to believe that being “pragmatic” is about helping the ordinary man and woman in the street, not the billionaire oil giants like Shell who have just posted profits of £7.37 billion for the April-to-June period, double last year.

Zack Polanski, leader of the Green party in England and Wales, condemned Burnham’s comments: “Al-

“It’s not too late for Burnham to do the right thing and commit to leaving dangerous fossil fuels in the ground

lowing new oil and gas drilling in the North Sea will worsen the climate breakdown, putting more lives at risk and doing untold damage to our economy. It’s not too late for Burnham to do the right thing and commit to leaving dangerous fossil fuels in the ground.”

Compare Burnham’s version of reality with that described a few years ago by Noam Chomsky: “I don’t know what word in the language – I can’t find one – that applies to people of that kind, who are willing to sacrifice the literal – the existence of organised human life, not in the distant future, so they can put a few more dollars in highly overstuffed pockets. The word ‘evil’ doesn’t begin to approach it.”

CT

David Cromwell & David Edwards are co-editors of Medialens – www.medialens.org. Edwards is the author of A Short Book About Ego... and the Remedy of Meditation, Mantra Books, 2025. He is also author of the forthcoming political science fiction novel, The Man with No Face, to be published by Roundfire Books in March 2027

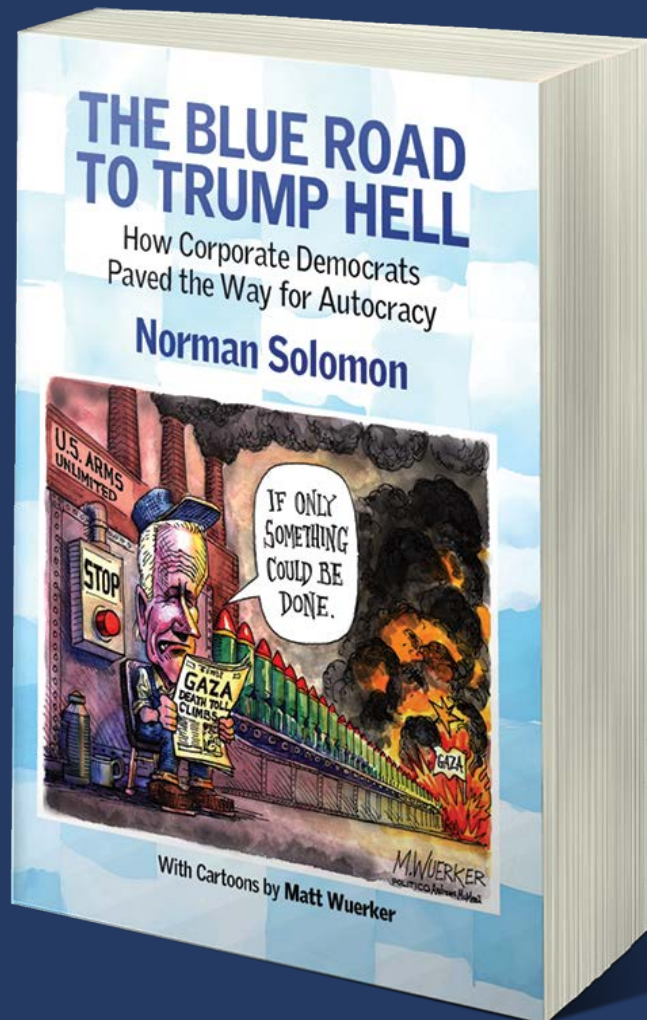
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SPECIAL REPORT

‘The most important half hour in my life’

After a four-day trial at Kingston Crown Court in England ending on Friday, August 21, 2026, UK political activist **Tony Greenstein** was acquitted of inviting support for a proscribed terrorist organisation [Hamas] under Section 12(1) of the Terrorism Act 2000. The charges related to three blog posts he made following the Hamas-led attack on Israel in 2023. Facing up to 14 years in prison after describing the breakout from the Strip as a “Gaza ghetto uprising,” Greenstein delivered the following closing speech to the jury

1. Why I am speaking to you myself

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury.

First, a word about why I have chosen to address you in person rather than through my barrister, Lawrence McNulty. My decision implies no criticism of Lawrence. It is simply this: when my liberty is at stake, I wish to speak to you directly rather than through someone else. It is my words that are on that indictment. When someone is accused of meaning something he never meant, he should be the one to tell you what he meant.

I am not a barrister. I hope you will bear that in mind. However what I will do is speak from the heart. I am 72 years old. I have been arguing in public for more than 50 years, and this may be the most important half hour of argument in my life.

The Prosecution say that I invited people to support an Islamic group called Hamas while accepting that I didn’t support Hamas myself. Think about that for a moment. Why should I invite people to support a group that I don’t support and never have supported? It is illogical.

According to the Prosecution’s opening statement, although I did not mention Hamas by name in my X posts, my “reference to support for the ‘Gaza ghetto uprising’ – in that specific context, on that specific date – can only have meant support for Hamas”.

In order to sustain their case the Prosecution fixated on one sentence in a blog of 10 pages, concerning the congratulation of Hamas for a well planned and audacious attack. In other words if you ever say anything

about any group then you are a supporter if not a recruiting sergeant.

In fact my blog is cut off in the Bundle. At 1,060 words. In fact it went on for some 1,935 words, including a leading article from an Israeli paper, *Ha’aretz* and two contributions from American Jewish political scientist, Norman Finkelstein. That is in addition to 2,000 words in the comments.

Even on the one piece they produced they had to ensure that you didn’t see all of the evidence. Let alone produce uncut the 15 or so blogs that demonstrated that I didn’t support Hamas and never had.

According to the Prosecution logic, Kemi Badenoch supporting Starmer’s decision not to make British bases available for the war against Iran means she supports the Labour Party.

It is like being told that the Pope has supported abortion by helping out women who have had abortions. The fact that you support one action of a group does not mean that you therefore support the group itself. That logic escapes the Prosecution, although it should be obvious that supporting one action of a group doesn’t mean supporting the group itself.

2. Who I am

Before I make my case, you are entitled to know a little of my background. Firstly I am a parent, with four children, three sons and a daughter. Although I am separated from my wife, Fiona she was in the public gallery yesterday with our 35-year-old son Daniel who is



NOT GUILTY: Tony Greenstein outside Kingston Crown Court after his acquittal on terror charges

severely autistic. Fiona and myself are Daniel's carers.

I went to Brighton Polytechnic in 1974 where I obtained an honours degree in Applied Sciences. In 1996 I obtained an MA in Colonial History from Birkbeck, London University, and between 2000-2 I obtained a law degree from Sussex University and the following year a Legal Practice Certificate from the College of Law in Guildford.

Apart from being a blogger I have written for, among other papers and web sites, The Guardian, New Statesman, Tribune Magazine (Orwell), Al Jazeera, Middle East Eye, Middle East Monitor, Open Democracy and many others

I was born in 1953, in the shadow of the Holocaust. The Holocaust had ended only eight years before. My father's parents came to England from Poland and left the rest of the family behind. Nearly all of them died in the Holocaust in Treblinka extermination camp. My father mentioned it just once in his whole life. Just one sister, who jumped off a deportation train, is known to have survived. Over three million of Poland's 3.3 million

Jews were murdered.

My father was Rabbi Solomon Greenstein. In 1936 he stood at Cable Street, where the working people of the East End – Jews and dockers together – stopped Oswald Mosley's blackshirts from marching through a Jewish neighbourhood. That is the house I was raised in. Not a house of quietism. A house where you stood in the road.

So I am extremely aware of the trauma caused by the Holocaust. It is not history to me. It is the empty chairs at my family's table. But what I have always fought against was those who used the murder of six million Jews in order to justify the murder and genocide of others. That is why I authored *Zionism During the Holocaust*.

I was brought up as a religious Zionist. In 1967, when Israel captured what is now known as Gaza and the West Bank, I shared in the joy of fellow Jews. None of us knew then what horrors would be visited on the indigent Palestinians who lived there.

Then, at the King David School in Liverpool, I was

'The profile of the average terrorist has changed too. It used to be a 31-year-old man. It is now more likely to be a 59-year-old woman'

asked to take part in a school debate on whether Zionism was Right or Wrong and, because nobody else would take that side, I agreed to play devil's advocate. In the course of researching the topic I suddenly realised that I had grown up with a series of fabrications and lies. The refugees of 1948 had not left voluntarily on the orders of the Arab regimes. They had been expelled at the point of a gun, and after a series of massacres. The documents that proved it were classified and are still classified.

This was the pivotal moment of my life. From then on I became a Jewish anti-Zionist. And I learnt something my school had never taught me: that anti-Zionism had been the majority trend amongst Jews until the second world war. It is a Jewish tradition, as old as Zionism, and I stand in that tradition. Today 44% of young British Jews describe themselves as non- or anti-Zionist. We are not a curiosity. We are a tradition, coming back.

And I have lived that tradition the way most of our Jewish ancestors did. For 50 years I have opposed fascist groups on the streets. Because racism and fascism led to the holocaust. I was also a founding member of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign.

I am a Jewish socialist. The Palestinian organisation whose politics I have supported for decades is the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – secular, socialist, founded by a Christian Palestinian, George Habash.

Hamas is an Islamist movement. Its full name is the Islamic Resistance Movement. Ask yourselves – is a Jewish secular socialist who has spent 20 years criticising political Islam and Hamas a plausible recruiting sergeant for it?

And as you weigh that question, understand what it is to be me, standing in this dock. Someone who has spent 50 years fighting fascism on the streets of this country. I never imagined it could happen here in the mother country of democracy that I would be facing 14 years imprisonment for writing a blog and tweeting under the Terrorism Act 2000.

3. How this case came to you

At half past six on 20th December, 2023, a dozen counter-terror police raided my home, seized my electronic devices, and arrested me – on the basis of a single tweet posted a month previously. We live, ladies and gentlemen, in dystopian and Orwellian times.

When I applied for the return of my devices, the offic-

er in charge explained in a witness statement why they were keeping them. They needed, he said, to fully understand my “mind set and ideology” from my internet search history, and from how, “and indeed if,” I talk about Hamas with others away from the public domain.

Is it really the job of the police to act as amateur psychologists, inquiring into peoples' minds?

There might be a justification for all this if they thought I was going to set off an explosive device. But that is obviously not the case. It was the police themselves who gave me bail the same day, with three relatively trivial restrictions – which, on appeal, Westminster magistrates watered down further. Clearly, they did not think I was a terrorist.

But the Terrorism Act has been creating a whole new category of terrorist. On the Home Office's own figures, arrests under the Terrorism Acts have leapt in 2024 from around 200 to more than 3,000 in 2025 – a more than ten-fold increase.

And the profile of the average terrorist has changed too. It used to be a 31-year-old man. It is now more likely to be a 59-year-old woman. You may ask yourselves whether the word “terrorist” has quietly been given a new meaning – and whether I am standing in front of you because of it.

