

Like Receiving a Hug and Eating a Beignet At The Same Time

CURRENT AFFAIRS

\$12.95

VOL. 10, ISSUE 1

JANUARY-APRIL 2025



ATLANTIS

Is it real? (No.)

**FRIDA
KAHLO**

Her politics matter!

TAXES

*And the people who do
not pay them.*

THINGS THAT MATTER

IF YOU DON'T BUY MAGAZINES, HOW WILL WE EVER SAVE DEMOCRACY?

FOR ONCE, CHATGPT IS CORRECT

In our pitch inbox, a writer tells us that they were encouraged to submit work to *Current Affairs* by ChatGPT, which informed them that we are an outlet that considers unusual writings. Well, we have to admit it: ChatGPT nailed it. *Current Affairs* cannot deny that it considers unusual writings. Our pages speak for themselves. Not too unusual, mind you. We still raise an eyebrow at submissions of experimental poetry or manifestos that run into the hundreds of thousands of words. But, yes, reader, if every other magazine has rejected a piece, that is when you know it might be a good fit for the pages of *Current Affairs*.

HOW TO GET YOUR CHILD TO SLEEP

"My child," writes a reader. "She does not sleep. She shouts continuously well into the night. The neighbors threaten to call the police, although they do not, because ultimately they are abolitionists like myself. I feel for them though, for I am annoyed by the child's wailings, too. Whatever shall I do?" Reader, we think that deep within you, you already know what it is you must do. You know because you wrote to us. You did not write to the (useless) *New York Times* "Ethicist" or *Miss Manners* or *Parenting Daily*. Some part of you anticipated our answer, which is the correct one: your child's plaintive moans are not cries of existential misery. The child secretly pines for *Current Affairs*. Get your latest copy out of the locked cabinet in which you keep it. Pick an article—any article—and read it to the child in hushed tones. Or sing it like a lullaby. Within moments, your child will drift into a gentle slumber. In the morning, when she rises, she will bound into the kitchen and shout "Thank you mother, I am cured!" The restorative powers of this magazine are limitless.

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

The editors of this magazine are frequently asked where the publication stands on the God question. Is He or ain't He? (Or She.) Our staff have their own view, but formally the magazine has taken no official position. We are not prepared to issue an editorial statement firmly declaring whether or not there is a God, although we would note that if there is a God, they have a mighty peculiar taste in worlds. We will say the one thing of which we are certain, which is that if God exists, they surely read every edition of *Current Affairs*.

QUIZ

Liberalism vs Leftism—Can you spot the difference between tinkering around the edges and fundamental change? Try it!

- | | |
|---|--|
| Conditioning genocidal military aid on a small humanitarian provision <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> More college financial aid |
| Housing vouchers for low-income people <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> Wearing kente cloth |
| Free college <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> Enacting an arms embargo on a genocidal regime |
| Diversifying the military <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> JOY, the economy is great |
| Building public housing for all <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> Cutting the military budget |
| Listing the poisons on food clearly <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> Defunding the police |
| Giving the land back <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> Increasing "access" to healthcare |
| \$25 min. minimum wage <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> Eliminate poisons from food |
| Medicare For All <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> Land acknowledgement |

YOU BEST BE READY FOR MARDI GRAS
IT'S COMING
ARE YOU PREPARED?!

THIS MONTH THE MAGAZINE IS BEST ENJOYED WITH...

A CHOCOLATE CROISSANT AND A MATCHA LATTE

Warning: a good croissant is very flaky and makes one hell of a mess. Don't leave crumbs around that other people have to clean up!

FIND US ON XIAOHONGSHU! 小红书

ANSWERS: LIBERALISM
Increasing "access" to healthcare
Conditioning genocidal military aid on a small humanitarian provision
Housing vouchers for low-income people
Building public housing for all
Free college
Diversifying the military
Cutting the military budget
Wearing kente cloth
Defunding the police
Listing the poisons on food clearly
Eliminate poisons from food
\$25 min. minimum wage
ANSWERS: LEFTISM
Medicare For All
Enacting an arms embargo
on a genocidal regime
Giving the land back
Land acknowledgement
JOY, the economy is great



¡VIVA LA AMÉRICA MEXICANA!

Let it be known that we are in full agreement with Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum, who recently proposed to rename the United States Mexican America, or América Mexicana. This was in response to Donald Trump's suggestion that the Gulf of Mexico be renamed to the Gulf of America, which is, of course, stupid because "Gulf of Mexico" is specific and accurate—no point changing a name that works just fine! The U.S., on the other hand, is made up of people from all over the Americas, and large parts of it used to be Mexico (and who here isn't eating some kind of Mexican food all the time, really?). So, in the spirit of universalism and human freedom and giving the middle finger to Empire and its land-grabbing Treaties, we say, Let the U.S. be called America Mexicana from now on! If readers are concerned about this change in the United States' name potentially causing confusion, first, please consult a history book. And remember that borders, as well as names, are totally made up. On our way to a world where all people and wildlife can move freely, we must first liberate the names! ¡Pa'lante!

I WON'T STAY IN A WORLD WITHOUT MAGAZINES

We try not to depress our readers here at *Current Affairs*—if you wish to be miserable, pick up *The Atlantic*—but for a moment imagine the following nightmare: a world without small independent magazines. Not *Current Affairs*, not *The Baffler*, not even *Highlights For Children*. The only information available is from Facebook posts accompanied by AI-generated images of things that didn't happen. How would such a society function? How could a democracy maintain itself there? It could not! You know it, we know it. Alright, enough: contemplate the nightmare no longer. It is too horrible to dwell in this world for long, even if only in our imaginations. Return to reality, where *Current Affairs* survives and thrives and is sent through the U.S. mail bimonthly. But reader, remember: the bleak world we have shown you could yet come to pass. Prevent it from being born by getting your friends to subscribe to small magazines like this one and by sending donations of any size to: *Current Affairs*, 300 Lafayette St. #210, New Orleans, LA 70130. (Current Affairs is a 501c3 nonprofit organization and donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.)



NOW IS THE TIME to be ungovernable!

We may be entering a neofascistic oligarchic nightmare, but the struggle for freedom must go on. Never despair, and never let right-wing tyrants tell you that we can't have healthcare for all, a \$25 minimum wage, and a fossil fuel-free future. We can, we must, we shall!

DISPELLING RUMORS ABOUT THE 'RED ROOM'

You may have seen our editor-in-chief in videos shot in a room with vibrant red walls in the *Current Affairs* World Headquarters. Some of our readers have inquired about the origins of this "red room." They have observed, suspiciously, that the room has a rather Soviet-like appearance. One reader speculated that the room was inspired by Chairman Mao's "little red book," a concept we have expanded into our own "big red room." Another said that it had to be a tribute to none other than Josef "Uncle Joe" Stalin. Or perhaps David Lynch? Others, who happen to be hardcore English literature fans, have asked whether this room has anything to do with the "red room" in Charlotte Brontë's novel, *Jane Eyre*.

We hereby put these speculations to rest for good. First, the room is completely nonpartisan and unaffiliated. It is in no way meant to be construed as a tribute to any leader of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics or the People's Republic of China. Nor the Republican Party. Nor the UK Labour Party. The *Current Affairs* red room is simply the editor-in-chief's office. The cries of purged dissidents will never be heard from within. Occasional laughter can be heard, as well as a groan or scoff any time the latest Matt Yglesias or Pamela Paul opinion piece drops. So, to clarify: it is just a room. It is nothing more. You should come see it sometime. Readers are always welcome to visit. We might even have a scone for you when you drop in.

MARRY F*CK KILL



Stars - Planets - Asteroids
Fluids - Solids - Gases
Boils - Rashes - Scars
Sticks - Twigs - Logs



Pompadours - Bouffants - Jheri Curls
Oleanders - Peonies - Magnolias
Encyclopedias - Traffic - Oats
Vibrations - Oscillations - Doubt

QUIZ YOUR FRIENDS!

RE: 21st CENTURY GERMAN NATIONALISM

It's okay for countries to be at least a little bit ashamed of disgraceful events from their past! One world war can happen to anyone. But two is a pattern!

CURRENT AFFAIRS (ISSN 2471-2647) is published bimonthly for \$69.99/year by CURRENT AFFAIRS INC., 300 LAFAYETTE ST., SUITE 210, NEW ORLEANS, LA 70130 Periodicals Postage PAID at NEW ORLEANS, LA and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Current Affairs, 300 Lafayette Street, Suite 210, New Orleans, LA 70130

PRINTED IN PENNSYLVANIA BY Sheridan Press.

A note to our Japanese readers:
In accordance with a recent change to your nation's laws, this issue of *Current Affairs* contains ZERO live reptiles.

THIS IS NOT A REPTILE. IT IS A PICTURE OF A REPTILE.



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NO MORE ANIMAL FARMING

BY EMILIA A. LEESE

THE FARMING OF ANIMALS—RAISING, USING, AND ultimately killing animals for human purposes—is a tradition that dates back to the Neolithic Revolution, about 11,000 years ago. That’s only 3 percent—a mere blink—of our existence as *Homo sapiens*.

Stretch the timeline further to include our hominin ancestors, who thrived for millions of years without the practices of farming animals or growing crops, and the practice accounts for much less than 1 percent of our history. For most of our time on Earth, we’ve lived without it.

Yet animal farming has undeniably shaped human culture, providing work, sustenance, and, as far back as ancient Egypt, a sense of identity. George Washington wrote in a letter to John Sinclair in 1794, “I know of no pursuit in which more zeal [and] important service can be rendered to any Country than by improving its agriculture—its breed of useful animals,” and part of the title of a 1797 lithograph of Washington at Mount Vernon describes agriculture as “the most healthy, the most useful, and the most noble employment of man.” In the 20th century, Theodore Roosevelt romanticized the “vigorous” life of a cattle rancher. Today, advocates of so-called regenerative agriculture argue that because grazing animals have “co-evolved” with grasslands for millennia, livestock are essential to restoring ecosystems, a claim that is hotly disputed.

Today, the ethical harms and environmental devastation

caused by farming animals are indisputable, and the practice has become obsolete. We must break free from outdated traditions that are harming both humanity and the planet. We must reject the exploitation of animals for human use entirely and boldly envision a future in which we don’t intentionally cause the suffering and destruction of animal life. The future we create must be one where animals are no longer raised for human use—because they simply don’t need to be.

INSIDE THE TORTURE FACTORIES

Globally, more than a trillion animals are slaughtered annually in the modern animal farming system, which is dominated by industrial-sized factory farms that house around 142 billion animals at a given time. (For context, the Population Reference Bureau estimates that approximately 117 billion humans “have ever been born on Earth.”) Worldwide, approximately 94 percent of farm animals live on (and are thus products of) factory farms. The definition of a “factory farm” varies, but what they all have in common is their massive scale, which necessitates cramped, inhumane conditions for animals.

The numbers are staggering. A factory might contain over 1,000 cattle destined for slaughter and crammed into pens. Imagine 700 dairy cows, their bodies exhausted from relentless milking. Or 2,500 pigs confined in spaces so tightly that they can

barely move. Envision 30,000 chickens packed wing-to-wing in dim, excrement-filled sheds, or 82,000 hens, their lives reduced to a monotonous cycle of laying eggs inside cages stacked up to the ceiling. Consider 55,000 turkeys, 500 horses, 10,000 sheep, or 5,000 ducks—all trapped in a system that reduces living, feeling beings to mere units of production. This scene isn't a dystopian nightmare—it's the reality of what the U.S. defines as an "industrial animal farm."

The horror lies not just in the scale but in the individual lives behind them: each animal, a sentient creature, enduring an existence stripped of dignity, freedom, and comfort.

Dairy cows endure relentless suffering, as they are valued only for their ability to reproduce and produce milk. Female cows are artificially impregnated, gestate for nine months, and then give birth, only to have their calves removed within hours or, on what are called "higher welfare" farms, within five months—far short of the natural weaning age of eight months. This separation causes visible distress, as cows are social animals who care about their young. Male calves are often slaughtered immediately or raised for veal.

Female calves are forced into the dairy cycle. While cows have a natural lifespan of up to 20-30 years, dairy cows are slaughtered at just 3-5 years old (or 16-18 weeks for veal). The few bulls that do survive face lives of forced ejaculation until they are no longer useful, at which point they're slaughtered. This cycle of exploitation happens worldwide.

ANIMALS: A CALL FOR MORAL INCLUSION

The horror of animal farming becomes more apparent when we consider that animals are sentient beings capable of experiencing pain, joy, and suffering. Their physical, mental, or social differences from humans, or variations in abilities, are not valid reasons to dismiss their value or exclude them from our circle of care. Throughout history, thinkers have grappled with animal sentience and its implications for how humans use them. In the 5th century B.C., Pythagoras first argued that animals were not mere objects, and in 1190, Maimonides saw animals as beings in their own right, not just existing in relation to humans. Much later, philosophers like Jeremy Bentham (in the 18th century) and Peter Singer emphasized suffering as a key measure of sentience. While suffering may not capture the full picture, and modern thinkers have different ideas about the definition of sentience, two key principles that should guide our thinking are that all animals are *alive* and that every one of them, from the largest to the smallest, desires to live.

Just look around you and notice the ladybug on your window sill, those ants carrying many times their weight on their backs, the squirrel running across the park, the fox rummaging in your bins, or fish swimming upriver. Each is experiencing their one and only life in whatever way and to whatever extent is relevant to them. This universal truth was beautifully captured in 1928 by American naturalist Henry Beston, whose reflections on

our relationship with animals remain as poignant today as they were nearly a century ago. He wrote:

[T]he animal shall not be measured by man. In a world older and more complete than ours they move finished and complete, gifted with extensions of the senses we have lost or never attained, living by voices we shall never hear. They are not brethren, they are not underlings; they are other nations, caught with ourselves in the net of life and time, fellow prisoners of the splendour and travail of the earth.

Today, scientists have shown us that animals lead rich emotional lives. Ecologist and evolutionary biologist Marc Bekoff's 2007 book *The Emotional Lives of Animals: A Leading Animal Scientist*

Explores Animal Joy, Sorrow, and Empathy—and Why They Matter is full of examples of such scientific discoveries. Bees, for instance, "can get depressed, feel pain, and be optimists or pessimists." Fish feel pain and are "cunning, deceitful, and display cultural traditions," while iguanas seek sensory pleasure and experience

a rise in body temperature and heart rate, "physiological responses that are associated with pleasure in other vertebrates, including humans." Cows "play games with one another and form strong life-long friendships. [...] [T]hey also sulk, hold grudges, and act vain." And, in a striking act of interspecies solidarity, three mugger crocodiles in India used their snouts to push a stranded dog to safety "when they surely could have enjoyed an easy meal." Even in death, animals express emotion: a waxwing bird, after their mate died in a widow strike, lay beside them, "heads touching," and passed away too. And ants, as ethicist Susana Monsó describes in her 2024 book *Playing Possum*, will "mobilize themselves" to save a trapped comrade, biting through nylon snares to free them.

Animal agriculture, then, strips animals of their most basic desires: the freedom to eat, socialize, roam, or mate. "They are not treated like the individuals that they are," says Monsó. Instead, they are reduced to mere objects for consumption. At its core, this "system of oppression" denies animals the right to their own lives—something they are entitled to, just as we humans are.

HORRORS FOR HUMANS

Animal farming and related industries, such as slaughtering, often exploit both animals and marginalized human communities. These industries set up their operations in economically deprived areas and take advantage of vulnerable groups—including ethnic minorities, people of color, migrants, and refugees—to staff their workforce, offering them jobs that are hard to refuse due to a lack of alternatives.

Slaughterhouses are perilous workplaces. Since 2015, the U.S. government has required severe injuries, including amputations, to be tracked. In the first nine months of this tracking, Tyson, the largest U.S. meat company by sales, averaged over one amputation monthly. Over seven years, Tyson reported 279 severe

EVERY CREATURE HAS A DESIRE TO LIVE.

injuries, but this is likely an underestimate because injuries are underreported due to workers' fears of job loss and employers' desire to avoid costs. In 2016, Oxfam released a report documenting the use of diapers among poultry workers who needed to avoid asking for bathroom breaks in order to keep up with work quotas. Between 2020 and March 2021, COVID-19 deaths among meat and poultry workers surpassed all industry fatalities from the previous 15 years. Additionally, significant percentages of chicken and pig processing workers (81 percent and 46 percent, respectively) are at risk of developing bone, joint, or muscle disorders, which come about due to work that requires thousands of repetitive forceful motions daily. Piece-rate work—in which workers are paid by piece rather than by the hour—incentivizes workers to increase their speeds, which contributes to the risk of bodily harm. Chicken workers, for instance, may handle 140-175 birds per minute.

Andre Noble, a former slaughterhouse worker, described his work in 2023 in *Newsweek*:

Pigs would come in on trucks and get offloaded into the [...] building. They would then pass through a machine to get killed. I don't know how. The sound of countless pigs screaming was heard a quarter of a mile surrounding the entire plant when this was happening. I did not see them getting killed, but I saw them come out of the machine and into the [...] building on meat hooks. Thousands of workers would then spend over 12 hours a day cutting the meat.

Another slaughterhouse worker anonymously recounted the following in 2020 for the BBC:

I'll never forget the day, after I'd been at the abattoir for a few months, when one of the lads cut into a freshly killed cow to gut her—and out fell the foetus of a calf. She was pregnant. He immediately started shouting and throwing his arms about. I took him into a meeting room to calm him down—and all he could say was, "It's just not right, it's not right," over and over again. These were hard men, and they rarely showed any emotion. But I could see tears prickling his eyes. Even worse than pregnant cows, though, were the young calves we sometimes had to kill.

As Oscar Heanue detailed in *On Labor* in 2022, slaughterhouse work, due to its violent nature, inflicts profound psychological harm on workers. This harm has been likened to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Other negative consequences include substance abuse and addiction. One study from 2009 found an "uptick in violent crime associated with slaughterhouse employment." As Noble put it: "[M]y drinking had gotten completely out of control. I was self-medicating—I fell into alcohol in order to relieve the stress of what I was doing. I just wanted to escape reality."