And when they interviewed me, I did not hide behind “no comment,” as my solicitor advised me. I answered every question for over an hour, and came back three months later, voluntarily, and did it again. When they asked me directly whether I supported Hamas against the Israeli army, I gave them an answer I will repeat again, because it is my whole case:

“I would probably support the devil against the Israeli army. That doesn't mean I support the devil in itself.”

And if the devil exists it exists amongst those who prohibit anaesthetics entering Gaza so that children have to endure amputations without the benefit of pain relief. The devil exists amongst those who deliberately starve children to death because they rationalise that those children will only grow up to be terrorists. It exists among those who bomb tent encampments and literally burn children and their parents alive. It exists amongst those who call Palestinians ‘human animals’ the same phrase used by Himmler, the head of the SS about Jewish children in a speech on October 4, 1943 to senior SS Generals.

In a situation where there is a conflict, you support the oppressed rather than the oppressor. That is not

'The charge is not holding an opinion. The charge is inviting other people to support an organisation, Hamas. Those are two different things'

support for an organisation. That is a moral position – one, I might add, with a rather long Jewish pedigree.

4. What you are being asked to decide

Her Honour will direct you on the law, and what she tells you about the law you must take from her, not from me. But you know by now what the Prosecution must make you sure of, and it is worth setting out plainly, because everything I say from here on hangs from it.

They must make you sure of three things. That Hamas was proscribed on 7 October 2023 – that is agreed, and always was. That my words in fact **invited support for Hamas. And that I knew, at the time, that that is what I was doing.**

Three things. All three. Sure of each.

Now notice what is *not* on that list.

It is not on that list whether you agree with my opinions about Israel and Palestine. It is not on that list whether you find those opinions congenial, or offensive – some of you may find that they are. And it is not on that list whether Hamas ought to be proscribed. That is the government's decision. It is not mine, and it is not yours.

The charge is not holding an opinion. The charge is inviting other people to support an organisation, Hamas. Those are two different things – and every single question in this trial lives in the distance between them.

Hold on to that distinction, because I am now going to show you what I actually wrote.

5. What I actually wrote

This case hinges on three short posts and one article. That is the entire alleged crime. So let us read it – carefully, the way the Prosecution hopes you won't.

First. Hamas is not mentioned. Not in the first tweet. Not in the second nor the third. Not once. The Prosecution invite you to supply the name yourselves – because I did not supply it.

What I wrote was “the Gaza Ghetto Uprising.” And I chose the word *ghetto* deliberately, but not for the reason the Prosecution imply.

Let me explain, for those of you who do not know the history. In the second world war, the Nazis walled the Jews of Warsaw, half a million of them into a ghetto – a sealed district, starved and diseased, from which the trains left for the Treblinka death camp. And in 1943 the young Jews who remained did something nobody expected. With a handful of smuggled pistols, against

tanks and the SS, they rose. They knew they could not win. They rose because it was better to die resisting than to be led away quietly. It is one of the proudest moments in Jewish history.

The last surviving commander of that uprising was a man named Marek Edelman. And in his old age, Edelman wrote to the Palestinian resistance and addressed them as fellow fighters – much to Israel's annoyance. When he died, Poland gave him a state funeral, a 15-gun salute, the President gave the oration. Israel did not send the lowliest clerk at the Israeli Embassy. Edelman wasn't a Zionist.

Edelman, who led the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising against the Nazis, described Gaza as a ghetto. I have used his comparison for years before October 2023. Two million people, most of them refugees or the children of refugees, sealed into a strip of land under blockade for 16 years, where the majority are children who have never once been allowed out. When I wrote “ghetto,” I meant a ghetto. My blog supported the Uprising just as I would have supported the slave uprisings of the 19th century. That is a political opinion. It was a political opinion on 7 October 2023, and it is a political opinion now.

And here is the crazy thing. Read section 1 of the Terrorism Act 2000 and ask what it would have made of the Warsaw Ghetto fighters. If this Act had existed in 1944, they could have been classified as terrorists. So could the French Resistance. That is how widely this law is drawn – and it is worth remembering when you consider who it is now being pointed at. The definition of terrorism in the Terrorism Act 2000 is no definition at all. It has been widely criticised, both by the Supreme Court in *Gul* and also by the Independent Reviewer of terrorism David Anderson QC as he then was.

Second. “PLEASE SHARE.” The Prosecution say those two words are the invitation. Members of the jury, I have written a blog for 18 years. “Please share” means: Read my article, pass it on, argue with it. Asking people to read what you have written is not asking them to support an organisation. If it were, every writer in this country would be standing where I am standing. My purpose was not to invite support for anyone. If I had wanted people to support a particular group I would have said it. I often ask for support for things such as the Al Tafawk kindergarten in Jenin. Nothing in the wording suggests that. The posts were advertising my blog. That is what writers do.

And here is what that “recruitment campaign”

'Let it be clear that support for an action of a proscribed group is not the same as support for the group itself'

achieved. 56 views. 73 views. 58 views. Four shares between them. The Prosecution's case that this was an invitation to the public to support a proscribed organisation – is a fantasy that they have created out of nothing.

Third – the sentence the whole case rests on. *"Whatever criticisms one can make of Hamas, we should congratulate them on this well planned and audacious attack."*

Note the words: **"whatever criticisms."** Those are not the words of a recruiter. A recruiter does not open with criticisms of the thing he is recruiting for. Those are the words of someone who has spent 15 years making those criticisms in public – and I will show you the receipts in a moment.

And *"well planned and audacious"* – that is a description, not an endorsement. October 7 *was* well planned, and it *was* audacious. Israel had constructed a five billion dollar electronic fence, complete with drones, sensors and automatic machine guns, and it was breached in minutes. Retired generals said the same thing on television that week. Nobody raided their homes at dawn.

As for *'Hamas should be congratulated'* it is so obviously a figure of speech, not meant literally, that I am surprised that the Prosecutor doesn't blush every time she argues this.

And I will tell you what else I wrote that day, in the same article and its comments. I wrote that the retribution of Israel would be *bloody and savage*. I wrote to a commenter: *"Graham, believe you me, I am apprehensive of the days ahead and Israel's potential for genocide."* Apprehensive. Those are not the words of someone celebrating. They are the words of someone who feared exactly what was coming – and who, you may think, has been proved catastrophically right.

But you would not have read the latter comment because the version of the blog in your Bundle is only half the original (1,060 words as opposed to 1,935 words). The comments underneath were another 2,000 words and they too were not in your bundle. Why? Because it is clear that the conversation didn't mention anyone joining Hamas. Anyone with eyes to see would understand that the blog was not an invitation to join Hamas.

It takes a certain malevolence to read that into the blog. And let it be clear that support for an action of a proscribed group is not the same as support for the group itself. Expressing an opinion or belief that is shared by or coincides with the aims of a proscribed organisation is not the same thing as expressing support for the organisation itself. That is or should be common

sense. It is also good law as in the case *ABJ* decided recently in the Supreme Court.

So ask yourself the only question that matters. Where, in any of this, is the invitation? Did I ask anyone to join anything? Did I ask for money? Did I ask a single human being to take a single action – other than to read an article?

You may take those three posts and that article into your deliberation room and read them from beginning to end as many times as you like. You will not find it. It is not there.

6. *Twenty years of my own headlines*

The Prosecution must also prove that I *knew* I was inviting support for Hamas. So let me show you what I have actually written about Hamas, over 20 years, under my own name. These are the titles of my articles:

- *We Support the Palestinian People of Gaza – not Hamas.* March 2009.
- *Islamic Fascists Attack Children's Summer Camp in Gaza.* May 2010.
- *Hamas – Speaking with a Forked Tongue.* December 2010.
- *The Lousy Hamas Government.* February 2011.
- *Hamas Prevents Palestinian Students Studying Abroad.* August 2011.
- *Hamas's Attack on NGOs Resembles That of Israel.* August 2011.
- *Hamas Pays the Price of Forced Islamicisation.* April 2013.
- *How Israel Helped Create Hamas.* July 2014.
- *Hamas Does Its Best to Make Palestinian Lives a Misery.* February 2018.
- *Abbas and Hamas – Abuse and Torture of Palestinians.* October 2018.

Ten years of headlines. I called them Islamic fascists. In print. In public. Under my own name. Do the titles of those blogs indicate support for Hamas?

And these are only some of them. You can be sure that if my writings helped the Prosecution in any way, they would have given them to you to read rather than objecting to them.

I have spent my political life supporting the secular, socialist tradition of Palestine. So when the Prosecution tell you that on the morning of 7 October 2023 I woke up and decided to become a recruiter for the Islamic Resistance Movement, you are entitled to ask: on what planet?

'The comparison is not between organisations. It is between governments and how easily they attach the word *terrorist* to whoever opposes the policy of the day'

7. Why, then, am I here? – One law for some

So if the words don't say it, and the record contradicts it, you are entitled to ask the obvious question: why is this Prosecution happening at all?

Let me answer it with a comparison, and you may draw your own conclusions.

Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham – Al Qaeda's franchise in Syria – was a proscribed organisation in this country until October of last year. While it was still proscribed, and while its leader, who became Syria's President, still had a 10 million dollar bounty on his head, eminent British public figures – Alastair Campbell, Tony Blair's former spin doctor, and Rory Stewart, a former Conservative MP – travelled to Damascus to conduct a friendly, filmed interview with him. This is a regime whose forces have killed thousands of Christians, Druze and Alawites because of their religion. They came home and were effusive in their opinions about him, to audiences of hundreds of thousands.

Nobody raided their homes at half past six in the morning. Nobody seized their devices to investigate their "mind set and ideology." A decision was taken not to trouble them.

Now, when a law is implemented against certain people and not others, that goes against the first principle of the rule of law. Either laws are applicable to all, or to none. To apply them only to those whose opinions the government of the day disagrees with – that is the hallmark of a police state, not a democracy.

And you do not have to take the point from me on trust, because the same double standard is written on a larger canvas. Parliament made genocide and war crimes offences under the International Criminal Court Act 2001. Yet successive British governments have gone on supplying arms to what most of the world regard as a genocide in Gaza, and yet no minister has ever stood where I am standing.

This is not a new story. Nelson Mandela – whose statue stands today in Parliament Square, facing the Houses of Parliament – was described by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan as a terrorist, and the movement he led as a terrorist movement. If this Act had been in force in those decades, that movement would have been proscribed – and anyone in Britain who wrote "we should congratulate them" would have been at risk of standing exactly where I am standing now. Mandela himself said:

"The West sees liberation movements as terrorist

movements – and that is why I am accused of supporting terrorism."

Now let me be precise about what I am saying, because it is not what the Prosecution may pretend I am saying. I am not comparing any organisation to Nelson Mandela. The comparison is not between organisations at all. It is between governments – then and now – and how easily they attach the word *terrorist* to whoever opposes the policy of the day. Today, Mandela is widely admired. The label of terrorism should be applied to those who are terrorists not those who are not.

8. The state has always prosecuted opinions

Judges have always insisted that the trials before them are not political. They said it at the trial of Emmeline Pankhurst in 1912. Chief Prosecutor and Attorney General Sir Rufus Isaacs, emphasised that:

'Suffrage is not the issue, it is the criminal behaviour of the suffragettes and their incitement to partake in militant activity at which 54 windows were broken.'

That was also the view of the Judge, Mr Justice Coleridge, who handed out a sentence of nine months to be served in the second division of prison, despite the plea of the jury for clemency.

The Home Secretary immediately stepped in to have Pankhurst transferred to the First Division of prison – a division reserved for *political* prisoners. A century ago the state admitted what today it denies: that some prisoners were political.

And consider what this country has done, within my lifetime, with laws that prosecuted people for what they were and what they said. The law of blasphemous libel – repealed. The law of gross indecency, which criminalised sexual conduct between men and destroyed Oscar Wilde and Alan Turing was also repealed, and more than repealed: under the Alan Turing Law of 2017, every conviction was wiped out, as if it had never existed. Parliament itself has accepted that there are times when it has made mistakes, and the law of the day was wrong.

The Editor of *Gay News*, Dennis Lemon, was the last person sentenced to six months imprisonment suspended in July 1977 for blasphemous libel for suggesting Jesus was gay. The judge at his trial, Alan King Hamilton, stated that homosexuality was responsible for the downfall of the Roman Empire. The judge at Oscar Wilde's trial bemoaned the fact that he could only sentence

'The role of the Judge is concerned with the law. The role of juries is to ensure justice is done'

him to two years in prison.

Judges have nearly always been the fiercest opponents of free speech. The reason is simple. As the *Law Society Gazette* pointed out on 25 June 2019 'Senior judges 'most socially exclusive' of all professionals, 75% are Oxbridge educated and 65% having gone to private school.

When the state prosecutes opinions, it always says it is prosecuting something else. And usually it eventually, apologises but usually too late.

Freedom of speech in this country was not granted to us from above, and it did not arrive with the European Convention. It was won through political struggle – at the Peterloo Massacre in 1819, where cavalry rode down women and children; by the Chartists at Newport who were brutally slaughtered for peacefully demanding democratic reforms in 1839. People died for the right I exercised on 7 October 2023: the right to publish an opinion the government doesn't like.

Benjamin Franklin warned: "*Whoever would overthrow the liberty of a nation must begin by subduing the freeness of speech.*" George Orwell – a man who knew something about both socialism and dystopia – put it in one sentence:

"If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear."

And if you want the alternative philosophy – the philosophy of this Prosecution – it was stated with admirable honesty by the Ugandan dictator Idi Amin:

"There is freedom of speech – but I cannot guarantee freedom after speech."

Ladies and gentlemen, you may think that sentence sums up a dawn raid over a tweet rather well. I was arrested, not for anything I did, but for what I said. This case is not about terrorism. It is about freedom of speech.

This is why the government's own Independent Reviewer of terrorism legislation, David Anderson KC, was critical of the new terrorism laws. I quote from his *2014 Report on Terrorism Legislation*:

a) To afford over-broad discretions to Ministers, prosecutors and police is undesirable in itself. As the Supreme Court maintained in *R v Gul*, 91 it leaves citizens in the dark and risks undermining the rule of law.

b) To render people subject to the terrorism laws whom no sensible person would think of as terrorists risks destroying the trust upon which these special powers depend for their acceptance by the public.

I have committed no violence. I have threatened no one. I have incited nobody. Nobody in this courtroom

suggests otherwise. I wrote an article.

And for that article, I face a maximum sentence of 14 years in prison. Fourteen years. For three posts and a blog. Ask yourself what kind of country are we becoming to send a 72-year-old Jewish grandfather – a carer – to prison for 14 years over three tweets and a blog article?

9. You – the lamp that shows that freedom lives

Which brings me, finally, to you, members of the Jury.

Let me be clear about what I am asking of you, and what I am not. I am not asking you to set aside the law. Her Honour will direct you on the law, and you should follow her directions. I am not asking you to agree with my politics. You may think I am wrong about everything I believe, and it would change nothing about your task.

The role of the Judge is concerned with the law. The role of juries is to ensure justice is done. That is why successive governments have slowly whittled away at the right to trial by jury. The previous Justice Secretary David Lammy wanted to abolish them for half of those who are now entitled to a jury. I have no doubt that although Andy Burnham has stopped these proposals they will return.

Because here is what the law itself gives you. **You are the sole judges of the facts, of the context, and of the meaning of words.** Not the Prosecution. Not the police analyst who selected the phrases. Twelve ordinary people, precisely because ordinary people know what words mean. The Prosecution does not get to dictate that "*please share my article*" means "support Hamas." That question belongs to you, and to nobody else in this building.

That is not an accident of our constitution. It is the whole point of it. Lord Patrick Devlin – one of the greatest judges this country produced – said:

"Trial by jury is more than an instrument of justice and more than one wheel of the constitution: it is the lamp that shows that freedom lives."

The jury, he said, is "*an insurance that the criminal law will conform to the ordinary man's idea of what is fair and just.*"

Dame Heather Hallett, who sat on the Court of Appeal for 14 years, 2005-17, gave the 2017 Blackstone Lecture on the role of the jury. She is Chair of the COVID Inquiry and previously of the inquiry into the terrorist atrocity on 7.7: She said:

'Understand that your answer will not stay in this room. If these three posts are terrorism, then the word has a new meaning for everyone in this country'

"A jury may refuse to convict in spite of the law and the evidence because it concludes that the law is an unjust law. The jury passes its verdict on the law. Secondly, it ensures that the Prosecution and the judge are on trial."

There is a plaque inside the entrance to the Old Bailey. It commemorates the most famous legal case of all – Bushell's. The jury in 1670, refused to convict two Quakers, William Penn and William Mead, for the crime of unlawful preaching. For that refusal the jurors were locked up for two nights without food, water, fire – or a chamber pot. They did not budge. And out of their stubbornness, in Bushell's case, came the right that you now hold: the right of a jury to deliver its verdict according to its conscience and its convictions, and to answer to no one for it.

I am asking you to do something far more modest than those 12 did. I am asking you to read three posts and an article, in their full context, with your own common sense – and to answer honestly the only two questions in this case. Were those words an invitation to support Hamas? And was I, a Jewish socialist with 20 years of published criticism of Hamas, *knowingly recruiting* for them?

And understand that your answer will not stay in this room. If these three posts are terrorism, then the word has a new meaning for everyone in this country. Every student who shares an article. Every pensioner who retweets the wrong opinion. Every writer, every blogger, every one of your neighbours with a social media account and a view about a war. Can it really be the law of England that any of them – that any of *you* – will be condemned to 14 years of prison for a tweet? You have the power, today, to answer that question. Whatever you answer is, it will be remembered long after this trial is forgotten.

If you are left in doubt as to whether I was genuinely inviting people to support a proscribed organisation – you must acquit. That is not politics. That is the law.

10. Finally

I told you at the beginning what it is to be me, standing in this dock. Let me end with why it should matter to you.

I was born eight years after the gates of the camps were opened. It was British soldiers who opened the gates at Belsen. Whatever quarrels I have had with British governments – and you have heard today that I have

had many – I have never once doubted what that meant.

I do not say that to ask for your sympathy. I say it because my family's history taught me one thing above all others. The moment that matters is never the loud one. It is the quiet one – when ordinary, decent people are asked to go along with something that does not sit right with them, and they do, because it is easier, because the language is technical, because someone in authority has assured them that it is necessary. I ask you to ensure that no one else goes through what I have experienced.

Not merely a case like this hanging over my head for three years, but the harassment that I have experienced from the State. Five times in the past two years I have been debanked for what is called 'regulatory reasons.' First was Nationwide Bank which I had been with for a quarter of a century, then HSBC which closed an account my wife and I opened for our son, Daniel's disability benefits. Then First Direct which I had been with 33 years, just three fewer than the bank itself existed. Then this year Santander and Kent Reliance building society.

It is clear that some agency of the state – the NCA most likely – fed false and malicious information to the banks and under money laundering legislation they are not allowed to tell me.

Lord Lane, Lord Chief Justice of England from 1980 to 1992, put it best of all in a House of Lords debate on April 7 1989:

"Loss of freedom seldom happens overnight. Oppression doesn't stand on the doorstep with toothbrush moustache and swastika armband – it creeps up insidiously... step by step, and all of a sudden the unfortunate citizen realises that it is gone."

You are 12 ordinary people, and this is one of the quiet moments. You are not being asked to make a protest, or to change any law. You are being asked to look at three short messages and one article, and to answer, on your conscience: was that an invitation to support Hamas – and did I know that that was what I was doing?

Although I am on trial today, it is really freedom of speech in this country that is on trial. The pretext for this attack is terrorism. However that is all it is. A pretext. I will finish with a quote from one of America's founding fathers, Benjamin Franklin, who said:

"Those who trade liberty for security deserve neither".

Thank you members of the jury.

TONY GREENSTEIN

CT

Small towns defy Big Tech's data centre plans

How working class people across the US are pushing back against the march of AI technology – and winning

It's a hot day, but it's cool inside Carol Newsome's thick-walled family cabin. Outside the trees are humming with cicadas and peepers in the humid North Carolina heat. The kitchen table is crowded with donuts and coffee mugs. A group of Rural Hall locals sit around it, chatting. They talk like close friends, but just a few months ago many of them didn't know each other yet, even though most of them have lived here for years.

They've been brought together under the most surprising circumstances, something they never could have predicted: Their tiny little town has been targeted for a huge data centre.

"When I first heard what they were proposing, I said, oh no, we don't want this at all," explains retired truck driver Randy Adams, in his soft southern accent.

Local residents are now fighting Project Iron Spur tooth and nail. They've been showing up to town council, holding protests, writing letters to the editor, posting yard signs, filing public records requests, knocking on neighbours' doors, and hosting huge community meetings.

"I told my mom: 'We can't let this happen,'" says Jean Jones, whose property sits across from the proposed build site. "We've got to organise.

As data centre companies race to

secure land, small-town residents across the US have been getting a crash course in local democracy. 67 percent of proposed data centres are planned for rural communities. In places like Jackson, Georgia (population 5,970) and Cave City, Kentucky (population 2,404), local residents are pushing back against Big Tech coming to their towns.

Traditionally sleepy small-town council meetings have been packed with protestors, and residents have been practicing serious organising and mobilising in numbers more often associated with urban centres.

Why are data centres the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back? Corporate America has never been kind to small towns.

Over the decades, rural America has been treated like a colony by big businesses, a place to extract from. Drive through any small town and you'll see the Dollar General stores that have shut down mom-and-pop stores; look at the brown, polluted water running out of taps as factories chug away upstream; witness the opioid crisis that has ravaged them; ask about paychecks so low you can't believe this is the Unit-

ed States. Rural people have always fought against these things, but the data centre pushback has taken on a life of its own.