Aside from workplace exploitation, humans are harmed on

a large scale by the practices of industrial farms. People who live near the farms experience "noise, smell[s], toxic air, chronic disease and water pollution." Industrial animal farms also rely heavily on antibiotics to prevent disease or to treat animals that get sick in their unhealthy and overcrowded living conditions, and this practice contributes to the creation of antibiotic-resistant germs, which can then infect humans. Additionally, the rise of industrial farming since the 1940s has increased zoonotic diseases (those that are transmitted from animals to humans) and panzootics like avian flu (H5N1), which can spark pandemics across species. The dangers posed to human health and well-being ought to remind us once again of our interconnectedness to other species. When we harm animals, we harm ourselves.

DEFORESTATION AND LAND USE

The practice of farming animals is also disastrous for the environment. It contributes most of the greenhouse gases (GHGs) related to agriculture. It's also the key driver in deforestation, which significantly contributes to GHGs. Animal agriculture furthers water depletion, soil degradation, ocean acidification, and biodiversity loss. This destruction accelerates climate change, which itself is a threat to all life on Earth.

Currently, 80 billion land animals are fed annually on vast amounts of land. Half of the world's habitable land is used for agriculture, and three-fourths is used for animal agriculture. If we continue with our current trend of meat production, we'll need to turn about 80 percent of the world's remaining forests and shrublands into land to raise animals to produce meat, dairy, and eggs. This would simply be catastrophic for the planet.

Transitioning to plant crops instead could reduce global agricultural land use by 75 percent, freeing up space to restore forests (which would help absorb greenhouse gas) and biodiversity. Research shows that we need to redirect crops from their current uses (a mixture of human consumption, livestock feed, and biofuels) to direct human consumption. Expert findings have made it clear that a food system based on plant crops is

both sustainable and desirable. Animal agriculture is simply not a sustainable component of a habitable world.

WHEN WE HARM ANIMALS, WE HARM OURSELVES.

FASHION BACKWARD

We don't just eat the consequences of animal farming. We wear them. Every year, the fashion industry fuels the suffering and slaughter of billions of animals for clothing and accessories. A staggering 3.4 billion ducks and geese are plucked for down and feathers, while 777 million cows, sheep, lambs, and goats are killed for leather and meat. The demand for fine wools such as merino, cashmere, and alpaca drives the exploitation of 672 million animals, many of whom endure painful shearing practices that leave them wounded and exposed to infection and the elements. The fur trade alone is responsible for the deaths of 107

million animals, each of whom is subjected to horrific conditions in tiny pens before being killed by gassing, electrocution, or sometimes neck-breaking. Foxes and mink on fur farms suffer psychological distress, self-mutilation, and even cannibalism before being killed.



In Hazaribagh, a part of western Dhaka renowned for its tanneries, a worker bends over a cow hide. Using a specially formed knife, he removes the chemically dissolved layer of fat from the skin. Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2015. Christian Faesecke / We Animals

Even exotic leathers, sourced from animals like crocodiles, pythons, and stingrays, account for the slaughter of 3 million wild creatures each year. While it is easy to assume that leather is simply a by-product of the meat industry, it is actually a co-product, a highly valuable item that can be sold for profit. As a 2023 report by the Australian nonprofit Collective Fashion Justice explains, “Leather sales effectively subsidise beef production,” and without this subsidy, “beef would become more expensive.”

Beyond the nightmare for animals, the fashion industry exploits human workers, particularly in the leather industry. In places like India and Bangladesh, tannery workers—including children—are exposed to toxic chemicals such as chromium, which is used in 80-90 percent of all leather processing. In these tanneries, environmental and labor regulations are often poorly enforced. Chromium, known to promote the development of cancer, pollutes local water supplies, and cancer, respiratory diseases, and skin conditions have been documented among workers and people in nearby communities.

SMALL-SCALE PSEUDO-SOLUTIONS

As we confront the devastating impact of industrial animal agriculture, it's tempting to view small-scale farms as a perfect antidote. Small-scale animal agriculture isn't a universally defined term, but sometimes it's simply referred to as traditional farming. In recent years, small-scale farms have been supported by King Charles, the EU, and the U.N. In the U.S., supporting small-scale agriculture is viewed as a way to “revitalize rural communities.” And the support is warranted—to an extent. There are myriad benefits to small-scale *crop* farms, from sustainable food production to the promotion of biodiversity. However, the solution isn't as simple as downsizing the problem.

First, industrial animal farming has become so efficient in rendering animals into products that a small-scale equivalent could never replace it. Animals would still need grazing lands and feed, and greenhouse gases from animal agriculture would continue to be generated. Second, from an ethical standpoint, whether animals are raised on factory farms, with thousands living in cramped, squalid conditions, or on a small pastoral homestead, where they might receive better care and more space, the fundamental issue remains the same: exploiting sentient beings for human use. This core question—whether it is justifiable to exploit and kill animals for human benefit—cannot be avoided. The answer depends on the context. For a subsistence farmer relying on animals for survival, sacrificing one may be necessary—there may be no alternatives. But the moral gap between this and the industrialized slaughter of factory farming is vast. For those of us with supermarkets full of choices, justifying such harm becomes indefensible.

THE MYTH OF “ETHICAL MEAT”

If smaller farms are not the answer, we might ask whether “ethical meat” could offer a viable alternative. We might look to animal products with higher ethical ratings in an effort to reduce animal suffering. But while less suffering is better than more, does ethical meat (or ethical eggs or dairy) do anything more than assuage our own conscience?

There are now numerous labelling and marketing strategies that often create a false sense of moral purity about the products being described. Terms like “humane,” “ethical,” “pasture-raised,” “grass-fed,” “free-range,” “Certified Humane,” or “Animal Welfare Approved” are used to convey care for animals. The reality is that these terms are often poorly defined, defined by the producers themselves, and/or undergo little verification or enforcement. Many certifications allow minimal improvements over standard factory farming practices, and even when there is a more rigorous meaning behind a label, the producers often carry out harmful practices. There is also sometimes an appeal made to nostalgia for an idyllic past, one in which chickens are “slow-grown and well roamed just like the ones your grandparents would have eaten.” Such read one ad I saw for an online grocer selling chicken.

These marketing practices work because people are concerned about the suffering of factory-farmed animals and the wider effects of animal farming. In 2023, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) commis-



The east side of a chicken house on a multi-building industrial egg-production farm. This company markets its eggs as laid by “Free Roaming” hens, but on this farm no outdoor access is apparent. Pennsylvania, USA, 2023. Gregory Kemp / Animal Outlook / We Animals

sioned an opinion survey about industrial agriculture and found that the overwhelming majority of respondents desired more humane agriculture. One study in the journal *Food Ethics* found that while U.S. shoppers are concerned about animal welfare, they don’t understand what the various labels mean. At the same time, they tend to overestimate the guarantees provided by animal welfare labels: they believe that such labels indicate that animals were treated “better-than-standard.” This misunderstanding leads to purchasing decisions that do not align with the buyer’s ethical intentions. And when investigations demonstrate that the public’s perception and the reality don’t match, scandals can result, such as the one in 2024 in the U.K. over “high welfare” farms. What happened was that a report by Animal Rising exposed systemic failures in the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (“RSPCA”) Assured farms, revealing that many fail to meet even basic legal welfare standards despite the organization’s “high welfare” claims. Investigators found widespread issues across 45 farms, uncovering 280 legal breaches and challenging the RSPCA’s role in promoting factory farming under the guise of animal protection.

Ultimately, animals from all farms face the same fate in the same slaughterhouses. While reducing suffering is better than allowing more, we have the power to choose no suffering at all—so why wouldn’t we?

CHANGE IS PROGRESS

In an age defined by the climate crisis and a deepened understanding of ethical responsibility, we can no longer afford to simply question animal agriculture. The devastating impacts on animals, humans, and the planet demand action. Because farming animals is no longer compatible with a sustainable, compassionate, or just future, we must end it. The only tangible way forward is to create a political movement to demand and

implement the large-scale policy changes that we need in our global food and fashion systems.

But first, we need to understand that meat consumption and animal clothing are not necessary for human societies to flourish. Despite the globally widespread practice of eating animal flesh and dairy, consuming animal products is not necessary for human health—a fact that has been affirmed by major medical, dietetic, and nutritional organizations worldwide. Well-planned diets without animal products are suitable for every stage of life, are nutritionally complete (with the addition of vitamin B12, whether from fortified foods or a supplement), and can offer health benefits. Plant-based diets are thus entirely viable and beneficial.

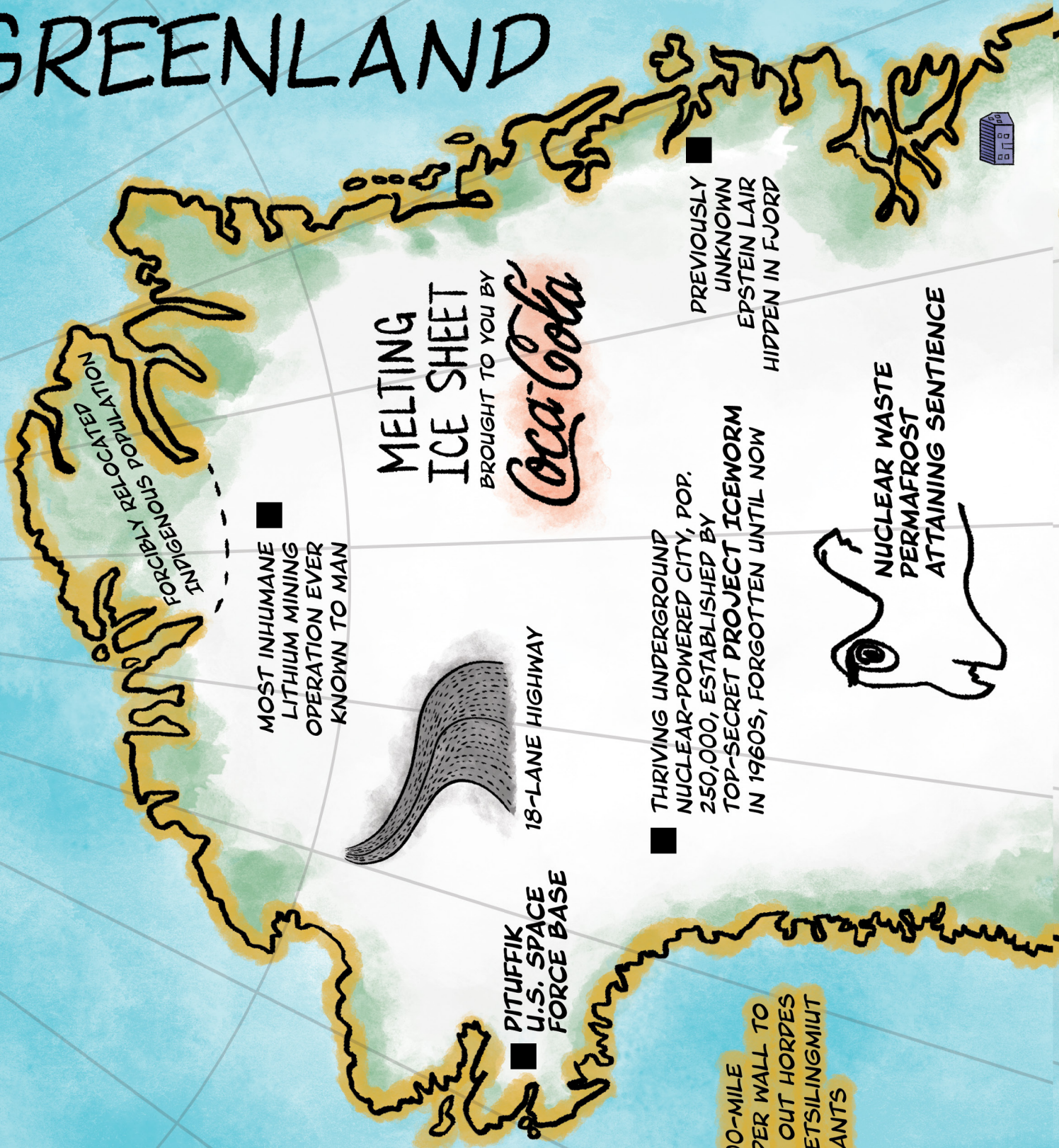
On a personal level, giving up animal-based products can feel like a rejection of our past, our traditions, and even our culture. It means letting go of familiar dishes that once brought comfort or that sweater carrying all those memories. For many, this shift can feel like losing a piece of identity. But it’s also an opportunity to redefine what those traditions mean and to create new ones. By embracing plant-based alternatives, we open ourselves to new flavors, textures, and experiences which are just as meaningful. For writer and animal rights proponent Marina Bolotnikova, becoming vegan allowed her to discover “how many plant-based gems already exist” in the cuisine of Russia, her culture of origin. Being vegan, she explains, is not about “subtract[ing] things from our lives.” Instead, it is “a source of abundance, meaning, and connection to our planet and our fellow creatures.”

As a Neapolitan, I find joy in reimagining classic dishes like *pasta e patate*—a hearty, smoky, and cheesy pasta and potato comfort dish—or the iconic dessert *babà*, in which I replace chicken’s eggs with aquafaba (bean water). But the real magic happens when I return to Naples and discover artisans crafting plant-based versions of these traditions in eateries across the city. It’s a testament to how food evolves while staying rooted in culture. And it’s not just Naples—whether in the U.K., where I live, or in my travels, I’ve met incredibly creative people who have given up animal products and are redefining their heritage—culinary or otherwise—through innovation. Culture does not have to be static. These creative bridges between tradition and progress exist and are just waiting for more people to discover them.

And while our ancestors might not have had choices other than animal-derived clothing, nowadays, we have other choices. There are many alternatives, like plant-based leathers made from a variety of materials (including discarded pineapple leaves, apple skins, cactus, and mushrooms) and recycled fabrics, including nylon. And with over 100 billion items of clothing made each year, we have enough to clothe everyone multiple times over. Ending the use of animals in fashion is as imperative as ending it for our food.

Just as food and fashion can evolve to honor tradition while embracing progress, so can our broader relationship with animals. We must shift from exploitation to coexistence and recognize animals as part of our shared moral community. Our survival is intertwined with theirs, and by ending animal farming, we can forge a future that values life in all its unique forms. ✦

Trump's GREENLAND



INDIGENOUS POPULATION
FORCIBLY RELOCATED

■
MOST INHUMAN
LITHIUM MINING
OPERATION EVER
KNOWN TO MAN

MELTING
ICE SHEET
BROUGHT TO YOU BY

Coca-Cola

■
THRIVING UNDERGROUND
NUCLEAR-POWERED CITY, POP.
250,000, ESTABLISHED BY
TOP-SECRET PROJECT ICEWORM
IN 1960S, FORGOTTEN UNTIL NOW

■
PREVIOUSLY
UNKNOWN
EPSTEIN LAIR
HIDDEN IN FJORD

NUCLEAR WASTE
PERMAFROST
ATTAINING SENTIENCE

27,000-MILE
BORDER WALL TO
KEEP OUT HORDES
OF NETSILINGMIUT
MIGRANTS

■
PITUFFIK
U.S. SPACE
FORCE BASE

18-LANE HIGHWAY

WRITTEN BY DEVIN SCHIFF
ILLUSTRATED BY LIBBY MCGUIRE

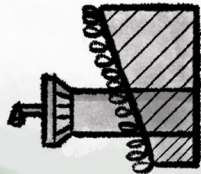
SEAL TEAM SIX



WILLIAM MCKINLEY MEMORIAL CANAL

4,000-YEAR-OLD CORPSE
FROZEN IN ICE ELECTED
DEMOCRATIC SENATOR

ILULISSAT



250 JOBS CREATED
BY NEW KANGERLUSSUAQ
SUPERMAX PRISON

SISIMIUT

TUNUMIT COUPLE
ACCUSED OF
HAVING ANCHOR
BABY ON U.S. SOIL



NEW ARTISAN
POLAR BEAR
MEAT DELI

TASIILAQ



Nuuk

STONEWALL
JACKSON STATUE
TO COMMEMORATE
GREENLAND'S NEW
AMERICAN HERITAGE

QAQORTOQ



NEOCON THINK TANK
DEMANDING PREEMPTIVE
STRIKE AGAINST FAROE
ISLANDS



THE GRIND OLD PARTY

BY STEPHEN PRAGER

IT'S RARE THAT A SINGLE TWEET DERAILS AN ENTIRE POLITICAL career. We live in an age where our political class is so mind-poisoned that most of them vent out something totally asinine, evil, or profoundly out of touch at least once a day, creating such a maelstrom of garbage that each individual piece remains indistinguishable from the last. And yet, sometimes a public figure's brain secretes something onto the keyboard that radiates such a perfect combination of profound ignorance, stomach-churning callousness, and arrogant self-satisfaction that it breaks the cringe barrier and creates a shock wave that sends its creator hurtling into a black abyss.

On December 26, 2024, while most normal people were bathing in the afterglow of the holiday season, opening the last of their gifts, Vivek Ramaswamy was furiously pounding at his keyboard. The electoral triumph of Donald Trump was still fresh, and the functionaries of his imperium were beginning to assemble, clamoring with full eyes and clear hearts to leave their indelible mark on the country. Vivek would be a central player: Along with Elon Musk, he would be tasked with leading the fledgling "Department of Government Efficiency." It was to be, as he put it, the "Dawn of a new Golden Age."

But debate was already raging across the online Right about how that "Golden Age" would be forged. The most visible fault lines had formed over the federal H-1B program, which allows highly educated foreign workers with special skills—usually in science, technology, engineering, or medicine—to receive visas allowing them to immigrate to the United States for work. The MAGA movement was broadly in agreement that it did not want poor immigrants—the supposedly "low-IQ," "cat-eating" Haitians and other such rabble—to enter the country. But what about wealthy Indian immigrants who know how to code?