In places like Lochbuie, Colorado, a galvanising issue is water. Reporting in June revealed that two-thirds of new data centres are to be built in some of the driest places in the country, including places currently experiencing serious drought.

"Water is a huge issue," Mayor Jamie Jeffrey of Lochbuie explains. "With these data centres, you can get into open- and closed-loop discussions, but no matter what, it impacts the water. And if I'm trying to think about the future of this town and the people who live here, I know that water is one of the most important resources we have – and could lose."

In other places, it's about electrical prices.

"If the data centre is built, our electric prices will skyrocket," says a woman who asked not to be named. She helped circulate a petition against a proposed center in Front Royal, Virginia, earlier this year. "I already can't afford my power bill – what will I do?" she asks.

Back in Rural Hall, North Caroli-

Corporate America has never been kind to small towns. Over the decades, rural America has been treated like a colony by big businesses



THE FIGHTBACK STARTS HERE: Rural Hall residents sit around the table in Carol Newsome's cabin in North Carolina

na, one of the main issues local residents have around the data centre proposal is related to land use. “We need things like more affordable housing to be built on that land,” says Jean Jones. “Things that fit here and are for the people.”

But beyond water, electricity, and land use, there is something more existential behind these fights. There’s general anxiety about Big Tech, AI, and, more broadly, profit and technology; a real sense that the “winners” of the future have already been decided.

This Big Tech future is largely being built without the consent of the people it impacts. “They’re shoving AI in everything, so it’s unavoidable,” says Andrew Rojas, of Rural Hall. “Later on, they push it on us, like, oh, well, you’re relying on data centres, so that’s why we have to build them. But we didn’t ask for this

technology, we didn’t ask for it to be in everything, and we certainly didn’t ask for this.”

In these small towns, data centres represent the lopsided economy; and they also represent a loss of the ability of people and towns to make their own decisions about their own futures.

In Lochbuie, Marylou Withrow says she has been asking neighbours what they want to see built in town. Many have told her that they want more activities for kids, especially teens; maybe a youth centre, a rec centre, and more places to go and things to do. Other people talk about the need for a grocery store, a coffee shop, a bakery. Marylou would like a library.

But no one mentions a data centre. “That is something a big company that doesn’t live here wants, not us,” she says.

The resistance is working. In August, Lochbuie’s town council passed a five-year data centre moratorium

– the longest in Colorado so far. Two weeks earlier, Front Royal passed the data centre ban demanded in a local petition. And in Rural Hall, Carol, Randy, Jean, and Andrew all rejoiced when Project Iron Spur’s rezoning request was denied.

Nationally, hundreds of data centre proposals have been derailed through local organising, blocking about \$64 billion in tech dollars. Over 500 moratoriums have been passed, and polling finds that 63 percent of voters support pausing the construction of AI data centres for at least a year. Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York have also introduced a national data centre moratorium.

As I sit in Carol’s cabin, listening to the passion of these Rural Hall neighbours and witnessing their powerful organising, I don’t think this resistance to data centres.

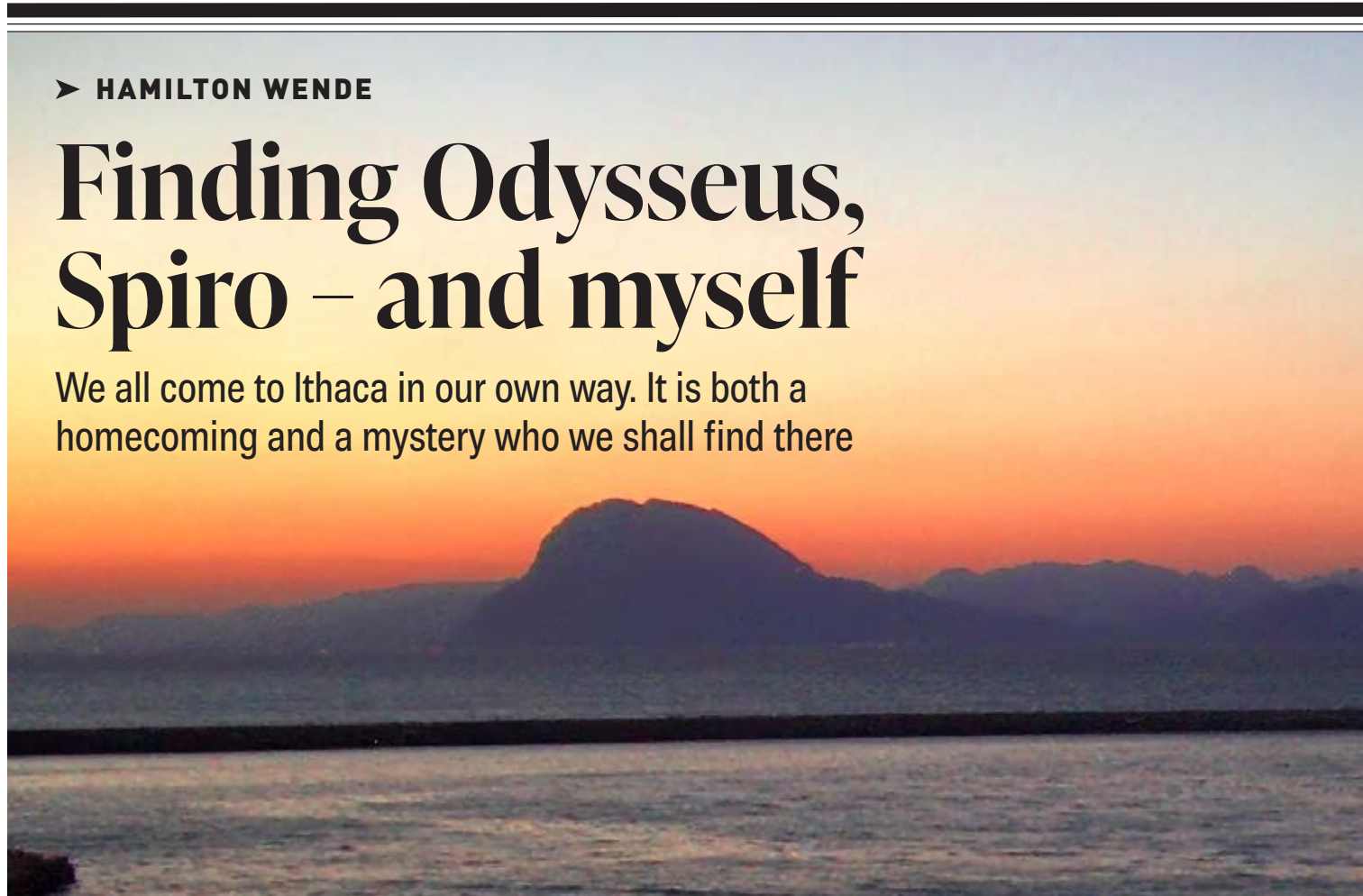
People are now asking: Will it be big corporations and the wealthy elite who chart our town’s future, or will the rest of us, those of us who live here finally get our say? **CT**

● Read more of Gwen Frisbie-Fulton's *Working Class Stories* at www.workingclassstories.substack.com

► HAMILTON WENDE

Finding Odysseus, Spiro – and myself

We all come to Ithaca in our own way. It is both a homecoming and a mystery who we shall find there



A strange whistling came out of the scrub around me. There was the answering bleat of a goat. A tumult of copper bells began their rhythmic, hollow clanking as the herd began to scabble up the steep mountainside in the fading light of the late afternoon sun.

Standing alone on the rocks I saw a man holding a walking stick and whistling for the goats to come home. Far below, the sea was spread out like a still blue mirror. He was staring at the horizon, watching the luxury yachts and the ferry boats that cruise the Ionian Sea. He was wearing a faded baseball cap. Underneath its shaded brim his face was tanned and creased.

I was on the island of Ithaca, said to be the home of the ancient Greek hero, Odysseus. I had been walking for hours, looking for the Cave

of Eumaeus, the faithful swineherd, the place where, according to Homer, Odysseus sheltered when he returned home from his years of wandering after the siege of Troy.

I thought of my own journey here. It was a wandering pilgrimage to come to the realm of my Homeric hero, the now famously “complicated” Odysseus.

On the ferry that brought me through the Ionian islands I spoke to one of the ship’s officers. His name was Apostolis. We were both older than the 20-something backpackers around us and we got chatting. “Come,” he said, ushering me onto the deck and pointing at the green coastline.

“You must look for the cave where Odysseus met his shepherd Eumaeus. They say it is the real one, but I’m not sure.” He stared over the dark sea. Like me he was

on a mid-life journey of his own, sailing these waters for decades, searching for something he wasn’t sure he would find. “I have so many questions, but I haven’t found answers. I am looking for truth, but I haven’t found it.”

I thought, too, of the words of the poet Cavafy:

“Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey.

Without her you wouldn’t have set out.

Christopher Nolan’s wildly popular film *The Odyssey* is a 21st century take on this ancient journey. Many have criticised it for lacking the emotional depth of the original poem. But the *Odyssey* is not one tale set in stone for all time. It is an ancient story from the Bronze Age, a tantalising bridge between myth and archaeology. It emerged as oral history around 800 BCE and

Arriving at Ithaca at dawn
– a poetic homecoming



was first written down two centuries later. Today's IMAX retelling is, for me, a valid interpretation of this ancient poem. Modern technology is reinvigorating its ancient roots – the story told in sound and colour in the urgency of real human voices, as it was once recited in rhythmic cadences illuminated by the shadows of flaming hearths.

We docked at the port of Vathy. In the 19th century Lord Byron fell in love with its rugged beauty, and he considered buying the entire island. He visited here in 1823 and famously said: "If this island belonged to me, I would bury all my books here and never go away." A moving but also strange sentiment of love for the island.

The beaches here are rocky and

somewhat inaccessible. Shaded olive groves cling to the steep rocky slopes, goats and donkeys wander down the narrow pathways through the mountains, the sound of their bells clanking in the soporific afternoon heat.

The island is filled with sites that some claim correspond closely to descriptions of Ithaca written by Homer. The possible site of Odysseus' palace is a Mycenaean ruin dating back some 3,000 years and is perhaps the most famous of them.

**I thought of my journey,
It was a wandering
pilgrimage to the realm
of my Homeric hero,
the now famously
'complicated' Odysseus**

But I was following Apostolis' advice and went looking for the cave of Eumaeus, the faithful swineherd, where he had kept his animals with his hut above it. Odysseus hid there while he planned to reveal himself to Penelope his wife and his son Telemachus.

A humble, secret place that held an inner mystery of Odysseus' suffering and doubt, it was here that he hid his true identity until he finally had to reveal it to his son. Fathers, sons and their selves both hidden and revealed to one another – a pain as old as history. That conflict intrigued me, as I think it had Apostolis.