The more openly xenophobic side of the movement, represented by figures like Steve Bannon and Laura Loomer, felt firmly that even a single job going to a foreigner when it could go to a "Heritage American" was one job too many. While the fundamental critique coming from this side was rooted more in a racist hostility towards non-white immigrants than any sort of broader discussion about the terms of work, they did hit on something real. The H-1B system *does* incentivize companies to hire skilled workers from foreign countries to the detriment of American workers, and it also exploits the immigrant workers themselves. Unlike American citizens, H-1B visa immigrant workers have

legal residency that is tied to their work for a specific company. If they complain about their working conditions, they risk being fired and, therefore, deported. As a result, many H-1B employers—including major tech firms—have been able to get away with paying those workers less than their American counterparts. For this reason, Senator Bernie Sanders has likened H-1B visa recipients to “indentured servants,” a source of cheap, easily exploitable labor.

But Vivek, a billionaire who hailed from the venture capital world—and who’d profited endlessly from the work of engineers and scientists tethered to their jobs—fell firmly on the other side of the debate. Taking to social media, he unveiled his manifesto:



This was, for all intents and purposes, the final statement Vivek Ramaswamy would make as a national public figure. It didn’t just elicit a response from the Left but from the Right as well.

IF YOU LOOK AT THE COMMENTS THAT EMERGED FROM THE ensuing H-1B discourse—the ones that aren’t simply full of anti-Indian racism, which is a lot of them—you’ll see that it enabled some on the Right to momentarily reach some Sanderesque conclusions of their own. “They want us to be working 80+ hours a week and have zero time for our families. These tech-nocratic billionaires use Americans as slave labor to make them more money,” wrote conservative author Evan Kilgore. “Tech bros framed their H-1B argument as ‘we need the best and brightest’ but what they really want is cheap labor,” said fascist Republican political operative Jack Posobiec.

Before this tweet, Vivek was on the inside track to considerable power. If he had stayed within the Trump administration, he would now be busy rending apart the sinews of the federal bureaucracy with the literal richest man in the world. Some considered him a possible heir apparent for the presidential nomination in 2028. But after his “mediocrity” post, Musk would ensure that Vivek was swiftly catapulted out of the federal government altogether, with *Politico* reporting that his “ill-received holiday rant... hastened his demise.” He has since returned to Ohio to launch a campaign for governor, where he is campaigning to launch a DOGE of his own and has received Trump’s endorsement in the GOP primary.

It’s very easy to see why Ramaswamy’s rant was so thoroughly panned by everyone who read it. It is one of the most profoundly offputting pieces of writing I’ve ever seen. On the surface, it drips with the sweaty insecurity of someone who has turned being a social outcast into a marker of their superiority. It displays a comforting belief that many nerdy outcasts come to adopt—that the reason they never got invited to parties was that the world simply couldn’t understand their genius.

Vivek fundamentally misunderstands the pop culture figures he wants to lionize. Urkel wasn’t an outcast because he was *smart*. He was an outcast because he constantly did and said weird things, and his klutzy and total lack of social awareness annoyed everybody around him. Other characters didn’t resent him because he used his intellect to master time travel and build robots but because he used it to come up with schemes to stalk and harass his next-door crush, Laura Winslow, including breaking into her home and tricking her into a fake marriage with him so she’ll give him a kiss.

But while a lot of mockery came from Vivek’s invocation of ’90s sitcoms as the root of American indolence, his invocation of the film *Whiplash* as a preferable alternative hints at the deeper evil within his worldview. The film is about a young drummer at a prestigious music academy who is severely abused, both verbally and physically, by a sociopathic band teacher who justifies his behavior as a motivational tool to “push people beyond what is expected of them.” *Whiplash* is one of the best films ever made about how toxic the single-minded drive to succeed at all costs can be. In the end, the protagonist achieves his dream, becoming a world-class drummer and earning his professor’s approval. But it requires him to become obsessive to the point that it costs him virtually everything else in his life. He breaks up with his girlfriend to focus



Scene from the movie "Whiplash"

solely on drumming, becomes distant from his family, and—as a consequence of his hypercompetitive environment—becomes as vicious and antisocial towards his bandmates as his professor.

It's hard to interpret *Whiplash* as anything other than a cautionary tale. But Vivek takes it as an aspirational model for the entire country. And he's not the only one who seems to view it that way. YouTube and TikTok are littered with videos from channels with names like "Spartan Motivation" that edit bits of the film, including the professor's rants and the student bleeding on his drum kits, into montages that are meant to "#motivate" the viewer to achieve excellence. *Whiplash* is a canonical film of sorts in "grindset" content, which has proliferated dramatically with the rise of influencers like Andrew Tate. In *GQ*, Ruchira Sharma describes the "grindset" as a strange mutation of earlier online expressions of masculine neuroses. Whereas earlier "manosphere" content glorified becoming a dominant, charismatic "alpha male" or, in the case of "incel" content, descended into nihilism about not being one, "grindset culture" venerates the "sigma male." As Sharma describes:

Sigma males are self-sufficient loners; they attract extremely good-looking women but aren't interested in them, and, in keeping with society's growing fixation with productivity, they're capitalist hustlers. Devotees encourage other users to live a stricter lifestyle and adopt self-care practices like going to the gym and drinking water more often. This, they argue, will make them more attractive and alpha-like, which will equate to more money.

In other words, no hanging out at the mall, no sleepovers, and no "chillin'."

THE "GRINDSET" MENTALITY IS THE INTERNET-IFICATION of an ideology that dates back to the Victorian era. English author Samuel Smiles's 1859 book *Self Help* (which spawned an entire genre of self-improvement texts) contains similar laments about how "individual idleness, selfishness, and vice" were engines of "national decay." As such, Smiles argued for minimal government intervention to help the poor, because "whatever is done for men or classes, to a certain extent takes away the stimulus and necessity of doing for themselves." He expressed a

Calvinist view of work, writing that "Heaven helps those who help themselves... Help from without is often enfeebling in its effects, but help from within invariably invigorates."

It was an early form of the "Protestant Work Ethic" that sociologist Max Weber would later critique, saying that within this worldview, "Waste of time is... the first and in principle the deadliest of sins. The span of human life is infinitely short and precious to make sure of one's own election. Loss of time through sociability, idle talk, luxury, even more sleep than is necessary for health, six to at most eight hours, is worthy of absolute moral condemnation." All of one's waking hours, in this view, should be spent on work and productivity; anything else is laziness and sin.

The standard eight-hour work days, weekends, and overtime pay that modern Americans have come to expect were not always ingrained. Before the early 20th century, working hours used to be much longer, with 12-hour shifts in grueling factory jobs and on construction sites considered normal. It was only through organized struggle by unionized workers over more than a century that reasonable hours were introduced into American law.

Bosses often retaliated against workers' demands with violence, but they also responded with moralizing and derision. In 1835, when a Boston carpenter's union launched one of the first campaigns to reduce the working week to a paltry 60 hours, a group of merchants and shipowners published a statement in the *Boston Courier* warning that even a moment of leisure would corrupt the souls of their workforce. "To be idle several of the most useful hours of the morning and evening will surely lead to intemperance and ruin," it read. Modernize the language a little, and you could hear the same thing from Vivek Ramaswamy.

THE RIGHT'S RESPONSE TO VIVEK'S TWEET WAS THE FINAL straw that ended his tenure in the nascent Trump administration. But this is a little perplexing, since Vivek's screed toward American workers is hardly distinct from the sort of condescension Republicans direct at American workers all the time, nor is his solution of endless grinding distinct from their policy agenda.

You don't have to look far to find right-wing content venerating the "grindset" mentality of endless work as a marker of virtue. One defender of Vivek's rant was multi-level marketing executive Patrick Bet-David, whose hugely influential *Valuetainment* podcast boasts more than 6.6 million subscribers and has hosted President Donald Trump as a guest. "As an immigrant from Iran," Bet-David said, "I didn't mind working 80 hours a week. I didn't mind the competition. All I wanted was a shot. This used to be the American Way."

The man currently charting Republican policy, Elon Musk, is a firm believer in extreme work hours. As far back as 2010, he's insisted on "100 hour" workweeks as a standard for any entrepreneur to be successful. After taking over Twitter, he demanded that anyone who wanted to stay employed there commit to working "hardcore" 84-hour weeks, which naturally led about 75 percent of them to resign. And since taking over as the doge of DOGE, he's upped the ante to the ludicrous claim that he and his young employees work 120 hours a week. (This seems, frankly, impossible since Musk also tweets dozens, if not hundreds, of times every day, along with playing PC games like *Elden Ring* and *Diablo 4*.) One of Musk and Ramaswamy's first initiatives in an effort to slash the federal workforce was to eliminate remote work with the hope

that many federal workers would simply quit. But Musk was also motivated by a belief that working from home is “morally wrong.” Meanwhile, despite his own companies receiving billions each year in federal contracts, he posts memes referring to people who receive federal assistance as members of the “parasite class.”

Musk’s 17-hour days and demands are extreme even by the standards of American tech executives, but his ideology is not. Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos and Google CEO Eric Schmidt, who have both recently become courtiers of the Trump White House, have long decried the idea that workers should expect a “work-life balance” and suggested that their companies’ failures to compete with newer tech startups are the result of their workers not being willing to grind hard enough.

At the political level, the Republican Party has been ruthlessly imposing the grindset as a new normal and chipping away at the expectations Americans have come to hold about their rights as workers. Trump said at a rally during his 2024 campaign that he “hated” giving workers overtime pay and often “wouldn’t pay” it. The Project 2025 policy manifesto his administration is currently implementing calls for an explicit end to the 40-hour workweek, replacing it with a 160-hour work *month*, which reduces the amount of overtime pay workers will receive. Project 2025 proposes many new avenues to help employers avoid it as well. The year before, when the Biden Labor Department introduced a new rule that allowed 4 million more workers to collect overtime payment, the GOP filed legislation to block the rule from going into effect.

Republicans have also begun to make arguments that Americans need to work later in life. During the presidential primary, Nikki Haley championed the idea of raising the retirement age from 67 to an unspecified higher age, an idea that some executives—like BlackRock’s Larry Fink—have co-signed. During the post-pandemic “labor shortage,” Wisconsin Senator Ron Johnson called for tax incentives to coax retirees back into the work force. And while Trump was smart enough to insist on the campaign trail that he wouldn’t “cut one cent” from Social Security, the Republican Study Committee, which includes a majority of the House GOP, has recommended raising the retirement age in 2025. Republican-aligned media has been sanding the ground for this reality, making the moral case for why seniors who want to retire are a bunch of lazy bums. Ben Shapiro called the idea of retirement “stupid” altogether, saying that “Everybody that I know who has retired, is dead within five years. And if you talk to people who are elderly, they lose their purpose in life by losing their job.” (For the record, studies on retirement have found that, if you control for the health of people retiring, the difference in life expectancy between those who retire early vs. later is essentially negligible.)

While these fortunately remain only wishes for the time being, we’ve seen what Republicans have been able to accomplish with absolute control over state governments. Union members have long enjoyed more standard, predictable hours and more paid time off—and so Republican states have worked to steadily demolish unions. Florida’s Governor Ron DeSantis has led red states in efforts to demolish public sector unions, introducing onerous new requirements that automatically decertify them if they don’t have enough dues-paying members. Other states have begun to copy him. At private companies, state Republican parties have opposed union drives and critical strikes. When the United Auto Workers launched a campaign to organize across the South—a place that



Packers Sanitation Services, Inc. employee who appears to be a minor working in the ‘Ground Beef room’ of a meat packing plant in Nebraska (L) and another employee who appears to be a minor hosing off equipment in the same plant (R). U.S. Department of Labor

has been notoriously inhospitable to unions—last year, six governors accused the union of “threaten[ing] our jobs and the values we live by.” Alabama, Georgia, and Tennessee have all enacted legislation requiring corporations not to recognize the results of union elections decided by card check, whereby a majority of workers at a workplace sign cards in favor of unionizing.

And when cities and towns have tried to pass ordinances to protect their workers from abuse, red states have blocked them using “preemption” laws. Over the past decade, more than a dozen red states have introduced laws that prevent cities from passing “predictive scheduling” laws, which require employers to give their employees a notice period before requiring them to come into work. Without these protections, the schedules of service workers are totally at the mercy of their bosses, who can call them in for shifts with almost no notice. Dozens of mostly red states have preempted other city level improvements to workers’ rights, including their abilities to raise wages, place requirements on gig work, and mandate paid leave. They’ve even fought requirements as simple as mandatory water breaks for employees, even as heat deaths have become more common among outdoor workers due to the increased temperature caused by climate change. Both Florida and Texas have passed laws *banning* municipalities from requiring that workers be given mandatory water breaks and time in the shade.

Kids are probably doing less “chillin’” and “hanging out at the mall” in states that have rolled back child labor laws over the past two years. In fact, putting kids to work has been such a priority that they bring it up even when nobody is asking. During the 2023 debt ceiling negotiations, when House Speaker Kevin McCarthy was asked about a proposal to increase the age that people needed to work in order to collect food stamps from 50 to 54, he strangely brought the topic to children: “We might have a child that has no job, no dependents, but sitting on the couch. We’re going to encourage that person to get a job and have to go to work, which gives them worth and value.”

Right-wing groups like the Chamber of Commerce and Americans for Prosperity have been successfully introducing and passing laws to let children work at younger ages, for longer hours, and in more dangerous environments. At the same time, the number of child labor violations has gone through the roof, reaching the highest level in decades. Some of the stories have been horrifying, like a 16-year-old in Wisconsin who was killed working in a sawmill or a 17-year-old slaughterhouse employee in Michigan whose hand was hacked off by a meat grinder. In Iowa, where Governor Kim Reynolds signed a law allowing children to work in meatpacking facilities in order to learn that there's "dignity in work," dozens of children, some as young as 13 years old, ended up working late night shifts using corrosive chemicals to clean dangerous slaughterhouse instruments. In Louisiana, Republicans eliminated mandatory 20-minute lunch breaks for 16- and 17-year-old workers on shifts longer than five hours. Rep. Roger Wilder, the Smoothie King franchisee who introduced the bill, chafed at the idea that it would "harm children," saying "Give me a break, these are young adults."

Even the idea of every child having a lunch to eat is controversial. Last year, 13 Republican governors opted out of a federal program to provide their states with money that could provide low-income children with credits for food during summer months when school lunch is unavailable, deriding it as "welfare." After taking office in January 2025, Donald Trump paused the grants for this program, taking benefits away from an estimated 28 million children. Georgia Republican Rep. Rich McCormick went on TV to defend the decision. "When you're talking about school lunches, I worked my way through high school. I don't know about you but I've worked since before I was 13 years old," he said. Needing to take a job in addition to attending school in order to have food to eat, McCormick said, was "something that makes them have value, thinking about their future instead of thinking about how they're going to sponge off the government when they don't need to."

THE REASON THAT VIVEK RAMASWAMY'S PARTICULAR STRAIN of classism raised such a reaction seems to be that it was refracted through a prism of racial or nationalistic antagonism. The problem wasn't that he was insulting *workers*, but that he was an Indian American man denigrating white American workers in comparison to immigrants from Southeast Asia. The irony was not lost to many commentators on the Left, including Trevor Beaulieu of the *Champagne Sharks* podcast, who noted that Vivek essentially gave white Americans the same sort of "pull up your pants" speech that white Americans have been giving to Black Americans for decades.

But of course, because this is the Right and their "populism" is limited by the extent to which they can use it to enforce other hierarchies, nothing of value seems to have been learned from this. Within weeks, the people who were railing against the suspect motives of "technocratic billionaires" were back to clapping like seals for Elon Musk as he began to take a chainsaw to the federal government—including agencies like the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, the Labor Department, and OSHA, whose primary purposes are to limit the corporate exploitation of workers and consumers.

That said, I'm loath to assume there's no limit to how much grinding people are willing to tolerate. Far from being a "mediocrity" culture as Vivek suggests, Americans already work more

than people in other similarly wealthy countries. We go on fewer vacations (and often still do work when we go on them), we get less family and sick leave, we take fewer breaks, and we eat more meals at our desks. And yet we also face greater precarity—more expensive healthcare, housing, and higher education and a weaker safety net for when we can't afford those necessities. And perhaps more importantly, we *feel* that something is wrong about this. Two-thirds of Americans say they feel burnout from their jobs according to *Forbes*, which says it's an all time high.

Republicans have taken their relatively narrow victory in the last election as a mandate to enact all their most outlandish policy fantasies. But when you ask Americans why they voted for Trump, it's not because they wanted him to get rid of the Department of Education or persecute trans people or take over Greenland or destroy OSHA. The most common reason was inflation. Biden was president, and people were paying too much for too little, so they voted for the only other person on offer.

Working-class Americans have been shifting red in recent years, and the last election continued that trend. But now we're all getting a big, fat dose of what Republicans do when they have complete control over the levers of government. They've been able to obscure their class allegiance for years by playing off racial and cultural resentments and obscuring the definition of "elite" to mean something other than "the rich guy who is in charge of your entire life." But now, all of those rich guys are aligned firmly behind Donald Trump, falling over each other to pay homage to him. And in return, he is going to give them what they want. He and his party are going to make ordinary people grind more and more and more.

Hating work and wanting to do less of it is one of the few things that unites nearly everybody—across race, religion, gender, and age. Any politician who ran on a national platform of reducing the length of the workweek would be likely to be formidable. Amid the post-New Deal consensus, even Republicans like Richard Nixon recognized that pitching a four-day workweek as a dream to strive for was good politics, even if they did it completely cynically.