Somehow, though, I had got lost and had been walking for three hours until a lone man greeted me. The man with the goats looked at me. We were standing on the cliff above what is said to be the Cave of



The view from the Cave of Eumaeus and the ancient memories of Odysseus

Eumaeus. “Lots of people come here looking for this cave,” he said. “But you came the long way round.”

He took a box of cigarettes from his shirt pocket. As he lit one, I noticed that his palms were tough and his fingers thick. The top of his thumb had been cut off, leaving just a thin rim of nail. They were the hands of a man who had done hard, physical work all his life.

We sat together on the rocks. In front of us the sun sank over the calm glittering sea. Behind us was a ramshackle farmhouse and a grove of ancient olive trees. The cicadas fell silent as the air began to cool.

Spiro was the man’s name. He was 51 and he had been the captain of many ships before leaving the sea and returning home to Ithaca. This was his place on earth, and he was a man deeply conscious and proud

of his identity and of all the layers of meaning that went with it.

“The story of Odysseus,” he said. “I read it at school, and I know it well. It’s maybe not a myth. It’s real. It is our history.”

He paused for a moment and then asked me. “How long is the history of Greece? You tell me.”

“Perhaps 3,000 years,” I replied.

He shrugged. “Maybe more. Greece is the birthplace of democracy. And now the Americans want to tell us about it. What is theirs,

The man with the goats looked at me. His palms were tough, and his fingers thick; the hands of a man who had done hard work all his life

to be the big man and tell everyone what to do? That is democracy?”

He shook his head. “You know I was born here.” He pointed with his scarred thumb. “In that house. It was the house of my grandfather, and before that. Our family has been living in this same house for 200 years or more. I started working on the farm when I was eight. I used to go to school and then help my father with the goats. When I was a teenager, I went to sea. I worked on ships for 27 years. I went all around the world. Africa, Japan, Australia. I saw the world and then I came back to the house of my grandfather.”

Centuries of fathers and sons sharing this humble abode.

“For me,” he went on. “Life was always hard work. The young people don’t know how to work anymore. They want to sleep late and go for



Ruins of Odysseus' real palace? A remnant of grandeur underlying the movie set



Spiro: "When you get home," he said, "you can tell them you found Odysseus"

Hamilton Wende

coffee in town. They want money, but they don't understand how that money will get into their pocket."

So, I couldn't help thinking, even after 3,000 years the old conflict between the generations that intrigued even Socrates and Plato has not been solved. But there was more than frustration and bitterness to Spiro.

There was a touch of eccentricity and of the romantic in him, and he genuinely treasured the old life and the values that had guided him through all its hardships.

"I have kept the house the way it was 200 years ago. Except I put in electricity. For the children, I have three TVs now – but I hate them. They wash your mind and then they can do what they want with you. When TV came here, life changed on this island. In the old times we

had no TV, no cars, no electricity. Now we want those things, and because we want them, we make trouble for ourselves."

Spiro had finished his cigarette. He stood up and began to search the scrub for his goats. It was time for me to go.

Spiro smiled wryly before I turned to walk back. "When you get home," he said, "you can tell them you found Odysseus."

CT

Hamilton Wende is a multi-award winning writer, filmmaker and journalist who has made films for National Geographic, CNN, BBC and Al Jazeera amongst others. He has published nine books based on his travels as a war correspondent in Africa and the Middle East, and two children's books. His website is www.hamiltonwende.com

Living (all too uneasily) in an AI world

How America's President deals with Ificial Intelligence (leaving out the Art)

For once, let me write about something I know almost literally (and rest assured that I don't mean literally) nothing about. This ancient fellow – I'm now 82 years old and, like all of us, growing older by the day – is thinking – and you probably won't be surprised to learn that, even at my age, I can still think less than artificially – about artificial intelligence, which has, of course, been reduced to AI by those who suspect that they already know all too much about it.

What brought this up for me? Well, one of my political favourites (or maybe he's just a favourite, plain and simple), Bernie Sanders, has called for a moratorium on data centre construction across this country and only recently took on AI directly, writing a letter to the CEOs of three of the country's leading AI companies, asking them: "Mr. Altman, Mr. Amodai, and Mr. Zuckerberg: In the interest of humanity, stand by your words. Pause AI development... It is not too late to avoid disaster. Stop building machines that humans cannot control."

Of course, I couldn't agree more with him, though I wonder if it isn't already too late.

Let me start by telling you this: I made a decision that I would never purposely use AI in my lifetime.

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm all too aware that, if I last another decade or so, I will undoubtedly be in a fully AI-fied world, whatever that might prove to mean. And I already know that, if I ask my computer to look for something online for me, AI instantly lends me a hand (if you can even say that AI has a hand), responding to my desires, whether I like it or not, with a pile of information and an "AI Overview," and there's not a damn thing that I can do about that.

Obviously, I have what I do (and don't) know about this ever-changing world of ours on my mind right now.

As a start, if you think about it for a moment (I mean really think about it), just calling it artificial intelligence is weirder than anyone seems to let on. The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines the word "artificial" above all else as "made, produced, or done by humans especially to seem like something natural" and, of course, as it notes, it can also mean "fake."

In fact, what about renaming it Unnatural Machine Intelligence (UMI), or Strange Machine Intelligence (SMI) or even Eerie Machine Intelligence (EMI)? Or what about just Ificial Intelligence (II), since

this old guy at least can't see any "art" in it at all?

And as you might imagine, there's still a fair amount that I can figure out for myself with only the slightest helping hand from AI (if at all). I don't need artificial intelligence, for instance, just my very own limited version of intelligence, to know that Donald Trump is the most disturbingly artificial president in our history, period.

And it's all too clear to me that, whatever else AI may do (or undo), its data centres are going to use energy in a staggering fashion and so, undoubtedly, continue to pour fossil fuels into the atmosphere for the foreseeable future, lending us humans a distinct helping hand in overheating this planet in a big-time fashion.

In short (or do I mean in all too long?), Artificial Intelligence is guaranteed to add immeasurably to the Anything But Artificial Heat (ABAH) on this already Distinctly Overheating Planetary Environment (DOPE) of ours. After all, we already know that July was the hottest month (no, not just the hottest July, but the hottest month!) in the recorded history of weather in the United States. In fact, as far as we know, as long as humans have been on this continent, ever.

And, honestly, how intelligent is a

result like that, artificially or otherwise? Truly, I don't need artificial intelligence, just my very own limited version of intelligence, to know that that's anything but good news for my children and grandchildren, no less everyone else on this world of – I was going to say “ours,” but I can't help wondering whether that's faintly accurate anymore.

Maybe I have to start saying, “of AI's.” And, of course, above all else, AI already uses energy as if there were – gulp! – no tomorrow (or perhaps as if tomorrow were indeed going to burn us humans off Planet Earth).

And of course (yes, again!), if I needed any confirmation of such fears, all I'd have to do is turn to You Know Who (and crew). After all, as Tony Romm wrote at the *New York Times* recently,

“To the administration, AI can do little wrong. In recent weeks, Mr. Trump and his top aides have dismissed the suggestion that widespread automation could carry real negative consequences for families, businesses, and the broader US economy.

Even as the electorate grows uneasy about the technology – and the data centres that power it – the president has only hardened in his view that A.I. will supercharge everything from medical research to military action.”

After all, Trump has already claimed that AI is “bigger than anybody ever thought possible.” And he's also said, “The way you look at AI, whoever wins AI just wins. It's that big. It's bigger than the internet by many times.”

As Prabhjote Gill pointed out at Yahoo/Finance recently, our president is AI all the way (to the bank). “The way you look at AI,” he's said,



“whoever wins, AI just wins. It's that big. It's bigger than the internet by many times.”

And on the subject of this country and AI, he just couldn't be prouder: “So, we are leading with AI on China. Nobody thought that was possible. The reason was energy. China can create unbelievable amounts of energy, and they use coal, and they use oil, and gas, and they make a lot of windmills, but they don't use too many windmills because they're smart. Because wind is a disaster.”

Yep, in case you didn't realise it, while wind (power) may be a disaster for our president, the same isn't true of AI. In fact, I'm anything but surprised to learn that the people handling his money have evidently already invested it in the AI universe in a significant fashion. No

'The way you look at AI, whoever wins AI just wins. It's that big. It's bigger than the internet by many times' – Donald Trump

surprise there, since he's already claimed that, in the end, it could prove “bigger than oil.” (And according to a headline at Yahoo/Finance, “President Donald Trump owns roughly \$5M in surging AI stock” – and in case you wondered, that's five million dollars!)

And to put AI in a Trumpian context, once upon a time, for our windy president, you couldn't have gotten bigger than oil.

And believe me, I don't need artificial intelligence, just my very own limited version of intelligence to know that it's anything but good news that

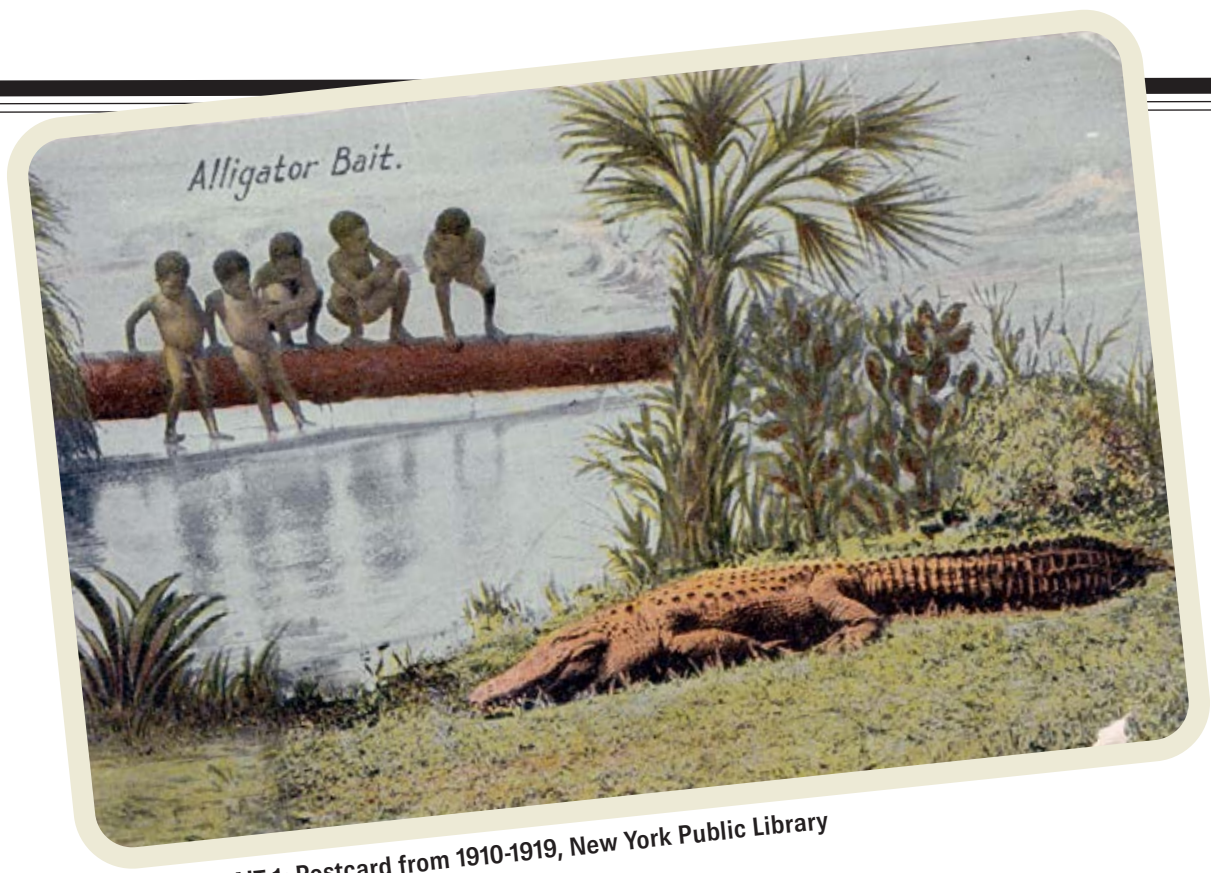
(as I mentioned) this July was indeed the hottest month ever recorded in this country.