It's even easier to make the case now: technology has dramatically increased our productivity, so why shouldn't we all get to reap the rewards by working less? Everyone can imagine what they'd do with an extra day of leisure—the books they'd read, the pastries they'd bake, the old friends they'd catch up with, or simply the sleep they'd get. But because both of our political parties are subservient to the whims of that small elite stratum that profits from our toil, even acknowledging the possibility of less work has largely been pushed to the fringes. Bernie Sanders has introduced a bill calling for a four-day workweek. Right now he is on an island, with only a few other Democrats signing on in agreement. But lots of other countries have been steadily reducing their workweeks, either informally through union negotiations or, in the case of Belgium, France, and recently Spain, through the force of law.

Americans are willing to put up with a lot more grinding than Vivek Ramaswamy is willing to give them credit for. But they still have a sense of dignity and self-respect that *doesn't* come from work, but comes from being a goddamn human being who wants to have *friends*, not just *colleagues*, who wants to have *hobbies*, not just *projects*. While the Right's seemingly unchecked power is terrifying, it's also clarifying. There will soon be no doubt about who is trying to grind us all into dust. ✨

The 24 Questions that Lead to Love

BY AIDAN Y-M

Tired of dating apps? Missed out on the perfect Valentine's Day? Thinking about hurling yourself off the sea cliffs out of heartbreak? Boy have we got the solution for you! While other "reputable" publications have put out their lists of questions that lead to love, we found that 36 whole questions was just way too many. That's why our expert psychologists got cracking on a faster, more streamlined approach. These new and improved questions are scientifically guaranteed to spark love 33.3% faster than the competition! Just find a partner, tell them "once I ask you these 24 questions you will be in love with me," and get asking away!

1. That guy over there, do you think he's handsome?
Handsome than me? Why? Be specific.

2. What's your opinion on balloon fetishists?
How's your lung capacity?

3. What's your sign? Mine is pedestrian crossing.

4. Are you gonna eat that?

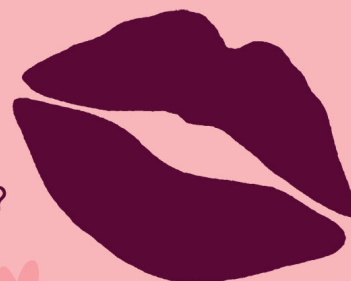
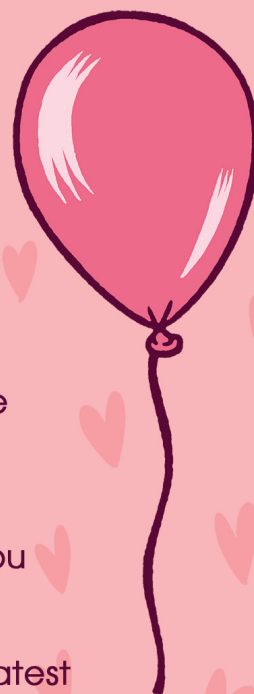
5. When was the last time you were
in a street fight? Did you win?

6. If you could change anything
about those thrown together rags you
call an outfit what would it be?

7. Do you have a goldfish? What is the greatest
accomplishment of your goldfish's life?

8. What be the answers to me riddles three?

9. Do you dare me to kiss you? Not like in a romantic
way or anything but just like woah wouldn't it be
crazy if we kissed? Like wouldn't that be so weird?
But like y'know just in a fun way, not anything
serious. So do you dare me?

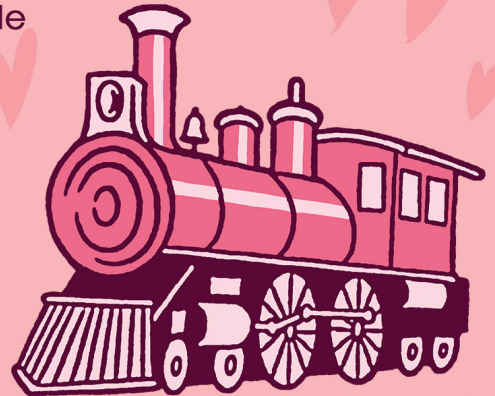


10. Can you crack my back?

11. When did you last cry in front of your fourth grade class because you peed your pants and then accidentally called the teacher mom?

12. Are you in love with me yet? Why not?

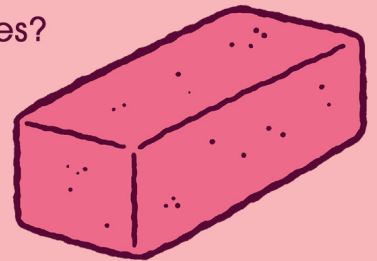
13. Two trains traveling towards each other both depart from stations 300 miles away from each other at 5:00. Train A is traveling 85 mph while train B is traveling 60 mph. At what time will the trains pass each other?



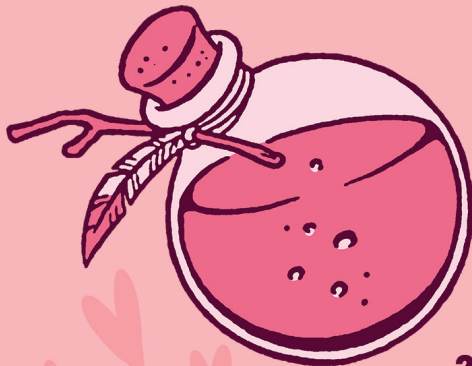
14. If you were to die this evening what would you give me in your will?

15. So uh ... do you have any hobbies?

16. Can you provide the names and phone numbers of three professional references?



17. What's your opinion on new age philosophy? Have you ever astral projected? Have you heard of Eckancar? What's your credit card number?



18. Do you prefer savory foods or getting hit in the head with a brick?

19. Would you like a sip of this love potion the swamp hag gave me?

20. Can you keep it down? I'm trying to think.

21. Do you think you're funny? Could you make me laugh? Can you tell me a joke that will make me laugh right now?

22. Do you wanna go dutch on a heavily discounted racehorse with me? I'm talkin' dirt cheap. I know a guy.



23. A person who is in love with me says what?

24. This sure is a lot of questions, huh?

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DEATH AND TAXES

BY LAUREN FADIMAN

IN 2003, THE ACTIVIST JULIA BUTTERFLY HILL—BEST known for the 738 days she spent living in an endangered California redwood tree to prevent it being cut down in the late 1990s—held a press conference in San Francisco announcing that she would refuse to pay \$150,000 in federal taxes. Instead, she declared, she planned on rerouting the money to after-school programs, community gardens, and various other ends. “I ‘redirect’ my taxes rather than ‘resisting’ my taxes. I actually take the money that the IRS says goes to them and I give it to the places where our taxes should be going,” Hill explained in a 2005 interview with *The Edge*. “And in my letter to the IRS I said, ‘I’m not refusing to pay my taxes. I’m actually paying them but I’m paying them where they belong because you refuse to do so.’”

The IRS must have received many such letters that year. One woman—not a prominent activist like Hill, but a mother of two living in Massachusetts—had her letter reprinted in the New England-based pacifist newsletter *Peacework*. “I am a responsible citizen, earning a salary at a local health clinic,” the letter explains. “I am not an anarchist. I am taking whatever steps I can to prevent the murder and torture of my fellow humans.” The \$1,507 she owed the IRS would instead “go to research to stop AIDS and cancer, the construction of a battered women’s shelter in Somerville, and programs which empower homeless people in Boston.”

Perhaps both women had taken a literal page out of *War Tax Resistance: A Guide to Withholding Your Support From the Military*, which had come out in its fifth edition in early 2003. It was a timely release: “As we go to press, President George W. Bush—promising a global war without end against terrorism—

has the U.S. military massing on the borders of Iraq for a possible ground invasion,” the book opens. “Military spending, which had been on a modest decline through the 1990s, is once again rising as sharply as it did during the Reagan years.” On the precipice of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the American left found itself facing a war that would rival Vietnam in duration. Would the tactics that protesters had wielded against American imperialism during the 1960s and 1970s work in a new century—a new millennium?

In practice, war tax resistance is a three-step simpler than any *chassé*: one stops withholding tax money through work, refuses come tax season to pay the portion of the income tax associated with war-related spending, then *personally* redirects that money to causes associated with peace. The amount of money in question could be as little as a few symbolic dollars or as much as 45 percent of the estimated lump sum—the amount the War Resisters League estimates will go to past and present war-related spending in the 2025 fiscal year. “There is a degree of tax resistance for every level of risk tolerance,” explained Ed Hedemann, author of *War Tax Resistance*, to the *Village Voice* in 2003.

About 8,000 Americans probably participated in war tax resistance during the War on Terror. The folks at the National War Tax Resistance Coordinating Committee (NWTRCC, pronounced like *new trick*) think that number is probably higher now. “Even before the invasion of Gaza, every year we would have 40,000 unique visitors to our website,” explains NWTRCC coordinator Lincoln Rice in an interview with *Current Affairs*. “Those four or five months after the invasion of Gaza leading up to Tax Day, we were having 20,000 unique visitors to our website every *month*. Our website crashed three different times... We had to keep expanding the bandwidth because we were having un-

precedented traffic.” It is difficult to know how much of that traffic translated into actual tax resistance, but if even 5,000 people refused to pay 45 percent of the average American income tax—about \$7,898 in 2022—that’s more than \$17 million that would have been redirected from the coffers of American warmongers.

Of course, \$17 million is a mere drop in the bucket of the \$849.8 *billion* of the federal budget dedicated to defense spending—but if the IRS’s history of abuse of tax resisters is any indication, then it would seem war tax resistance has an outsized impact on, at very least, the morale of the American war machine. Indeed, the refusal to pay taxes has been a powerful form of resistance against war and imperialism in North America since before the United States even existed. It may provide a potential mode of resistance against American funding for violence in Gaza, too.

IN 1755, AS THE FRENCH AND INDIAN WAR ENVELOPED the colonies of North America in conflict, the Quaker community of Philadelphia found itself in a difficult position: caught between the civil obligation to pay taxes to the war effort and the spiritual demands of pacifism that are a central tenet of Quaker belief to this day. “To refuse the active payment of a Tax which our Society generally paid, was exceedingly disagreeable,” wrote the Quaker preacher John Woolman in his journal, “but to do a thing contrary to my Conscience appeared yet more dreadful.” On December 16, 1755, Woolman drew up “an epistle of tender love and caution to Friends in Pennsylvania,” in which he (and the twenty-one fellow Friends who signed the document) explained that they “could most cheerfully contribute” to the tax if only military contributions were not part of the lump sum. “Suffering be the consequence of our refusal,” the epistle went on to say—and, indeed, the Philadelphia Meeting for Sufferings began that year a careful tabulation of the many material consequences endured by Friends who refused to fuel the engine of war. Even in the land of supposed religious freedom it would prove difficult to disentangle oneself from the bloodthirsty demands of the emerging American state.

Twenty years later, as the American Revolution raged, the same problem arose again. This time, the Military Association of Philadelphia and the Committee of Safety requested that Quakers make financial contributions in lieu of military service to the would-be American state. “Where the Liberty of all is at stake,” explained the Committee in a petition to the Philadelphia Assembly, “every Man should assist in its support, and... where the Cause is common, and the benefits derived from an Opposition are universal, it is not consonant to justice or Equity that the Burdens should be partial.” The Meeting for Sufferings responded saying that such payments could only be made in breach of religious conscience by “Friends & others Conscientiously Scrupulous of bearing Arms.” But the Assembly soon surrendered to the demands of the Committee, ushering in a new “time of suffering” for the Quakers facing two options—military service or pecuniary compensation for the lack of service—both of which required tacit acceptance of the demands of war. Ultimately, the Meeting for Sufferings threw its moderate weight behind the Loyalist cause, which opposed American independence in favor of “loyalty” to the British crown.

The result was, by colonial standards, a shitstorm of epic

proportions. Thomas Paine accused the Friends of “dabbling at matters, which the professed quietude of their principles instructed them not to meddle with,” while Samuel Adams stormed that “if they would not pull down Kings, let them not support tyrants!” Individual Quakers were targeted in the streets for refusing to pay tithes to the Continental Congress or use the currency it had issued to fund the war. The latter was the crime of a Delaware resident named John Cowgill, who was paraded through the streets of Dover with a sign declaring, “On the Circulation of the Continental Currency Depends the Fate of America,” on his back. Countless others were jailed or had their property seized and auctioned.

Already by the early nineteenth century, American citizenship came with strings attached: complicity in armed conflict. The Mexican War and Civil War both raised complicated questions for those opposed to military violence—the latter especially, as many Quaker pacifists were also stringent abolitionists. Two hundred years after the American Revolution, as the United States embarked upon two decades of war on Vietnam, the Philadelphia Quakers were grappling yet again with the question of war taxes. Two Quaker employees, “a Monthly Meeting secretary and a youth worker for the Peace Committee,” had “asked their employers to cease withholding income tax from their salaries,” and the problem made its way to the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting for discussion in 1966. The Meeting concluded that “Friends, whatever their judgments about a particular action, are sympathetic toward those who engage in it for reasons of conscience,” and so they set about “devis[ing] a formula acceptable to the Internal Revenue Service and to Congress, which would permit persons to withhold that proportion of their income taxes applicable to military purposes and apply it to constructive purposes of government.”

By then, the long-held Quaker opposition to pecuniary support for war had gone mainstream, in no small part thanks to horrors of the atom bomb—and the fact that, due to the advent of the income tax in 1943, every American had helped pay for it. “You pay the bills of war, you accept war jobs, you bombed Nagasaki,” declares a 1949 leaflet distributed by the War Resisters League-allied pacifist group Peacemakers. “If you keep on doing these routine, but really immoral things, you will soon bomb hundreds of other cities.” Individual Peacemakers, like athlete Eroeseanna Robinson—who could have been an international track star had she not declined the opportunity to compete in the 1958 USA–USSR Track and Field Dual Meet to avoid being a political pawn in the Cold War—held the line at enormous personal cost. “If I pay income tax, I am participating in... destruction,” Robinson told *Jet Magazine* in 1960, amidst a high-profile legal battle. Ultimately, she was sentenced to a year in prison for refusing to pay her taxes and cooperate with either the IRS or the courts, but was released after only three months following a successful 22-day hunger strike.

The ranks of secular war tax resisters only grew as the Vietnam War dragged on. In 1966, Robinson and her fellow resisters were joined by a further 370, including Joan Baez, Dorothy Day, and Noam Chomsky, who signed onto an ad in the *Washington Post* that year declaring that they would not pay the 23 percent of the 1965 income tax that would finance the war in Vietnam. They, in turn, were joined in 1967 by a further 528—these including Gloria Steinem—who rejected the 10 percent war surtax that had just been appended to the income tax. By 1982, an estimated 10,000

Quakers and at least as many fellow travelers across the United States were withholding from the Internal Revenue Service money earmarked for the military, to the tune of as much as 36 percent of their annual income tax. “I hate to be in the position to refuse taxes, because I want to support so many things worth supporting,” explained one 73-year-old Friend in an interview with *The New York Times*, a sentiment not so different from that of the Quaker preacher John Woolman two centuries earlier. “I’m law-abiding, but I think there’s a point where civil disobedience is required if the Government is compromising religious freedom and the conscience of the individual.”

There’s a point where civil disobedience is required. It might have been the Quakers who conceptualized war tax resistance during the days of the French and Indian War, but it was Henry David Thoreau who wrote most passionately in defense of the tactic in his 1849 essay *Civil Disobedience*. “If a thousand men were not to pay their tax-bills this year,” writes Thoreau, “that would not be a violent and bloody measure, as it would be to pay them, and enable the State to commit violence and shed innocent blood. This is, in fact, the definition of a peaceable revolution, if any such is possible.” His target was American involvement in the Mexican War, but his words would find receptive audiences among the ranks of Quaker and secular resisters who would come—over the course of the 20th century—to think of their resistance to the war tax as not merely the expression of personal scruple, but a powerful means to protest American warmongering abroad. In the meantime, *Civil Disobedience* would become required reading in high school classes across the country. The essay has stuck around, but the numbers of war tax protesters have decreased since the 1970s. Where, in the bloody decades since the Vietnam War, has war tax protest gone?

ON DECEMBER 3, 1989, THE ACTIVIST RANDY Kehler was arrested for being inside his own home. He had been expecting the arrest—planning for it, even—but it still came as a bit of a shock to Kehler and his wife. “As a result of our refusal to pay war taxes—to pay federal taxes, 50 percent of which are used to pay for past, present, and future wars... the government has auctioned our home, bought it from themselves, and now has taken—they would *like* to think they have taken—possession,” explained Kehler’s wife Betsy Corner in an oral history interview in early 1990. “They arrested Randy for being in the house... The next day, people occupied the house... [and have] taken turns being in the house the last... six weeks. We’re keeping possession of the house in the sense that our friends and supporters are living in it.”

The couple had stopped paying their federal income tax in 1977 in opposition to U.S. military action and intervention abroad. They would calculate their owed taxes and then instead send that amount to victims of U.S.-sponsored wars in Nicaragua and El Salvador, as well as women’s shelters, veterans’ outreach programs, the homeless, and other organizations in their town of Colrain, Massachusetts. As a result, the IRS launched a lengthy war on the couple that culminated in their eviction, making the Corner-Kehler family the last one to lose a house to war

THE REFUSAL TO PAY TAXES HAS BEEN A POWERFUL FORM OF RESISTANCE AGAINST WAR AND IMPERIALISM

tax resistance. Reflecting ten years later on the history of war tax resistance, the War Resisters League was circumspect about state-sponsored prosecution. “If war tax resistance were totally ineffective,” reads their 2003 guide, “we wouldn’t have to worry about a reaction from the government.”