And that our all too windy president, while milling around at the White House or, for that matter, at his estate in Mar-a-Lago, Florida, is clearly exhibiting his own remarkable version of DAUI when it comes to this planet. No, that isn't a Hawaiian word but – in case you're not up on your acronyms – it is short (at least in my own personal dictionary) for Distinctly Artificial UnIntelligence.

Perhaps the whole phenomenon should indeed be renamed Ificial Intelligence or II. After all, there can be no question, with Donald Trump in the White House, that the art part of it is distinctly from another era, given his own version of Artifishy Intelligence.

Now, excuse me if I take a moment to myself just to think (anything but artificially) about this ever-stranger world of ours. **CT**

Tom Engelhardt created and ran the website TomDispatch.com for 25 years. His latest book is A Nation Unmade by War. Tom's post-TomDispatch essays are at <https://tomengelhardt.substack.com>



ALLIGATOR BAIT 1: Postcard from 1910-1919, New York Public Library

► MARK BORROW

The forgotten racial history of Alligator Alcatraz

Detention centre planners may not have tried to invoke racial stereotypes, yet historical symbols often outlive the context in which they were created

America's infamous migrant detention centre known as Alligator Alcatraz is closed, but much about it remains unresolved. There are lawsuits over detainees' treatment, environmental claims over damage to protected wetlands and uncertainty about the future of the airstrip it was built on.

One aspect of the South Florida facility has drawn far less attention, though: the name itself, and the long history of associating alligators with racist ideas about peo-

ple of colour.

As an historian of wildlife, the environment and American culture, I have studied the cultural and environmental history of the American alligator.

My research shows that the species has carried a variety of meanings in the United States, ranging from a prized source of leather for luxury fashion to an emblem of Florida identity. Less well known is the reptile's role in the nation's history of racial stereotyping. For generations, alligators featured prom-

inently in imagery intended to demean Black Americans.

Whatever the intentions of those who named and promoted the facility, Alligator Alcatraz echoed a long tradition of using alligators in ways that have reinforced racist imagery and dehumanising stereotypes.

Located on a remote landing strip surrounded by Big Cypress National Preserve, about six miles north of Everglades National Park, Alligator

Alcatraz sparked controversy from the beginning. Critics argued that the detention center housed immigrants in unsafe and inhumane conditions, limited access for lawyers and family members, and imperilled sensitive, federally protected wetlands. Seminole and Miccosukee people denounced it as a threat to their sacred homelands. Some detractors even characterised it as a concentration camp.

In a lengthy exposé for *The Atlantic*, journalist Eric Schlosser decried the facility as “a uniquely cruel publicity stunt with an absurdly high price tag.” Based on figures from court filings and Florida’s grant application to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Schlosser estimated that it cost about US\$500,000 a year to hold a single immigrant at Alligator Alcatraz. By contrast, Florida spends only \$30,000 a year to confine someone in a state prison.

The contentious centre was the brainchild of Florida Attorney General James Uthmeier, who pitched the idea to federal officials in June 2025.

Uthmeier’s catchy name was meant to grab attention, particularly from President Donald Trump, who had recently proposed reopening the notorious, long-shuttered Alcatraz federal penitentiary in San Francisco Bay. During his first term, Trump had also reportedly floated the idea of constructing a moat filled with “snakes or alligators” to fortify his southern border wall. Keenly attuned to the power of provocative branding, Trump embraced Uthmeier’s proposal.

Once given the green light, the administration of Gov. Ron DeSantis hastily built a makeshift detention center designed to hold several thousand migrants. After touring the facility shortly before the first detainees arrived, Trump declared, “We’re surrounded by miles of treacherous swampland, and the only way out is, really, deportation.”

He added, “You have a lot of bodyguards and a lot of cops that are in the form of alligators.”

Ahead of Trump’s visit, the Department of Homeland Security posted an AI-generated image of menacing alligators wearing Imm-



CELEBRATING: Donald Trump is joined by Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Kristi Noem, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, Acting Director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement Todd M. Lyons and Executive Director of Florida Division of Emergency Management Kevin Guthrie for a facility tour of “Alligator Alcatraz”

gration and Customs Enforcement hats as they stood guard outside the detention centre. To cash in on the idea, the Florida Republican Party also began peddling Alligator Alcatraz-themed merchandise, like T-

shirts, hats and beer koozies.

Whether he realised it or not, Trump’s depiction of alligators as enforcers of migrant detention echoed a much older tradition.

My research reveals that, as early as the 18th century, French explorers and naturalists began claiming that alligators and crocodiles showed a marked preference for attacking and consuming people of African descent. Plantation owners in the South eagerly repeated these stories because they discouraged enslaved people from escaping into marshes and swamps, where pursuing them proved difficult.

The idea gained much wider traction after the Civil War. As formerly enslaved people secured freedom and basic civil rights, pursued educational and economic opportunities, and gained political power, many white Americans sought to reassert white supremacy. They restricted voting rights, imposed Jim Crow segregation and inflicted racial violence.

They also employed demeaning racial stereotypes designed to humiliate African Americans while undermining their claims to freedom, dignity and citizenship. The growing association between alligators and black bodies was part of this larger campaign to reinforce notions of Black inferiority.

Many postwar accounts of alligator attacks centred on a dated racist slur that portrayed black children as less than human. Typically depicted with exaggerated features and ragged clothing – or no clothing at all – these children were often shown being chased by alligators or other wild animals. Such images rested on the dehumanising assumption that black children were

Tia Dufour, DHS.



ALLIGATOR BAIT 2: Photo from 1887 – Gift of Daniel Cowin to the International Center of Photography

incapable of experiencing pain or suffering in the same way as their white counterparts.

Soon, stories about hunters using black children as bait to lure alligators also began circulating. Some particularly improbable accounts claimed that African American mothers rented out their babies to hunters seeking to attract the reptiles.

These stories represented a grotesque inversion of the lived experience of slavery. For enslaved women, the forced separation from their children was among the institution's most devastating cruelties. By

suggesting that black women would willingly place their own children in mortal danger for profit, such narratives provided yet another means of humiliating, degrading and dehumanising African Americans.

By the late 19th century, these ideas had crystallised into the racial slur “alligator bait.” The phrase fused long-standing claims that alligators preferred black flesh with newer stories of black children being used to attract the reptiles. It soon became a fixture of American popular culture, appearing regularly in newspapers, editorial cartoons, postcards, photographs, songs and

motion pictures.

Such imagery remained widespread until the modern Civil Rights Movement rendered it increasingly unacceptable.

The architects of Alligator Alcatraz may not have consciously sought to invoke the history of “alligator bait” stereotypes. Yet historical symbols often outlive the contexts in which they were created, and the American alligator bears the imprint of a long racial history.

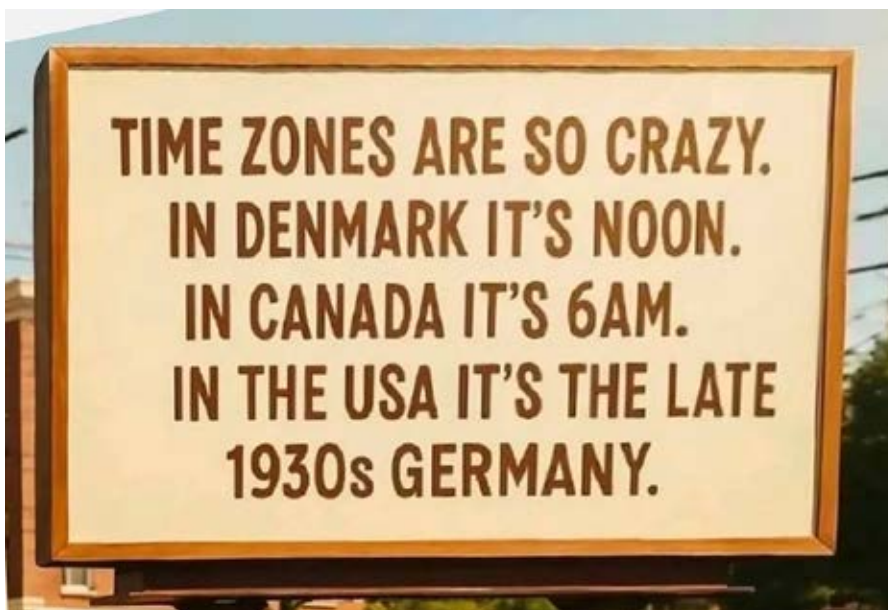
Alligator Alcatraz drew upon a symbol shaped by generations of racial exclusion and dehumanisation. In transforming migrant detention into political theatre, the now-closed facility revealed a troubling disregard for symbolism and history. It also betrayed the cruelty and indignity that spectacle-based approaches to immigration enforcement inflict on human beings.

The tents may be gone, but the racist historical echoes embedded in the name “Alligator Alcatraz” remain. **CT**

Mark V. Barrow, Jr. is Professor of History at Virginia Tech. He is the author of several books, including Gator!: The Making of America's Iconic Reptile, from First Encounters to Florida Man (University of Chicago Press). This article was first published at www.theconversation.com

► HOME TRUTHS

FROM THE INTERNET



► JOE ALLEN

Scan and destroy

Our culture – or what’s left of it – is being sketched in silicon and tossed into the fire

Book lovers are furious at the Anthropic company for scanning and shredding countless old volumes. Their ravenous Beast Machine was hungry for aged memes, so the AI company harvested old-school language from a billion yellowing pages, uploaded them to use as training data, and then destroyed the brittle remains.

Anthropic outsourced their literary holocaust – dubbed “Project Panama” – to a book-mulching company called ISBNdb, which specialises in transforming physical tomes into digital text.

This outrage serves as a small, concave mirror that reflects a much larger process. AI consumes culture on an industrial scale. It’s a form of memetic vampirism. Human artwork is sucked out of our collective neck, along with the uploaded details of our lives, our communications, our affinities and aversions, and quite often, our innermost thoughts. Vampiric bots rake over all this data, remix it, reinterpret it,

hallucinate a few novel details, then feed it back to us as memetic slop.

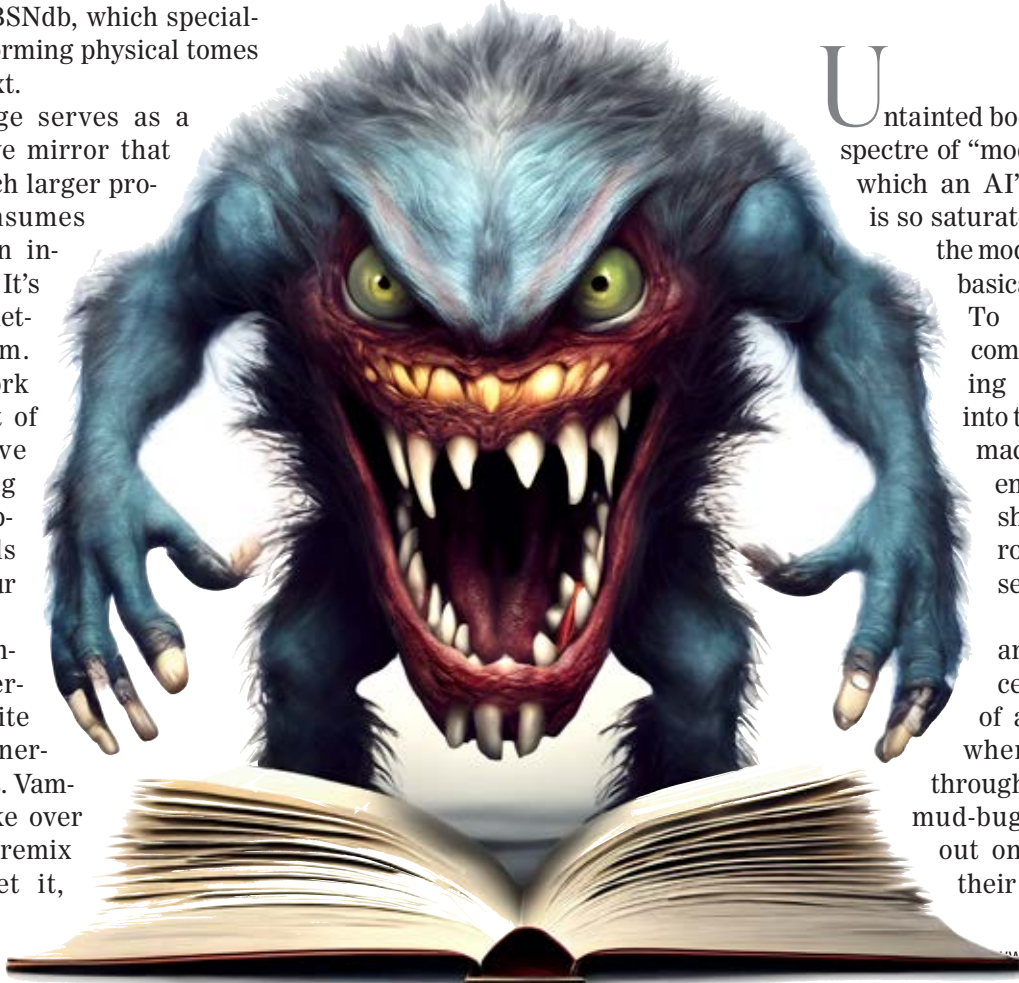
These AI vampires have been invited into our schools, medical facilities, global corporations, government agencies, military command centres, and most consequentially, into a billion smartphones, producing swarms of dead-eyed, blood-thirsty zombies shambling into the streets from their virtual graveyards.

The book-grinder uproar was kicked off by an in-depth investi-

gation from Emanuel Maiberg, published at *404 Media* in July. The details read like a dystopian pulp novel: “The world’s best AI training data is sitting on a shelf,” ISBNdb, a company that produces what it claims is “the world’s largest book database,” and that offers high-volume book acquisition services for AI companies, says on its site. ... ISBNdb explains that printed books published before 2022 are ideal for AI training data because they don’t include AI generated text.

Untainted books stave off the spectre of “model collapse,” in which an AI’s training data is so saturated with AI slop, the model being trained basically goes insane. To avoid this, AI companies are feeding pre-slop books into their newest slop machines. They’re emptying bookshelves to make room for more server racks.

ISBNdb’s scan and destroy process reminds me of a crawfish boil, where diners pick through a pile of boiled mud-bugs, pluck them out one-by-one, twist their little heads off,



suck the spicy juice out, free the meagre meat from its shell, munch down the morsel, then pluck out the next one, again and again, transforming crawfish into human vitality and drunken conversation.

So it is with ISBNdb's "destructive scanning." Stacks of out-of-print books are fed into a hydraulic machine. Their title-inscribed spines are sliced off neatly. The freed pages are fed into another machine, scanned in rapid succession, then turned into pulp. As Maiberg reports, the company's website waxes poetic about their recycling program. "It is the completion of a book's life cycle: from tree to knowledge to tree again."

They leave out the part where that uploaded knowledge is transformed into the lame, AI-infected books now cluttering Amazon search results.

Aside from its efficiency, this brutal process allowed Anthropic to circumvent an impromptu loophole in copyright law. As reported in the *Washington Post* last January, a federal judge ruled that destructive scanning didn't replicate copyrighted material illegally. According to the Honorable William Alsup, AI companies were just "transforming" each physical copy into a single digital copy. They merely used the resulting data as if they were teachers "training school children to write well."

No reasonable person would buy that shit, so ISBNdb offers its customers total anonymity through non-disclosure agreements. That policy worked pretty well, until Anthropic got hauled into court and sued for stealing people's intellectual property en masse.

"The optics problem is real," ISBNdb correctly states on its site, as proven by the hate being heaped on Anthropic. "AI company destroys two million books' is not a headline that generates sympathy."

The same should hold true for "AI company destroys two million jobs" or "AI company destroys a hundred million brains," but people still insist the AI industry's ongoing civilisational hack-a-thon is for our own good.

There is no running list of the books destroyed, so we're left to guess. Some morbid part of me imagines that a first edition copy of J. G. Frazer's definitive, if somewhat imaginative, 1890 classic *The Golden Bough* was among those scanned and shredded in this mass sacrifice. Conceptually, destructive scanning

is like the pagan King Kill rite that Frazer described, where an aging divine ruler would be dragged off his throne and ritually murdered so his life force could be preserved.

"The man-god must be killed as soon as he shows symptoms that his powers are beginning to fail," Frazer wrote, "and his soul must be transferred to a vigorous successor before it has been seriously impaired by the threatened decay."

The archaic King Kill rationale is a precursor to Information Age concepts such as data decay, substrate independence, and mind-uploading. In any closed system, the data will tend to decay over time. But because patterns of information are independent of the underlying substrate, the same memories and cognitive algorithms that exist in your brain can be transferred to a book. And the same memories and cognitive algorithms that exist in a book

can be animated in a computer.

The ancients called such memories and cognitive algorithms "the soul," whether expressed in the body or on the page. Transhumanists prefer to call the soul an "informational pattern" in the brain, or a "brain emulation" in silicon. If the substrate is less important than the pattern, why cling to the substrate? The message transcends the medium.

The fact is those books are getting old. The letters are fading. Their pages are deteriorating. Why not transfer that valuable information to a more durable substrate? Why not use a digital copy to train a brand new artificial intelligence? Then you can use that AI to read books for you and save the effort.

Time is slipping away. No sense in wasting yours on reading.

The hard truth is that memories fade. In the end, your precious library is fated to become a pile of mouldy pulp. So is your brain. No need to be sentimental about either of them. As long as we can keep the data centres powered up, any digital copies you make of your books – or yourself – are practically immortal.

By this logic, the proper course is clear. Upload your books. Upload your soul! Upload your entire civilisation!! Kill the king before his mojo dissipates.

I'm a sentimental man who prefers to read books on paper. My shelves are lined with them. My desk is flanked by stacks of them. Even the trashiest is a treasure. And as a sentimental man, I prefer to keep my soul – or at least the deepest parts – held fast in what's left of my brain. Yet here I am, typing into the digital void. So glad you could join me here!

The entire enterprise of mass data extraction, book-mulching, AI training, cultural hybridisation, and human replacement brings to mind

The hard truth
is that memories fade.
In the end, your
precious library is fated
to become a pile
of mouldy pulp.
So is your brain

Judge Holden from Cormac McCarthy's 1985 historical novel *Blood Meridian*. It's the tale of a multi-racial cowboy gang that roams the western plains, raping and pillaging and collecting Injun scalps and raising hell.

You realise Judge Holden is both real and symbolic ... he represents the ravenous nature of the cosmos embodied in human arrogance and treachery

The first time I saw the book, it was in the tender hands of a Brooklyn hipster sitting across from me on the subway. He read each page intently, displaying the cover for all to see, twirling his waxed handlebar moustache with deep self-satisfaction. Perhaps he imagined himself as the main character and New York as the Wild West, where the kid collected craft beer bottles as if they were Comanche scalps.

As the novel unfolds, you realise Judge Holden is both real and symbolic. In my interpretation, he represents the ravenous nature of the cosmos as embodied in human arrogance and treachery.

"In such games as have for their stake the annihilation of the defeated the decisions are quite clear," the judge explained with no need of commas. "War is the ultimate game because war is at last a forcing of the unity of existence. War is god."

In one chilling motif, McCarthy's ragged cowboy gang is camped near "the ruins of an older culture deep

in the stone mountains." It was a cliff-dwelling culture, perhaps the Anasazi. The judge crept through the ruins, gathering various artifacts left behind. He took these to camp, spread them out in front of the fire along with an old piece of armour, and began drawing them.

"In his lap he held the leather ledgerbook," writes McCarthy, "and he took up each piece, flint or potsherd or tool of bone, and deftly sketched it into the book. ... His fingers traced the impression of old willow wicker on a piece of pottery clay and he put this into his book with nice shadings, an economy of pencil strokes."

In the judge's sinister art, we find a fitting symbol for the ravenous cosmic force in man, now given over to quantification and virtual reality:

"Lastly he set before him the foot-piece from a suit of armour hammered out in a shop in Toledo three centuries before, a small steel tapadero frail and shelled with rot. This the judge sketched in profile and in perspective, citing the dimensions in his neat script, making marginal notes. ...

"When he had done he took up the little footguard and turned it in his hand and studied it again and then he crushed it into a ball of foil

and pitched it into the fire. He gathered up the other artifacts and cast them also into the fire. ... Then he sat with his hands cupped in his lap and he seemed much satisfied with the world, as if his counsel had been sought at its creation.