And yet, the shadow of what happened to the Corner-Kehler family is a long one—despite the fact that such attacks by the IRS on conscientious objectors to the war tax are exceedingly rare, especially now. “I don’t think [the IRS is]... that scary on a logical level,” explains Lincoln Rice, “but... it’s been enculturated into us to really fear any sort of non-payment of taxes—even though [those taxes are] oftentimes being used for the most terrible things.” Indeed, the taxman is one of the classic bogeymen of American culture: an urban legend about the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) even has its employees branding Americans with the Mark of the Beast in order to receive Social Security checks. “I’m crazy enough to take on Batman,” says the Joker in a 1998 cartoon. “But the IRS? No, thank you.”

Some of the IRS’s frightening reputation was no doubt earned during the late 20th century, when its abuses culminated in a 1998 Senate hearing that exposed a culture of “cowboy agents” who “think that the end of putting away the bad guys justifies... intrusive, intimidating and oppressive investigations.” The hearing drew to a close the most aggressive period of IRS pursuit of war tax resisters. “I don’t know that many war tax resisters who had their homes taken [by the IRS]... [but] I know a lot of war tax resisters from the ’70s and ’80s who had their cars taken—and wage garnishments were almost a guaranteed thing,” says Rice. “During that time, the IRS was much better funded, and if you worked a wage job and refused to pay, you basically had a 100 percent chance that... your wages were going to be garnished.” The fact was, however, that the government was on the defense: “[Tax resistance] definitely concerned the Nixon administration during the Vietnam War, [so] we did see, at that point, an uptick in criminal prosecution of war tax resisters.” But times have

MARCHES MIGHT MAKE HEADLINES, BUT MONEY IS THE TRUE ENGINE OF WAR

changed since the Vietnam War era—and now the IRS would seemingly rather not draw attention to war tax resistance, as the Corner-Kehler affair certainly had, even if it would mean recouping financial loss. “I became a war tax resister in the late ’90s,” muses Rice, “and I’ve never had my wages garnished ever.”

Why, if not for fear of the IRS, has war tax resistance faded from popular consciousness? Perhaps it has to do with the changing nature of war. There is its sheer duration, for one thing: the War in Afghanistan dragged on for a whopping twenty years, making it the longest conflict in American history. Then there is its altered state: since 1973, soldiers are no longer draftees, but men and women who have—for a variety of reasons—chosen to join the military. Their ranks are far smaller than the legions of Americans sent east during Vietnam, and the wars they fight are far more technologized than the combat of yore. All of this has contributed to a reality of war that is alienating despite its endurance, its immediacy tempered by time. “People have just gotten used to being at war, unfortunately,” theorizes one resister to *The New Republic*. And the war to which they are accustomed asks less of us than ever—just a little money, relatively speaking, in exchange for the huge cost in human lives abroad.

Of course, that money adds up. According to NWTRCC, the average American pays as much as 45 percent of their taxes to the military, which translates to a massive annual Department of Defense budget. The further breakdown of taxation is chilling: in 2018, the average taxpayer worked 63 days to fund the military—and 31 of those days were for the sake of Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, and other private military contractors alone. The financialization of war (the process by which banks, hedge funds, private equity, and private companies have tethered profit to conflict) poses a particular challenge to those seeking to resist warmaking, as does the fact that recent wars have been funded almost entirely by debt—in no small part because explicit war taxes are unpopular, capable of dragging down support for a given war by as much as 15 percent.

At the same time, war tax resistance might seem to lack the symbolic urgency that neverending wars demand. It is a mode of resistance that, by nature, stops no traffic and draws no attention. To know your neighbor is a war tax resister, they would need to have told you—or you would need to work for the IRS. The sheer

horror of American support for and perpetration of violence in the Middle East, meanwhile, seems to demand the sort of protest that makes the news: demonstrations, occupations, immolations. There is a quietness to war tax resistance that would seem to render it almost too *amiable* in the face of American war crimes abroad.

Finally, from an ideological perspective, there is the following: socialists have hitched themselves to the payment of taxes, with “tax the rich” becoming a popular slogan, and the opposition to taxes has come to be a stance typically associated with right-wing beliefs. Despite the long shadow of Oklahoma City bomber Terry Nichols, today most committed “sovereign citizens” spend their time neither building bombs nor storming buildings but rather weaponizing the banal. They engage in ceaseless traffic law violations, acts of tax evasion, and, above all, paper terrorism—i.e., the production of enormous quantities of false liens, frivolous lawsuits, fraudulent letters of credit, and other pseudolegal filings that seek to jam up local courts, governments, and businesses like malfunctioning printers. This is the extreme end of right-wing opposition to taxation, but even the most middle-of-the-road Republican wants their taxes cut. It is perhaps in a kind of symbolic opposition to this that the Left has become the political face of *paying* one’s taxes, though only programs like Social Security and entities like the embattled Department of Education represent anything like what socialist taxation would theoretically fund at the federal level.

So, is there a place for war tax resistance in our troubled present, as the U.S. uses tax dollars to fund Israeli warmaking to the tune of billions? The National War Tax Resistance Coordinating Committee thinks so—though not necessarily because they believe we’ll ever succeed in defunding war from below. “War tax resistance is an act of empowerment against empire,” explains NWTRCC outreach coordinator Chrissy Kirchhoefer in an interview with *Current Affairs*. It is not merely about the amount of money one withholds, but the feeling it produces: one of agency in the face of the war machine. “[And] it’s not [just about] withholding from something that we don’t believe in... but it’s also [about] giving to what we do believe in.” She explains that war tax resistance is an opportunity for things like mutual aid—the collaborative pooling of resources at the local level—and other programs and projects that cannot or do not receive support from the government. It is, in short, a way to put our money where our mouths are in the here and now.

American war tax resisters maintain that their protest is at *least* as effective as demonstrations in the street—perhaps even more so. There is a quote popular among their ranks: “Let them march all they want, as long as they pay their taxes.” Like an American spin on *Let them eat cake*, it was supposedly said by President Ronald Reagan’s Secretary of State Alexander Haig in response to a 1982 march for peace—although today no one can find a sure source for its origin. But perhaps it is equally powerful as an apocryphal quote, one conceivably said by any member of the establishment—for Republicans and Democrats are united, ultimately, in their vilification of protest and their deification of wealth. And it makes sense as a sentiment: marches might make headlines, but money is the true engine of war. Perhaps war tax resistance is the only form of protest capable of hitting the government where it really hurts. ✚

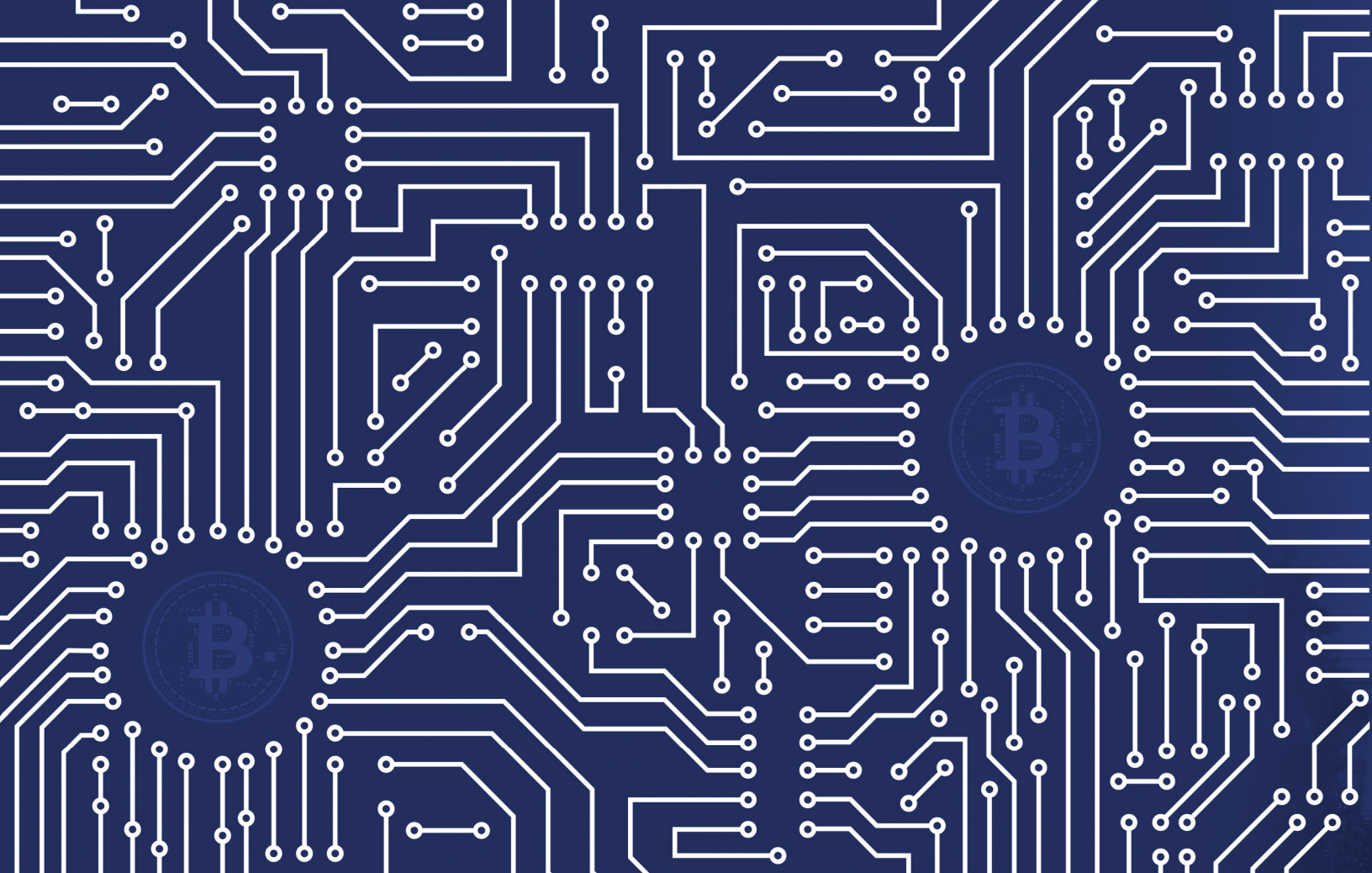
Taylor Swift

A close-up, high-contrast photograph of Taylor Swift. She has blonde, wavy hair and is looking upwards with her mouth wide open, as if about to swallow something. She is holding a small, realistic model of the Earth in her mouth. The background is a dark, starry space with some nebulae visible on the right side.

DEVOURER OF WORLDS TOUR

The even-more spectacular follow-up to the acclaimed "Eras" tour. A new civilization will arise in which all planetary resources are redirected toward the construction of a colossal stadium. After a thousand centuries of song, a geological age to be known as the Swiftocene, Taylor Swift will devour the planet whole, feasting upon the flesh of humanity and absorbing all terrestrial life forms into her bloodstream. She will then spend an eternity wandering the universe seeking new worlds to subdue and digest.

BEGINS 2026, ENDS NEVER



IT'S FAIR TO SAY THAT THE LAST FEW YEARS have been disastrous for the cryptocurrency industry—at least in terms of public reputation. A little over 15 years after bitcoin's emergence promised to transform the global economy around the values of greater privacy and financial freedom, a series of high-profile scandals have seen trust in cryptocurrency plummet to staggering lows. The decentralized currency has been characterized by sharp, sudden rises and falls in value—as seen in the profitable “bull run” of 2017 and the “crypto winter” that followed in early 2018—leaving many traders facing staggering losses. More recently, a series of high-profile court cases against industry leaders who cheated traders out of millions and billions of dollars highlighted the risks associated with investing in this under-regulated sector.

This all came to a head with the downfall of FTX cryptocurrency exchange founder Sam Bankman-Fried, who was sentenced to 25 years in prison in March 2024 for defrauding customers and investors alike. In the wake of the revelation that one of the industry's leading figures had taken billions from customers in order to buy property and make political donations

(among other unauthorized uses), crypto's remaining power figures began looking for a way to rebuild as their reputation lay in tatters.

Their calculation? That if they couldn't win the trust of the public at large, they would use their millions to create a supportive majority in Congress. Three crypto-backed super PACs—innocuously named Defend American Jobs, Fairshake, and Protect Progress—spent more than \$265 million in the 2024 election cycle trying to oust crypto skeptics in favor of candidates who had signalled a willingness to ease regulations on the currency.

Even before November, the PACs had racked up a number of big wins. Fairshake spent \$10 million boosting Adam Schiff (who received an A-rating from the crypto industry) in the California senate primary over Katie Porter, a progressive known for taking tough stances against corporate greed. Schiff went on to convincingly beat Porter in the March primary and won the general election in November. Similarly, the group spent more than \$2 million opposing New York representative and fellow progressive Jamaal Bowman. Bowman, who faced well-funded opponents from both the crypto and pro-Israel lobby, was defeated in what became the most expensive House primary race ever.

In the 14 years since the *Citizens United* ruling opened the floodgates for big money to gain unprecedented power in U.S.

HOW CRYPTO BOUGHT WASHINGTON

BY TOM WILLIAMS

politics, donations from cryptocurrency groups have constituted 15 percent of corporate political contributions. The industry's spending—which totals \$129 million since 2010—puts it second only to the fossil fuel industry.

Not wanting to get on the industry's bad side, politicians across the aisle shifted towards a more crypto-friendly stance in this past election. None did so in a more cynical fashion than President Donald Trump. Having been on the record calling crypto a “scam” as recently as 2021, Trump would run in 2024 with the promise to make America “the crypto capital of the planet.”

In May of last year, Trump became the first presidential candidate to accept bitcoin donations. Soon after, he received \$2.5 million from Cameron and Tyler Winklevoss, the twin founders of cryptocurrency exchange Gemini. Trump's response to the donation was fawning, as he described the pair as “male models with a big, beautiful brain.” But perhaps more useful to the twins is Trump's replacement of Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) chair Gary Gensler (whom the Winklevosses have described as “evil”) with Paul Atkins (a noted ally of the industry).

However, while Trump seemed to receive the bulk of crypto's support, Kamala Harris was not without high-profile, deep-pocketed backers in this regard. In September, *Axios* reported that the

then-vice president used a Wall Street fundraiser to signal her friendliness to the crypto industry. The event would raise \$27 million, marking the biggest single-day haul of her campaign up until that point. Meanwhile, Chris Larsen, the chair of cryptocurrency company Ripple, would give the Harris campaign almost \$12 million.

Recognizing the power of the cryptocurrency industry ahead of time, many members (and would-be members) of Congress facing election in 2024 made sure to avoid getting on the wrong side of the industry early on. The most obvious illustration of this came via a congressional vote on the Financial Innovation and Technology for the 21st Century Act (FIT21). The act constituted the most comprehensive effort to regulate cryptocurrency to date, but further tipped the balance in the industry's favor.

If passed, the act would see cryptocurrency treated as a commodity rather than a security. This would subject the currency to significantly looser restrictions—opening the floodgates for yet greater fraud and exploitation of traders—and see regulation handed over from the relatively more hawkish Securities and Exchange Commission to the weaker and more industry-friendly Commodity Futures Trading Commission. As SEC chair, Gensler warned that the legislation would likely undermine investor protections.

Despite Gensler's warnings, 71 Democrats joined almost all Republicans in supporting the bill's passage in the House—including former Speaker Nancy Pelosi. But Sherrod Brown, then-Chairman of the Senate Banking Committee, would block the bill's advancement in the Senate, solidifying his position as Public Enemy Number One in the eyes of the crypto lobby.

Fairshake, along with other crypto groups, quickly identified Brown as their top congressional target. Seeing that Brown, a Democrat, was running for reelection in Ohio (a state previously won by Trump over Biden by nearly 500,000 votes), they sensed an opportunity. Fairshake alone spent \$40 million trying to defeat the senator while boosting the reputation of his Republican opponent—a previously little-known luxury car dealer, Bernie Moreno, who once claimed that “Our Founding Fathers would have been bitcoiners.”

The Ohio election was pivotal to maintaining Democrats' narrow control of the Senate, with Brown being one of two Democratic incumbents (alongside Montana's Jon Tester) defending a seat in a state Trump won in 2020. Brown was a popular incumbent who had defied his state's rightward trajectory six years earlier—and mere months before Election Day, Democrats had been hopeful that he could do so again. By the end of July, he held a sizable 6.5 percent lead over Moreno. But as more money came in to boost Moreno, that lead got smaller and smaller until it had evaporated by Election Day. Ultimately, Moreno would defeat Brown by 3.6 percent.

Moreno will now sit on the same Banking Committee that his predecessor recently chaired. (“Senator Thune [the new Senate Majority Leader] was kind enough to get me on Banking,” Moreno celebrated.) In Brown's place as chair is now Republican Tim Scott, who had already vowed last summer to remove Gensler as SEC Chair, and who received \$38,000 from Coinbase's CEO in the 2024 election cycle despite the fact that Scott was reelected in 2022 and does not face another campaign until 2028.

Moreno's win was not an outlier but instead emblematic of an incredibly fruitful 2024 election for the crypto industry—which resulted in a majority of senators and over 270 (out of 435) crypto-friendly members of the House of Representatives. One post-election estimate found that 85 percent of congressional candidates backed by the cryptocurrency industry won.

Another notch in the industry's belt arrived via the Michigan Senate election, where the industry was supporting centrist Democrat Elissa Slotkin. As a House representative, Slotkin had voted for FIT21 and was given an A rating by Stand With Crypto. In what proved to be the second-closest Senate race that cycle, she eked out a victory, with less than 20,000 out of over 5 million votes cast separating her and Republican rival Mike Rogers. Another victory for the industry came when, a week after Election Day, the Arizona Senate race was called for Democrat

Ruben Gallego. Another FIT21 supporter, he received substantial donations from the cryptocurrency industry that helped allow him to significantly outperform Kamala Harris in a state Donald Trump won by nearly 6 percent.

We are undoubtedly entering an era of the “most pro-crypto Congress ever,” as Coinbase's Brian Armstrong boasted after the November elections. Meanwhile, the White House's ties to the industry only seem to be getting deeper by the day. The week-end before the inauguration, both Donald and Melania Trump launched their own cryptocurrency meme coins. Just days before he was due to once again become leader of the free world, the president-elect posted on X: “It's time to celebrate everything we stand for: WINNING! Join my very special Trump Community. GET YOUR \$TRUMP NOW.” The Vice President, meanwhile, is estimated to hold between \$250,000 and \$500,000 in bitcoin.

In this sense, Trump and Vance are outliers among the political class. Although they will find no shortage of fellow crypto advocates in the Senate and House and around the Cabinet table, they will find few fellow investors in the notoriously unstable currency there. A review by data provider 2iQ found that only four members of Congress had reported buying or selling cryptocurrency. Despite their public embrace of the industry, Congress members who actually trust the risky currency—at least enough to put their money where their mouth is—are, evidently, few and far between.

In this sense, members of Congress are far more aligned with the public at large. A Pew Research poll from last October found that 63 percent of Americans had “little to no” confidence in the safety and reliability of cryptocurrency, while only 5 percent said they were “extremely or very” confident. And though the cryptocurrency industry likes to claim that 52 million Americans own crypto, the actual figure is closer to 18 million—and is on the decline.

We are undoubtedly entering an era of the “most pro-crypto Congress ever”

Crypto groups, aware of the widespread public distrust of the industry, responded during the last election by hiding their true intentions. Ohioans spent much of the last year inundated by ads from cryptocurrency companies attacking Sherrod Brown and boosting Moreno in what would become the most expensive Senate race of all time. But absent from these ads was any mention

of cryptocurrency. Instead, these groups ran ads with messages about shipping “American innovation to China,” as one commercial warned could happen if Brown was reelected. As one *Wall Street Journal* headline put it: “Want a crypto-friendly Congress? Run ads that don't mention crypto.”

The crypto industry uses vast sums of money to create majorities in Congress to champion their unpopular cause—as seen with FIT21's passage through the House—and advance candidates to the White House who promise to sack industry adversaries like Gary Gensler and replace them with allies like Paul Atkins. This is a sadly familiar story in U.S. politics. Certainly, it's

not dissimilar from the way the National Rifle Association ensures that overwhelmingly popular gun control measures—such as universal background checks, which enjoy 86 percent support—land dead on arrival in Congress. Similarly, the millions of dollars that pro-Israel groups like AIPAC have on hand—and demonstrations of the lobby's might via the takedowns of Jamaal Bowman and Cori Bush—have helped ensure bipartisan support for continuing to fund Israeli weapons, even as polls have shown that three-fifths of Americans want such funding to stop.

As with the successful lobbying efforts of AIPAC and the NRA, crypto's ability to play and win the Washington corruption game comes at the direct expense of consumers. So much of the industry's success relies on the deceit and manipulation of its customers—whether that comes in the form of the Bankman-Frieds of the world, who take customers' billions with the express intention of using it unlawfully, or the countless more subtly insidious companies who drive up their value by marketing unwise and unstable investments towards unknowing consumers. Far from crypto's lofty promises of creating a democratic exchange space that empowers consumers, the industry has emerged as one whose success hinges on its ability to disempower its own traders and curry favor with elites.

When Trump took his oath of office, he was surrounded by big players in cryptocurrency and tech at large. Unsurprisingly, Elon Musk—who happens to be a heavy investor in cryptocurrency through his various companies—was there. So was Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg, who tried unsuccessfully to launch a Facebook-based cryptocurrency in 2020 and has spent the time between November 5 and now desperately trying to get in the good graces of those in Trump's orbit. Also in attendance was OpenAI's Sam Altman.

**Crypto's success
hinges on its ability
to disempower its
own traders**

It's a striking image and a damning indictment of the faux populism of all involved. At the center of it is Trump, a billionaire who promised to drain the swamp but who has time and time again bowed down to corporate interests (be it crypto investors like the Winklevoss twins or Miriam Adelson, the widow of casino magnate Sheldon). Around

him are the tech bros who made their millions (and billions) off of lofty promises to democratize big tech and usher in a fairer and more transparent world. But, in the end, all of them gained political influence by perfecting the age-old game of D.C. corruption. They used their vast resources not to upend the existing system but to work their way up it. As America swore in a new president this year, so too did it push the country closer than ever to oligarchy. ♣

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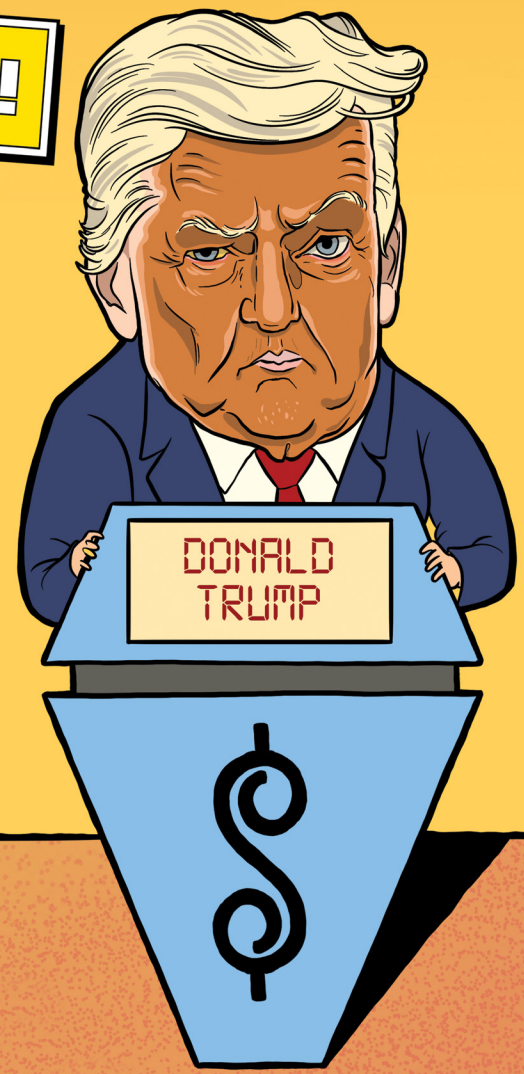
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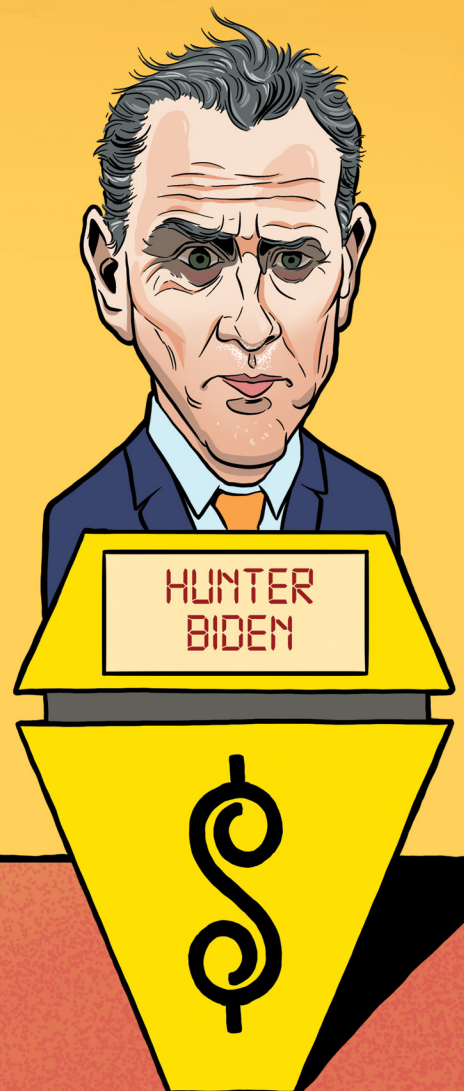
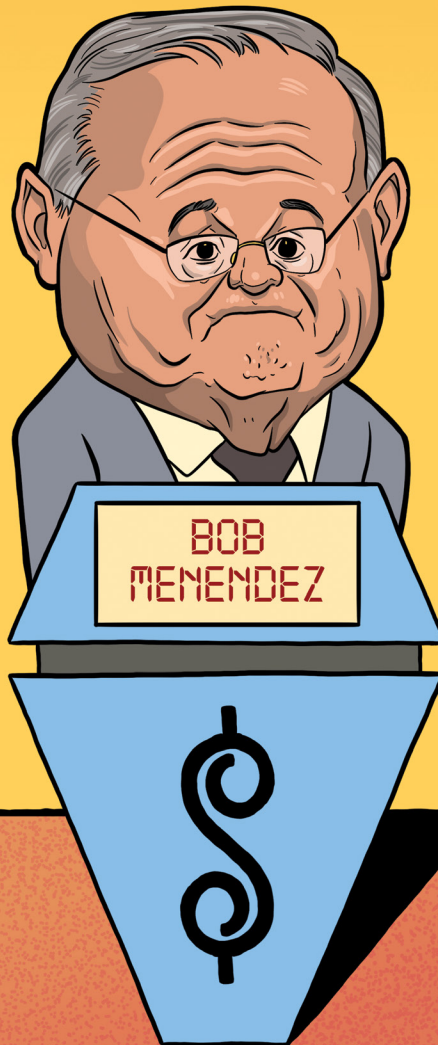
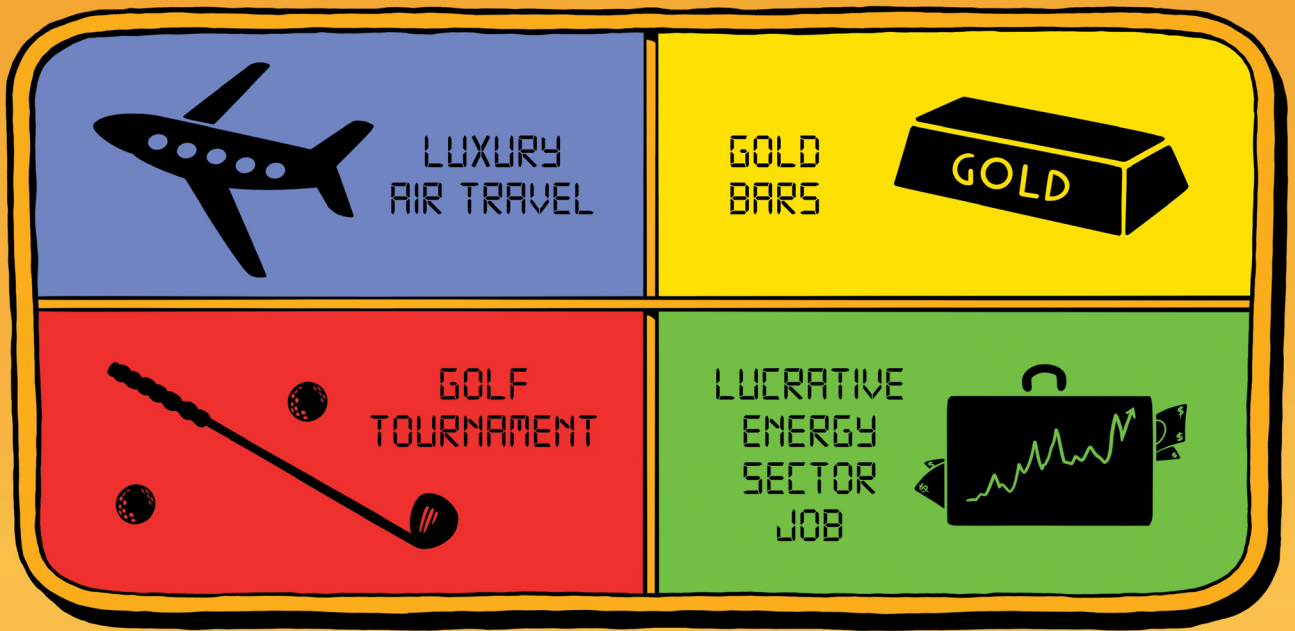


WITH YOUR HOST,
GEORGE SANTOS!



CAN YOU MATCH THE
AMERICAN POLITICAL
FIGURES TO THE
VALUABLE ITEMS
THAT WERE
ALLEGEDLY
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LOYALTY, AND THE
COUNTRIES THAT
ALLEGEDLY DID THE
DEALS?







KAHLO AS COMMUNIST AND COMMODITY

BY ALEX SKOPIC

IT WAS OCTOBER 2017, AND THERESA MAY WAS AT THE midpoint of her deeply awful tenure as Britain’s prime minister. Like every British prime minister from 2010 to 2024, May was a member of the Conservative Party. She’d spent the last few years slashing the national budget for schools and mental health services, expanding police surveillance powers, creating what she called a “hostile environment” for undocumented immigrants, and failing to reach a Brexit deal that anyone was particularly happy with. But when she took the stage at the Conservatives’ 2017 party conference, it was her fashion choices that sparked headlines. On her right hand, May sported a chunky, oversized bracelet made of small portraits—all of Frida Kahlo, the iconic Mexican artist who died in 1954. Today, none of what May said in her convention speech is remembered. But the Kahlo bracelet is. It inspired a wave of media speculation from *Vanity Fair* to the *London Review of Books*, which only intensified when the prime minister wore the bracelet again to a European Union summit the following year. Both times, people had one question on their minds: why would someone like May, whose politics are firmly right-wing, wear the image of someone like Kahlo, who spent her life and career as an avowed communist?

It’s not as strange as it seems. In the 71 years since her death, Kahlo has enjoyed a huge boom in popularity—a phenomenon art historians call “Fridamania” or even “Fridolatry,” which has given her “global pop culture status that challenges the likes of Elvis and Marilyn Monroe.” She’s one of very few 20th-century painters to reach that status, and an entire cottage industry of gift-shop kitsch has sprung up around her, just as it has for figures like Vincent van Gogh and Salvador Dalí. Along with bracelets like May’s, you can now buy earrings, coffee mugs, jigsaw puzzles, smartphone cases, novelty socks, and lip balm emblazoned with Kahlo’s face—and stranger items, too, like a ceramic cactus pot or a three-piece spice set. There was even a Frida Kahlo Barbie doll in 2018, which was banned from the Mexican market after Kahlo’s great-niece sued Mattel for using the artist’s likeness without permission.

Kahlo’s art and persona have become a globally recognized brand—but in the process, her radical politics have been obscured, if not outright erased. She’s remembered as a “feminist symbol of daring creativity,” as one recent book puts it, as someone who was “stoic in the face of struggles” related to chronic illness and disability, and even for her bisexuality. But the “daring” she’s credited with is generic and non-partisan. The fact that

she was a loyal member of the Mexican Communist Party, except when she was allied with Leon Trotsky instead, is often left out. And so, sanitized and commodified for popular consumption, she can sit comfortably on Theresa May's wrist. It's a fate she would likely have despised, and a tremendous disservice to her real legacy.



Top: Theresa May wearing a Frida Kahlo bracelet at the Conservatives' 2017 party conference

Bottom: Cafféluxe Frida Kahlo Smokehouse Meets Mexican Spices & Seasoning gift set

How did this happen? As usual, Hollywood is partly to blame. The definitive biography of Kahlo is Hayden Herrera's *Frida*, from 1983, and it covers her politics in considerable detail—from her childhood fascination with the ongoing Mexican Revolution, to her reading of Marx and Hegel as a teenager, to her later engagements with both Trotskyism and Stalinism. But sadly, a lot more people get their history from big-budget movies than from 400-page hardcover books, especial-

ly in the United States. There are two major films about Kahlo's life: one a dramatization from 2002 with Salma Hayek in the lead role and the other a documentary released on Amazon Prime in 2024. Like Herrera's book, both are simply called *Frida*, and both have their strengths. But they also distort their subject in important ways and, above all, downplay Kahlo's devotion to the communist cause.

The 2002 *Frida*, directed by Julie Taymor, really ought to be called *Frida and Diego*, the title it reportedly had at one point during its long and troubled development. Ostensibly, it's an adaptation of Herrera's book. At the time, Harper Perennial even released a new edition of the biography with the movie poster as the cover. But really, the film is less a straightforward biopic and more a romantic drama. It frames Kahlo's life mainly through her romantic and sexual relationships—primarily with fellow artist Diego Rivera, but also with Leon Trotsky when he was exiled to Mexico in the late 1930s, and occasionally with a variety of female side characters. The tagline on one of the cinema posters reads “prepare to be seduced,” and that sums up the film's approach.

When communism comes up, it's usually because Rivera (played with aplomb by Alfred Molina) or Trotsky (a slightly underwhelming Geoffrey Rush) are expounding about it. Kahlo takes part in their arguments and their protests; she helps Rivera crank out communist pamphlets on a clunky printing press and supports him when he feuds with Nelson Rockefeller over his decision to paint Lenin into his latest mural. But she seems to have little political initiative of her own. The implication is that she's a communist mainly because the men in her life are. Instead of a portrait of her as a serious political thinker, we get a lot of prurient stuff about her sex life, whether she's seducing the same woman Rivera has just slept with (out of jealousy, it's implied) or having a fling with the much-older Trotsky. The performances save this version of *Frida* from being truly bad—both Hayek and Molina inhabit their roles perfectly—and Taymor's use of color, plus the occasional stop-motion skeleton, bring Kahlo's art to vibrant life. The film *looks* like one of her paintings, but as a portrait of the painter, it's incomplete.

Of course, Kahlo's (bi)sexuality was an important part of her life, and biopics shouldn't prudishly shy away from sex. But there's an ugly reason for the romantic and erotic focus of the 2002 *Frida*: the predatory habits of its producer, Harvey Weinstein. As Hayek revealed in a 2017 op-ed during the #MeToo movement, Weinstein started sexually harassing her soon after signing the deal to produce *Frida*, and he turned to petty sadism when his advances were rejected, even threatening to kill Hayek in a fit of rage at one point. By her account, he also insisted on adding more of what he considered “sex appeal” to the film, “constantly asking for more skin” and threatening to shut down the production if he didn't get his way. To the extent that the film is a halfway decent adaptation of Kahlo's life at all, it's because Taymor and Hayek pushed back. Weinstein had wanted Kahlo's trademark unibrow removed, along with the limp from her childhood bout with polio, neither of which he considered “sexy”; both made it into the final film. But he did force Hayek to perform a completely extraneous lesbian sex scene, which she describes as a traumatic experience—“not because I would be naked with another woman [but] because I would be naked with her for Harvey Weinstein.” By itself, this behavior is nauseating, and anyone who complains about the #MeToo movement today is either utterly misinformed, cruelly misogynistic, or both. But as a secondary effect of his lechery, Weinstein has also helped to distort the perception of one of history's most important Marxist artists, making it possible for the movie-going public to see Frida Kahlo as a mere sex symbol to be leered at and fantasized over. If anything, that's almost as bad.