"A Tennessean named Webster had been watching him and he asked the judge what he aimed to do with those notes and sketches and the judge smiled and said that it was his intention to expunge them from the memory of man. Webster smiled and the judge laughed. Webster regarded him with one eye asquint and he said: Well you've been a draftsman somewhere and them pictures is like enough the things themselves. But no man can put all the world in a book. No more than everthing drawn in a book is so."

Much like the Injun artifacts, our culture – or what's left of it – is being sketched in silicon and tossed into the fire.

As a sentimental man, I have faith that the immortal souls moving through our teetering culture will endure long after this mass transformation has passed. It's a comforting conviction, because every uploaded page is kindling a civilisational bonfire and the flames are licking our heels.

CT

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Eat, drink and be merry, a food crisis is on the way!

The role of governments is not to prepare for the good times. Governments exist to defend us from harm. This isn't possible without long-term plans

When a business makes long-term plans, they call it prudence. When a government makes long-term plans, they call it communism. Any sustained state intervention attracts the prefix “Soviet-style,” and triggers vicious attacks across the billionaire media. So governments have developed a bias against long-term thinking. This may explain why we no longer maintain strategic food reserves.

In Britain, where soils have parched, market analysts warn that we're facing the most severe food security crisis in decades. In normal years, crop failures at home don't threaten our security, thanks to global trade.

This is one of the reasons why hunger and famines are rarer and less deadly than they used to be. But this is not a normal year, because the problem is now global.

Similar impacts are hitting farmers across Europe and in the US, whose wheat production this year is forecast to be lower than at any point since 1971. Until a few weeks ago, harvest forecasts in Canada were excellent, but now its spring wheat is also shrivelling in hot and dry conditions.

Ukraine has had a good growing season, but export forecasts have been cut as a result of Russia's at-

tacks on its ports.

At the same time, crucial global pinch-points for food and farming supplies are tightening: Donald Trump's aimless war with Iran has caused major reductions in shipping through the strait of Hormuz, the Red Sea and the Suez canal. These have become essential trade routes for fertiliser and, more recently, food, thanks to the Middle East's emergence as a major re-export hub.

One impact of these disruptions has been to divert more shipping through the Panama canal. But the canal is now afflicted by drought, which has led to restrictions on ships' draught (depth under water). The global circulation on which our food security depends no longer looks reliable.

It's not just that these impacts can immediately restrict the availability of food, even in wealthy importers such as the UK (poorer nations

In normal years, crop failures at home don't threaten our security, thanks to global trade ... But this is not a normal year

in the Global South are, of course, hit much harder). It's that they also land on a global food structure that has become systemically fragile. It is now highly exposed to the risk of cascading collapse that nearly brought down the financial system in 2008.

In fact, it suffers from very similar dysfunctions. The government knows this, because a report by its own security advisers warns that our food supply is “at strategic risk of catastrophic failure” by 2030. It responded by suppressing the report.

As with all potential system failures, it's impossible to say where the tipping point may be. But what we can say is that if such an event occurs, the impacts would be beyond contemplation. It could be the most deadly global crisis in modern history.

A world in which governments hold strategic stockpiles has a better chance of weathering either a temporary shortfall or a systemic failure. If food reserves were big enough, they would buy us enough time to rebuild the system. In their absence, if the food system collapses, so does society.

The UK once held strategic food reserves, albeit very limited. But in the late 1970s and early 1980s, our governments decided they were no longer necessary, as private retail-

ers would maintain sufficient stocks. As the National Preparedness Commission points out, this policy coincided with decisions by the big retailers to stop holding stocks and switch to a just-in-time system: goodbye warehouses, hello logistics.

No subsequent government appears to have noticed that its food-security assumptions are based on conditions that no

longer exist. Perhaps they looked away out of the fear of being labelled interventionist.

Perhaps they fear criticism more than crisis.

Today, as far as I can tell, the government's sole food storage intervention is a single unpublicised paragraph on its Prepare website. It instructs us to "Put together an emergency kit of items at home. This could include: Non-perishable food that doesn't need cooking ... how much you need will vary based on your own circumstances." Invaluable advice, I'm sure.

That scarcely anyone has seen it, that many people have no space for an emergency food store and no money to buy it with is just bad luck. Perhaps we don't deserve to survive.

I write as though I'm confident that the UK does not maintain stockpiles. For several years, I have been asking the environment department this simple question: does it or does it not hold them?

The Conservatives were honest



Parched field near Ashby Puerorum, Lincolnshire, England, in mid-August

enough to say "no." But since Labour took office, it has repeatedly failed to answer. When I asked again in the middle of August, it sent me a long disquisition on related subjects, but signally failed to answer the question.

I then asked why it hadn't answered, and received no reply to that either.

I find this response more eloquent than a candid "no." It tells me two things: "the answer's still no" and "we know the policy is wrong". Otherwise, it would be happy to tell me about it.

The government also told me: "The UK has a highly resilient food system, drawing on both strong domestic production and international trade and we do not expect the recent dry weather to have any impact on national food security." This

Food reserves are for losers. Prudence is for suckers. Somehow the words 'British' and 'invulnerable' have become muddled up

claim, which defies warnings from the security services, market analysts and the food trade itself goes beyond complacency. It's denial.

As far as I can tell, since he became prime minister, Andy Burnham and his office have not said one word in public about the climate crisis. He recently chaired an emergency Cobra meeting to discuss the extreme heat, the drought and the wildfires. But, at the time of writing, there has yet to be a

public statement about what has caused this crisis, and how we might cause less of it.

Yet No 10 did find time last week to intervene on Westminster council's plan to limit vertical drinking in Soho. Good to know it is laser-focused on the crucial matters of state.

The government's disregard and denial sustains our proud tradition of heroic failure, from the charge of the Light Brigade to Brexit. Food reserves are for losers. Prudence is for suckers. Somehow the words "British" and "invulnerable" have become muddled up.

In good times, government stockpiles look like a waste of money and effort. But the role of governments is not to prepare for the good times. Governments exist to defend us from harm. And this isn't possible without long-term plans. **CT**

George Monbiot's latest book, written with Peter Hutchinson, is Invisible Doctrine: The Secret History of Neoliberalism. This article first appeared in The Guardian. George Monbiot's website is www.monbiot.com



LAST WORDS | CAITLIN JOHNSTONE

Capitalism trains us to blame each other for systemic abuse

Propaganda isn't just there to get us to consent to wars, it's there to get us buying into the entire system

The capitalist empire blames all systemic problems on the individual.

The problem isn't billionaire mega corporations polluting the planet, it's that you drive a car.

The problem isn't that it's getting harder and harder to afford to live as the ruling class extracts more and more value from labour, it's that you're not working hard enough and you're making bad decisions.

Soaring police brutality isn't a problem, the problem is that the guy in the current viral police brutality video didn't obey orders correctly.

Israel's not an irredeemably racist endeavour dependent on nonstop violence and apartheid, it's just some naughty settlers and a few bad apples in the IDF.

We don't live in a highly controlled oligarchy where both parties inflict war, ecocide, injustice and tyranny upon the rest of humanity on behalf of their wealthy donors, the problem is that you haven't been voting for the correct candidates.

We don't live under an evil empire that feeds on human blood, it only looks that way because some individuals in charge made some unwise foreign policy decisions at certain points in history.

The blame always lands on the individual, not the system, and you can recognise this as the cynical manipulation that it is because the blame only ever goes one way:

- The individual business executives whose decisions are destroying our ecosystem are never held to account.

● The individual government officials whose depraved foreign policy decisions destroy countless lives are never imprisoned for war crimes.

• The oligarchs who are reaping massive profits expanding the surveillance state and profiteering off war, tyranny and sickness are allowed to keep buying politicians and private islands without suffering any consequences.

Notice how “blame the individual” never applies in these cases. If you want these individuals to be treated like a problem, then you’re a radical. You’re an extremist. You need to be put on a terrorist watch list. You and your friends need to be monitored and infiltrated by federal police. When it comes to those who prop up and profit from the system, blaming the individual is strictly prohibited.

Jailing an impoverished man for periodically shoplifting to survive? That’s fine; he should have behaved himself. Jailing a billionaire for buying elections and poisoning our planet? That’s evil. Shame on you for even thinking that.

Jailing a worker for stealing from her employer? That’s as it should be; thieves should be punished. Jailing a wealthy business owner for stealing wages from thousands of employees? Get outta here, Stalin, that’s a civil case. They can have their paychecks when they’ve won their class action lawsuit.

Under the capitalist empire, we are taught that all we can do is make sure we’re not a part of the giant permanent underclass who must suffer and toil for meagre wages while always one mistake away from destitution. It is taken as a given that the underclass must always exist, and that all we can do is make wise decisions as individuals to ensure that we’re not among the unfortunate riffraff our society is built on top of.

It’s like we’ve all been trapped in a crowded room by some psycho who is flooding the room with water, and he’s telling us over the loudspeaker “Now you’d better make sure you climb on top of the others, or you’ll drown!” In that scenario the psycho is clearly the problem, but we’ve been trained to see the individuals who can’t get their heads above water as the problem.

Whenever anyone goes online to complain about how hard it is to keep their bills paid or buy a house under the current system, they are swarmed by capitalism apologists telling them to work harder, spend less, and try to get a better

job. Which is a lot like calling the fire department when a crowded building is burning and being told “Well I guess you’d better stay away from the flames then.” No matter how well I as an individual stay away from the flames, there are still people trapped in the burning building who need help. Making the conversation about my actions as an individual is just an excuse to avoid addressing the large-scale nature of the problem.

People consent to this nonsense because we’ve been indoctrinated into it our entire lives. Propaganda isn’t just there to get us to consent to wars, it’s there to get us buying into the entire system.

● The pop music is about owning stuff and having a good time.

● The TV shows are about people who are thriving so much under the current system that they have time and energy to get into hilarious hijinks.

● The movies are about protagonists applying their willpower and working hard over musical montages to overcome obstacles and achieve their goals as individuals.

● The news stories fixate on the latest attention-grabbing controversy while ignoring terrible things like homelessness and industrial ecocide

Our schooling tells us that communist countries have always been oppressive totalitarian wastelands and that capitalism offers us freedom and happiness.

At no time are we ever offered the suggestion that things could be better than they are. Over and over again in innumerable ways throughout our lives, we are told that the current order is the only way things could ever be.

Our minds have been carefully groomed to accept the imperial status quo as normal and healthy, and to see every failure of the system as a failure of the individual. We need to reclaim our minds from the social engineers who have conditioned us to think this way and begin cultivating unorthodox, unauthorised worldviews

We need to stop blaming each other for the failures of the system, stop scrambling to climb on top of each other to keep our heads above water, and start working together to eliminate the psychos who have trapped us in this room. **CT**

Caitlin Johnstone is an Australian independent journalist. This article was first published at her web site, www.caitlinjohnstone.com.au

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