The 2024 *Frida*, meanwhile, is both better and worse. There's no abuse associated with this production—at least, none that's been made public—which is an obvious point in the “better” column. The documentary also tells Kahlo's story in her own words, relying heavily on narration taken from her diaries and letters, and it's mostly in her native Spanish. But although it's a lot more faithful and less sensationalized than the 2002 *Frida*, it's still highly selective in which parts of Kahlo's life it explores. The art itself is presented well, with expensive-looking animated recreations



Movie poster for the 2024 movie "Frida"

of Kahlo's paintings sprawling across the screen as narrator Fernanda Echevarría reads the artist's commentaries on her pieces. Birds flutter, vines creep, and the scissors in the famous portrait of Kahlo wearing close-cropped hair and a men's suit go *snip*. Kahlo's sexuality, meanwhile, is treated tastefully. It's there, as it should be, but it isn't made an all-consuming focus like in the 2002 film. But if anything, the political content is even more lacking than in the Taymor/Hayek drama. As Maximiliano Durón wrote in his review for *Art News*, "we learn that Kahlo decided to join the Communist Party" in a single line of voiceover, but "not much more is said on that front." There's some B-roll footage of Emiliano Zapata, but the complexities of the Mexican Revolution and Kahlo's nationalist commitment to "the cause of a new Mexico" go unexamined. The more difficult aspects of her art, like her appropriation of the traditional dress of the indigenous Tehuana people—which has provoked a wide variety of responses over the years—are nowhere to be found. Durón concludes that the 2024 film "doesn't even scratch the surface" of Kahlo's life, and that her "Wikipedia page remains more insightful." That might be a little harsh, but it basically hits the mark.

Again, the involvement of a malevolent rich man plays a role. This time it's

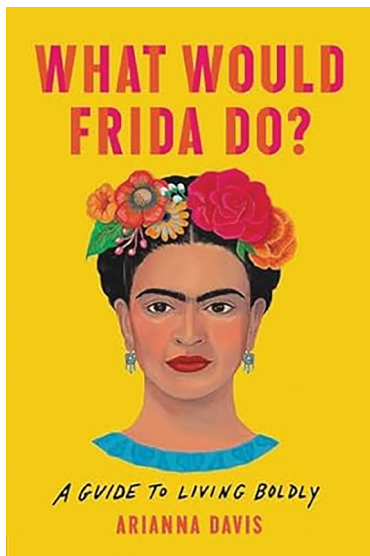
not Harvey Weinstein but Jeff Bezos, and instead of gendered abuse, more subtle economic and cultural forces are at work. The 2024 *Frida* was released through Bezos's Amazon Prime streaming platform, and it shares the same formal issues that many such "streaming originals" have. To put it bluntly, streaming video services reward bland, dumbed-down content that's easy to consume—what online critics have taken to derisively calling "slop." With a few exceptions, they don't make "films" in the sense a 20th-century cinema audience would recognize. They make "content" designed for "casual viewing"—literally, to be half-watched while doing laundry or scrolling social media. It's gotten so bad that Netflix executives have reportedly ordered their screenwriters to have characters "announce what they're doing so that viewers who have this program on in the background can follow along" without actually looking at the screen. For his part, Jeff Bezos is one of the world's foremost purveyors of slop. Amazon Prime cranks out endless straight-to-streaming films like *Without Remorse* and *The Tomorrow War* that come and go without leaving much of an impression, positive or negative. The 2024 *Frida* isn't as bad as those, which are some of the most generic action movies (er, "action content") ever made. But if the documentary is superficial and doesn't dive into the complexities of Kahlo's politics, it's partly because it was made for a platform that's uninterested in complexity of any kind.

Beyond this, though, we know that Jeff Bezos—one of the richest people in the world—discourages people at his companies from taking left-wing political stances. Just this month, he issued a decree that all opinion writers at the *Washington Post*, which he also owns, must support "free markets" and "personal liberties" in their articles if they want to be published. (Never mind that markets, and the necessity of selling one's time and labor in order to live, are the single biggest thing preventing people from having any meaningful liberty.) Bezos has also personally stepped in to prevent the *Post* making an endorsement in the last U.S. presidential election, and under his watch the paper has refused to run negative ads about his fellow billionaire Elon Musk. This kind of censorship is the

obvious danger of having one person own a media service the general public relies on. With the *Frida* documentary, there's no evidence that Bezos or any other executive stepped in to prevent director Carla Gutierrez from talking about Kahlo's politics—but they didn't need to. Censorship in a capitalist media industry is more subtle than that. As Noam Chomsky memorably put it in an interview with the BBC's Andrew Marr, media figures usually "believe everything [they're] saying," and believe they're expressing their own point of view—but "if they believed something different, [they] wouldn't be sitting there." People who want to make bland, agreeable, non-partisan art (or "content") get hired. People who want to make more radical statements don't. And so we get a documentary about a famous and outspoken communist that barely mentions communism.

It's the same in the publishing industry, especially when the books are geared toward a younger audience. There are several children's books about Kahlo's life, ranging from a board book called *Counting With Frida* ("two paint brushes," "three flowers," and so on), to Silvia López's *My Little Golden Book About Frida Kahlo* (meant for children four to eight years old, with a few sentences per page), to a volume called *Who Was Frida Kahlo?* aimed at middle schoolers. They're cute books, but they're almost entirely apolitical. Now, it's probably understandable that the Little Golden Book and the one that teaches babies to count don't include Kahlo's politics. Four years of age might, after all, be a little young to be introduced to the finer points of Marxism-Leninism. But for *Who Was Frida Kahlo?*, there's really no excuse. Amusingly enough, the same *Who Was...* series includes a book about Fidel Castro, which enraged Governor Ron DeSantis when he discovered it in a Florida library, and another about Che Guevara, both of which are more or less fair to their subjects. So clearly the authors and editors are capable of covering communist figures. But in *Who Was Frida Kahlo?*, communism just doesn't come up; even poor old Trotsky doesn't get to make a cameo appearance. The closest we get is a line about how the Mexican Revolution was fought against "government officials and a few rich farm owners [who] kept the money for themselves." It

would have been easy enough to include a page about the Mexican Communist Party, explained in terms a curious child could understand; for an honest account, all author Sarah Fabiny had to do was say something like “Frida and her friends carried a banner with a hammer and sickle, a symbol that showed they supported the workers and farmers movement in Mexico.” But there’s nothing like that in the book.



Even in books ostensibly meant for adults, it’s not much better. In a 2020 self-help book called *What Would Frida Do? A Guide to Living Boldly*, written by former *Oprah Magazine* digital director Arianna Davis, we get a grand total of four pages about Kahlo’s politics, plus a two-page timeline, both of which come at the end of a chapter called “Identity.” What’s there is accurate enough. Davis writes that Kahlo was “outspoken about her communist and Marxist-Leninist views” and notes that her political engagement began “long before she was Diego Rivera’s wife,” which is an important point. But the relative lack of emphasis is striking. By contrast to the six-ish pages about Marxism, “Love,” “Sex,” and “Heartbreak” all get their own chapters, each more than 20 pages in length. Even when writing about her communism, Davis’s conclusion is that Kahlo is an example of how women should “embrace our viewpoints, even if they go against the norm,” and she wraps up by telling her readers “don’t just be yourself—be loud and proud about it.” It’s

kind of miraculous, in all the wrong ways. Davis takes communism and transmutes it into individualism, taking only the form of Kahlo’s politics—her “outspokenness”—and casting the content aside. The vital question of what people should be outspoken *about* is not asked. It doesn’t seem to occur to Davis that the answer to the question “What Would Frida Do?” is “find a communist party and join it.” Instead, we get Kahlo-as-Girlboss—a formulation that could just as easily “empower” someone to be a corporate executive, or even a conservative politician like Theresa May, as it could an artist or a socialist. The fact that the author used to work for Oprah does not seem coincidental.

Needless to say, Kahlo is not the only famous figure to be sanitized and stripped of her association with the political Left in this way. Last year, Prince Shakur wrote for *Current Affairs* about how James Baldwin has undergone a similar process. He’s a literary icon, the inspiration for multiple films, and his face appears on all kinds of merchandise—but the fact that he was a vocal supporter of Palestinian liberation is carefully left out of the conversation. Similarly, everyone knows Albert Einstein’s name, but fewer people have read his essay “Why Socialism?” from the inaugural issue of the *Monthly Review*. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is remembered as a significantly less radical figure than he really was. So is Helen Keller. In *The State and Revolution*, Vladimir Lenin summed up this phenomenon perfectly:

During the lifetime of great revolutionaries, the oppressing classes constantly hounded them, received their theories with the most savage malice, the most furious hatred and the most unscrupulous campaigns of lies and slander. After their death, attempts are made to convert them into harmless icons, to canonize them, so to say, and to hallow their names to a certain extent for the “consolation” of the oppressed classes and with the object of duping the latter, while at the same time robbing the revolutionary theory of its substance, blunting its revolutionary edge and vulgarizing it.

Lenin was talking about Marx (when wasn’t he?), but the same principle ap-

plies exactly to Frida Kahlo. Hollywood, the publishing industry, and the commercial art world are more than happy to buy and sell images of her work, and to hold exhibitions and make documentaries in her honor. They’ll sell you a Frida Kahlo finger puppet and be glad to do it. But to acknowledge her as a communist, and not a commodity, would be too much. It would suggest that Marxism is not an ideology of pure evil or base stupidity, as almost 200 years of propaganda has told us. It would reveal that communism is something intelligent and creative people have devoted their lives to, with good reason. And that’s too dangerous an idea to be allowed.

SO WHO WAS FRIDA KAHLO, THE communist? What is it that’s been occluded from her history? When we peel back the veil and see her for who she truly was, the person we find is far more impressive than the version we’ve been told about. Kahlo was a radical from her youth, even before she’d had any kind of political education; it seems rebellion was just part of her temperament. More specifically, she told interviewers that she was spurred into radical politics partly as a reaction against her mother’s conservative Catholicism, which she found stifling:

My mother was a great friend to me, but the whole religion thing never united us. My mother went down in history for religion. We had to pray before every meal.... For twenty years my mother won the battle against me, but by thirteen I was already a raging leftist.

In her diary, Kahlo recalls another formative incident: having seen “with my own eyes the clash between Zapata’s peasants and the forces of Carranza” during the Mexican Revolution, and how her mother invited Zapatista rebels into their home, “tended their wounds and fed them corn gorditas.” This impressed her deeply and seems to have contributed to her lifelong affinity for revolution and revolutionaries. In a move that has made life difficult for her biographers ever since, she lied about her age when she entered preparatory school, claiming that she was born in 1910—the year the Revolution kicked

off—rather than 1907. It meant that much to her.

At the age of 15 (not 13, as she claimed!), Kahlo went to the National Preparatory School in Mexico City—the equivalent of an American high school—and quickly joined the Cachuchas, a radical student group. In early accounts of Kahlo's life, like the rather sexist 1938 *Vogue* profile that called her “Madame Rivera,” this group has been described in infantilizing terms as “a gang of boys and girls who made the school halls ring with their escapades.” That’s the way they’re portrayed in the 2002 *Frida* film, too, although they barely appear in it. But the Cachuchas were much more than that. As Herrera puts it, they “espoused a kind of romantic socialism mixed with [Mexican] nationalism,” and although they did play juvenile pranks, they had a distinct political bent. It was the conservative teachers at the Preparatoria, specifically, who were the targets. At one point, apparently, they detonated a “six-inch firecracker” in the classroom of one Professor Caso—all because he refused to teach them Marx, Engels, and Hegel! But beyond petty acts of mayhem, the Cachuchas were also a revolutionary reading circle, exactly the kind of small intellectual cell that the Bolshevik Party had started out with in Russia. Among other authors, they read Dumas, Pushkin, Gogol, Tolstoy, H.G. Wells, and the revolutionary poet Ramón López Velarde, and Kahlo herself soon learned to read in three languages—Spanish, English, and German. Later in life, she would write in her diary that “I have read the History of my country and of nearly all nations. I know their class struggles and their economic conflicts. I understand quite clearly the dialectical materialism of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao Tse,” and “I love them as the pillars of the new Communist world.” In other words, she was intellectually brilliant on a level that few adults, let alone teenagers, can aspire to—a fact that makes the sexism of those early press accounts, with titles like “Wife of the Master Muralist Gleefully Dabbles in Works of Art,” all the more infuriating.

What’s more, Kahlo’s communism was connected to her lifelong experience of chronic illness and pain in a way that resonates deeply today. This has been left out of virtually *all* accounts of her life,



“Marxism Will Give Health to the Sick” by Frida Kahlo, 1954

printed and filmed, but it’s vital. In the last interview she gave before her death, to the Mexican art critic Raquel Tibol, Kahlo reflects on the infamous bus accident that broke her spine at the age of 18 and left her with a variety of traumas and complications. The incident is portrayed in both of the *Frida* films, but what isn’t said there—and what Kahlo reveals to Tibol—is that it wasn’t just the accident itself that hurt her. It was the subpar medical care she received afterward:

I was not taken care of properly and I had no X-rays taken. I sat down as best I could and told the Red Cross to call my family... I spent three months in the Red Cross. The Red Cross was very poor. They had us in a kind of awful

shed, the food was crap and could hardly be eaten. A single nurse took care of twenty-five patients.

There’s no way of telling for sure, but it’s very possible that if Kahlo had gotten better healthcare—including X-rays, which were widely considered an essential medical tool by the year 1900—she might not have suffered as much of the pain, difficulty walking, miscarriage, and other medical difficulties that haunted her life from that time on. In particular, the detail about one nurse’s labor being stretched too far to adequately cover all of the patients is familiar from hospital workers’ strikes today, in which dangerous understaffing has been one of the most important issues.



Frida Kahlo, Juan O'Gorman, and Diego Rivera at a demonstration against U.S. intervention in Guatemala, July 2, 1954

In other words, Kahlo understood her illness and injury, at least in part, in terms of *resources* and the lack thereof. Toward the end of her life, she would paint a remarkably unsubtle picture called *Marxism Will Give Health to the Sick* that gave that understanding visual form. It shows the disembodied head of Karl Marx hovering in the sky like some strange bearded sun and reaching out with a giant fist to strangle a vulture with the face of Uncle Sam. In the center, Kahlo stands with a book—red, of course—in hand and casts her crutches aside. The painting's original title was even more direct: "Peace on Earth so the Marxist Science may Save the Sick and Those Oppressed by Criminal Yankee Capitalism." Curiously, it's not a piece that tends to show up on gift-shop calendars. But to my mind, it's her greatest work. It's all there: her unshakable faith that socialism would change everything, and ensure no one ever had to suffer the way she did again. A promise to the future.

Kahlo didn't live to see that promise fulfilled. She died in 1954, just days after she and Rivera had marched in a demonstration against the U.S.-backed coup in Guatemala; at her funeral, one of her students threw a flag with the hammer and sickle over her coffin. But since the

mid-20th century, Mexico has been on a long road to universal healthcare. In 1943 the Mexican Social Security Institute was established, with public hospitals and emergency services as one of its main purviews along with public pensions and, as the name suggests, social security payments. Still, healthcare was tied to one's employment, much as it is in the U.S. today. That changed in 1983, when an amendment to the Mexican constitution made healthcare a universal right for the first time.

Over the ensuing decades, a series of large-scale government plans have been enacted to make that provision a reality. First there was the *Sistema Nacional de Salud* (National Health System) in 1984, which consolidated existing public health services into a single framework. That was followed by the *Programa de Reforma del Sector Salud* (Health Sector Reform Program) in 1995, which decentralized the system and gave more local control to individual Mexican states, and by the *Seguro Popular* (Popular Insurance) program in 2003—a colossal effort which gave health insurance to more than 53 million people who didn't previously have it and helped cut the infant mortality rate in Mexico by half. Finally, the Morena government recently implemented the

INSABI (*Instituto de Salud para el Bienestar*, or "Institute of Health for Well-being") program, which replaced *Seguro Popular* to remove premiums and enrollment costs and make healthcare truly free. (Though certain major conditions, like cancer and heart attacks, are still not fully covered—a notable flaw.) Through this extended process, there have been plenty of struggles, scandals, and setbacks, which could fill a book. There actually is such a book, *Health Systems in Transition: Mexico* by Miguel A. González Block et al. But the bottom line is that Mexico has committed itself to healthcare as a human right for all of its citizens, regardless of their ability to pay. If not precisely Marxism, at least social democracy and robust public services really have brought health to the sick, just as Kahlo said. And as a much richer and more powerful nation, the United States truly has no excuse for not making the same commitment to the north.


YOU CAN TELL FRIDA KAHLO was a remarkable communist, because more than 70 years after her death, the international right wing is still scared of her. In Hungary, a conservative newspaper affiliated with Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's party threw a fit about Kahlo's paintings being displayed in the National Gallery in Budapest in 2018, fuming that "This is the way communism is promoted using state money." A year later, Donald Trump's ambassador to Mexico—a man named Christopher Landau who, like many Trump ambassadors, was not actually a trained diplomat—took it upon himself to denigrate Kahlo, saying that he admired her "free and bohemian spirit" but condemned her "obvious passion for Marxism, Leninism, Stalinism." Ironically, these conservative figures recognize what the commercial peddlers of Kahlo merchandise don't. They understand that her communism is an essential part of her life and legacy, along with her outspoken feminism, her illness, her sexuality, and all the rest. The fact that they're so visibly worried about her art, and its potential to inspire people today, shows that it's still what Surrealist André Breton called it: "a ribbon around a bomb." And that's exactly how she should be remembered. ✚

PSY-OP GENERATOR

American life may be devolving into chaos and violence, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't try to uncover the cause! Threats to your family and your way of life lie around every corner, directed by all manner of insidious forces.

If you're having trouble figuring out who's behind what, never fear: you should always assume that everything and everyone are conspiring against you. But if it's conclusive proof you seek, simply use our Psy-op Generator to uncover the latest shadowy force trying to control your life!

PHENOMENON




Chemtrails
Noxious odors
UFOs
Swirling black clouds
High-pitched whine
Water taps run blood
Vaccine shedding
Frothing livestock
Sun looks kinda weird
Haitians

LOCATIONS

Night sky over Arizona
Disney World tunnels
Public library
Militia training ground
American embassy
Dangerous urban areas
X: The Everything App
Tallahassee-area Chili's
Your child's classroom
Real America

PERPETRATOR



Kim Jong Un
Left-wing podcasts
The Deep State
Russia
Elders of Zion
Shadowy cabal formed by the U.N. and Denny's
George Soros
Secret Rhode Island
Donald Rumsfeld's ghost
The Moon

EFFECTS



Fainting spells
Mass vomiting
Chronic brain fog
Wake up transgender
Blood spewing from eyes
Urge to buy gun
Lose Animorph powers
Compulsive coprophilia
Family shuns you in horror at what you've done
Become Jeffrey Epstein



AGAINST CORPORATE FOOD

BY LILY SÁNCHEZ

THINK ABOUT THE HUMBLE OAT. If you grew up in the United States, chances are you were given rolled oats for breakfast at some point in your life, perhaps the Old Fashioned Quaker Oats that come in cardboard cylinders or the boxes of instant packets that include varieties like Apples & Cinnamon or Maple & Brown Sugar (childhood favorites of mine). These flavors, according to the brand website, are the “Classics,” while more recent varieties—in our age of what food writer Michael Pollan has called “nutritionism,” or a focus on nutrients as opposed to the food itself—include “High Fiber” or “Fiber & Protein” alongside the now-ubiquitous “Gluten-Free.” Beyond Quaker oats, there are dozens of breakfast oat products now on the market, things I don’t think we had when I was a kid in the 1980s such as steel cut oats, oat bran, and even groats. *What’s a groat?* you might ask. Well, it’s simply an oat kernel. It’s a whole-grain oat. “Groat” is also used to describe the whole forms of other grains such as wheat, rye, and barley.

When I first discovered the oat groat about a decade ago, I couldn’t help but laugh. “Groat” sounded like a portmanteau of “gross” and “oat.” Not exactly appetizing! But, as I discovered, oat groats are delicious. They’re chewy and hearty and creamy and nothing like the packaged instant oats, which simply use flecks of oats as a vehicle for delivering sugar and “flavors” and usually, in my experience, aren’t satisfying on their own as a breakfast meal.

The reason I found out about groats was because I had discovered a bag of “quick cook” steel cut oats at Costco some years ago and noticed that the ingredient list said “organic whole grain oats.” I then began to wonder a lot more about oats and oatmeal. I recalled that the familiar Quaker oats were “rolled” oats. So what exactly was the difference between the rolled oat and the “whole grain oat”? I was pretty sure this had never been explained to me, and in doing research to answer this question, I was led to a startling realization: the food products most readily available to us are often not the best, most nutritious, or most enjoyable forms of that particular food in existence. This is because the companies that bring us the things that we need and think we want are not interested in providing us with

an enjoyable experience or a healthy food product. They are interested in profit. As Nathan J. Robinson wrote recently about Starbucks, for example, which serves “infamously disappointing” coffee that tastes burnt and “mass-produced” defrosted food,

Starbucks is a megacorporation, and it exists to make profits for shareholders, not to make the best coffee or treat people well. It will make good coffee to the extent that this goal coincides with making profits for shareholders, but if it’s more profitable to make bad coffee than good coffee, profit will always come first.

Like Starbucks, Big Food, or the large conglomerates whose products fill our grocery stores, offer us an array of edible products that are profitable to companies. Like any corporate product, corporate food has always been brought to us by advertising, which teaches us to want the things we want and to accept the choices we have been given—even when those choices can have deadly consequences. Recall that cigarette companies got medical doctors to advertise their (we now know) cancer-causing products in the early to mid-20th century. From the cereal industry pushing its newly sweetened, otherwise bland “anti-masturbation” corn flakes onto children in the first half of the 20th century to Wonder Bread, which the Federal Trade Commission found in 1973 to have engaged in false advertising for making claims about the supposed health benefits of its bread, to current-day soft drink companies targeting their advertising to minority children, corporations are the driving force behind what we eat and drink every day, even if we don’t think much about it. Big Food is just part of the problem, though. The question of why we eat what we eat relates to time—or, more specifically, our lack thereof.

Time is a subject that interests me—and bothers me—so I tend to write about it. Whether thinking about the considerable time taken up by our jobs or the time needed to commute somewhere, it’s clear that our society runs on manufactured time scarcity. Sustenance, like everything else, must be squeezed into our lives. As Amanda Mull explained in the *Atlantic* in 2019, the Industrial Revolution standardized people’s work lives and thus their meal times. As a result, quick breakfast foods eventually displaced the more standard “bacon and eggs” breakfast to become the norm:

Industrially produced breakfast products, like cold cereal, yogurt, and instant oatmeal, dramatically reduced the time and effort required of working women [who were recruited to work around the time of World War II] to feed their family, and the skyrocketing sugar content and colorful mascots made them an easy sell to most kids (and, therefore, most harried moms).

Given the time squeeze, it’s not surprising that breakfast can be something of a hit-or-miss occurrence. According to pre-pandemic government statistics, about 15 percent of adults skipped breakfast on a given day. More recent statistics show that only about a quarter of teenagers eat breakfast every day. An obvious reason is lack of time. Or sometimes lack of appetite. But lack of appetite is really just an issue of time, at least for me personally. For instance, if I wake up not feeling hungry, chances are I will be within about an hour, so if I had more time in the morning to delay breakfast, that might be more enjoyable than forcing something down quickly in order to get out the door, which is what usually happens.

As for lunch, in the United States, there is no federal requirement that employers give workers a lunch or coffee break. A 2021 *Jacobin* headline summed things up quite well: “A fast and mostly joyless lunch break has become the norm in just about every corner of the world.” In the article, Tom Ana explained that in today’s workplaces, the act of human nourishment must compete with the worker’s need to stay productive. Just check out videos on TikTok to see an assortment of lunch breaks taken in cars, on factory floors, in break rooms, or even in driveways (in the case of delivery workers). The lack of a leisurely lunch also makes it easier for convenience products (such as meal replacement shakes and other products) to be sold to us so that we can get in a quick meal fix while “maximiz[ing] a neoliberal model of personal efficiency.” As one customer testimonial for Huel instant meals, shakes, and powders reads: “In today’s world, life is pretty busy, and to have a suite of products that I can trust—that fill the gaps in times where I can’t get a full meal—gives me that level of assurance I feel really good about.” While I’m not into meal replacements per se, like many people, I rely on grocery frozen microwave foods quite a

bit. But I don't really *feel good about it*. There's usually something else I'd rather be eating.

And this brings us to dinner. In "You'll Never Get Off the Dinner Treadmill," Rachel Sugar describes the problem of getting three meals into your mouth each day:

I can compromise on breakfast. It is absolutely normal to eat the same breakfast every single day for years, and equally normal to eat nothing. Lunch: Eat it, skip it, have some carrot sticks, who cares. Lunch is a meal of convenience. But dinner is special. Dinner isn't just the largest meal in the standard American diet; it is the most important, the most nourishing, the most freighted with moral weight. The mythical dream of dinner is that after a hard but wholesome day at school or work, the family unit is reunited over a hot meal, freshly prepared. Even if you're dining solo, dinner tends to be eaten in a state of relative leisure, signaling a transition into the time of day when you are no longer beholden to your job.

While I disagree with Sugar over her willingness to compromise on breakfast and lunch—unless I am deliberately trying to fast, I prefer to have three proper meals daily—the struggle of “meal prep” is never-ending, no matter how many meals one eats each day. As a food enthusiast, I spend much of my time outside of work doing meal planning, grocery shopping, and cooking food and freezing it for later use or defrosting it at meal times. I understand why supermarket “fast” foods like breakfast bars, microwave meals, shakes, instant coffee, and the like are valuable. They're easy to store, prepare, and consume, whether for a breakfast “on the go” or a caffeine hit to take on your morning commute or as part of a quick lunch or dinner. Putting aside the enjoyment factor and any nutritional downsides, such as high salt or sugar content, among others, it's not that there's anything wrong with eating these things. Or with getting a meal kit or meal delivery subscriptions and services like Home Chef or Hello Fresh or the like. The point isn't to shame people for their choices but to question the conditions that lead us to make these choices in the first place. And to ask: What do we miss out on by eating the things that we eat?

After discovering groats, I began reading up on oatmeal and found that the standard oats I had always seen

were referred to as “rolled.” Rolled oats are steamed and flattened. There are different kinds—instant (cooks in under 3 minutes), quick-cook (cooks in 1-5 minutes), regular (cooks in 10-20 minutes), or extra thick. But what about other varieties? Well, there were the steel cut kind, which takes about 15-20 minutes to cook on the stovetop, and the quick cook steel cut, which takes about 7 minutes. (These were the ones Costco was selling.) Then there's the funny-named oat groat, which takes 30-60 minutes to cook on the stovetop (this can be reduced to 20 minutes of cooking time using a pressure cooker). So it turns out that the steel cut form, which is just cut-up groats, is less processed than the rolled form. The groat, then, is the least processed form of the grain and takes the longest to prepare. Once I put all of this together, I felt as if a lightbulb had gone off. When I was a kid, I just thought that oatmeal came in packets, that that's just the way that oatmeal existed in the world. But instead, there was another reason I was eating those packets: the market provided people with things they were incentivized, due to time scarcity, to buy!

Also, I discovered that groats are relatively hard to find in physical grocery stores (nowadays, there are many places to get them online). Presumably, this is a sales issue. People aren't going to buy what they don't have time to prepare! I used to buy Bob's Red Mill oat groats online, but the company stopped selling them, and other brands I have tried are not nearly as good. I called the company recently to ask why they stopped selling them around 2020, and the agent could not give me an exact reason but said that it either had to do with “sourcing” or “sales,” the latter meaning that they simply weren't profitable.

The lack of availability of the whole oat groat is unfortunate. As I mentioned, not only do the groats *taste* better, but they are actually healthier for you than the more processed form. Whole grains in general cause less of a sugar spike in your bloodstream after you eat them compared to more processed forms. A diet with a high “glycemic index,” as it's called, is one that spikes your sugar levels and predisposes to things like type 2 diabetes and heart disease, which are two of the most common (and often preventable) chronic diseases in American adults. Many commonly eaten foods

have a high glycemic index—things like “white bread, rice cakes, most crackers, bagels, cakes, doughnuts, croissants, most packaged breakfast cereals”—so eating a bunch of these foods all the time is not ideal for health and longevity. (Ultra-processed foods—referring to ready-to-eat or ready-to-heat foods that include additives that are typically not found in home kitchens—have also been associated with cancer, which is now affecting people at a younger age.) These foods are also, as you'll notice, some of the easiest and quickest foods to prepare and eat.

AS IS THE CASE WITH OATS, other commonly consumed foods such as coffee and bread are often sold to us in highly processed and “quick” forms that actually do not taste nearly as good as their “slower” versions. Like instant oats, which do not taste as good as groats, instant coffee granules or single-serve coffee pods do not, for the most part, even begin to do justice to coffee. And mass-produced supermarket bread—although the variety of offerings has improved over the years—is nothing like homemade or “slow” bread. Once you realize what good oats, coffee, and bread actually taste like, you may not want to go back to the “quick” stuff if you can help it.

Coffee beans come from East Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, and around the 15th century, coffee began to be consumed in beverage form. Coffee is widely consumed in the U.S., and its more recent history in the country is often referred to in “waves.” The first wave was the 1800s, when coffee became a commodity and products like instant coffee and Folger's came onto the market. In the 1970s, the second wave refers to the rise of coffee shops like Starbucks and espresso-based coffee drinks. And the 2000s, or third wave, was when coffee became similar to wine, a product that consumers pick for its taste profile and origins. Home-brewed coffee has grown in popularity in recent years, in part due to the early pandemic years when people either stayed home or worked from home and needed to make coffee themselves instead of going to their favorite coffee shop. This has led to a big demand for specialty beans and single-cup home brewing devices such as the V60 pour over and the AeroPress,



PHOTO BY MIKE MOZART / FLICKR

which uses a kind of plunger to make the coffee, as well as grinders and other accessories.

The popularity of coffee due to its caffeine content is obvious. But it has always struck me how *bad* coffee can be, and I've always assumed that people tolerate bad coffee (such as Starbucks) because they mostly want it for the caffeine. Whether brewed in a fancy drip machine (trust me, I used to use one of these) or a pod, coffee, to me, often tastes burnt or bitter or weak or leaves an unpleasant funky aftertaste on the tongue. I used to think that's just how coffee was... until I tried a home-brew method (AeroPress) with home-ground beans that were freshly roasted. The result was mind-blowing. No more funk, no more bitterness, and even decaf tastes great. (Those of us who are sensitive to caffeine and don't wish to consume so much of it need not suffer bad-tasting decaf anymore, and in my experience, decaf at Starbucks or coffee

shops, in general, is usually not very good.) As James Hoffmann, a coffee expert, YouTuber, and former World Barista Champion, explains, the main factors when brewing coffee are the grind size and water temperature. The freshness of the beans is also key. So any brewing method that does not optimize these factors will not produce a great cup of coffee. Single-cup brewing is not too time-consuming once you have all your equipment ready, but sometimes even 5 or 10 minutes may be simply too much time to spend on brewing a cup of coffee on a busy morning. But until you have tried this approach, you don't really know what you're missing. While there may not be specific health benefits to brewing at home versus not (assuming both methods make use of a filter, which is important to eliminate certain substances from the coffee), the taste and enjoyment alone make it well worth the effort.

AS MICHAEL POLLAN EXPLAINS in his book *Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation*, bread is a form of food that allows humans to extract energy from the seed (kernel) of a grass called wheat. In its most rudimentary form, early food processing of grass seeds by humans involved “toast[ing] on a fire or [grinding] between stones and then boil[ing] in water to create a simple mash.” The mash could also be cooked over fire to make a flatbread. Then, about 6,000 years ago, humans discovered leavening or the rising of the wheat that yields bread. Thus, bread is essentially “aerated porridge.” Leavening requires yeast and bacteria to produce gas to make the dough rise. Modern breadmaking takes advantage of commercial yeast, which was invented in the late 19th century, to provide the gas. Other “modern food science” bread hacks include “other leavening agents, sweeteners, preservatives, and dough

WE'RE OFTEN EATING SOMETHING THAT SOMEBODY ELSE CHOSE FOR US BECAUSE IT WAS PROFITABLE TO SHARE- HOLDERS.



conditioners.” Mass-produced bread uses these tricks to speed up the process of leavening but also to add taste to a dough that is simply not as tasty as slower bread such as sourdough, which can take days, from start to finish, in order to produce a complex and flavorful loaf. (This explains, Pollan writes, why the “last century, aka the Wonder Bread Era” has been “a notably bad time for bread.”)

In contrast, sourdough bread gets its flavor not from additives but from “some 200+ compounds” that reside in the bread’s many air pockets. These flavor compounds are detected in the back of our mouth and nose, where they are then sent to our brain, specifically areas that process memory and emotion. “Perhaps this helps explain,” Pollan speculates, “the keen pleasure we seem to take in all kinds of aerated foods and beverages: the sparkling wines and sodas, the soufflés and whipped cream, the lofted breads and ethereal croissants and weightless meringues, and the laminated pastries with their 128 layers of air.” It also turns out that sourdough bread has a lower glycemic index than standard bread.

You may wonder why the fuss about bread, though. Many grocery stores now offer freshly baked bread in addition to mass-produced bread, and these products can be quite good. While more options are better—I use supermarket bread or bakery bread, not homemade, when I make certain recipes—the point of making your own bread is not just for taste or health but for the enjoyment of the experience. As Pollan writes,

I’ve come to love the feel of the dough in my hands as it develops, the way, on the third or fourth turn, the inert, sticky paste begins to cohere and then gradually become elastic, as if sinews and muscles were forming inside it. I love (and a little bit dread) the moment of truth when I lower the oven door to discover how much “oven spring” (if any) my loaf has achieved. And I love the muffled static the bread emits while it cools, as the interior steam crackles the crust during its escape, filling the kitchen with that matchless air.

While not everyone wants to cook, it is another human experience that often escapes us in modern life. Similar to foraging for mushrooms, as Andrew Ancheta wrote, making your own bread can bring you closer to your food sources and give you a greater appreciation for the fruits of the earth. He wrote:

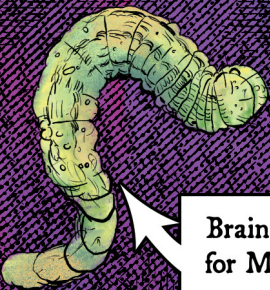
Unlike the factory-farmed, mass-pro-

duced, and highly processed food products sold to us in stores, mushrooms are truly natural. In eating them, we are able to conceive of our human life as part of nature and the wider ecosystem, rather than something cut off from it.

Like many others during the early pandemic years, I got into sourdough for a brief time. Basically, you mix water and flour (or buy a commercial “starter”) and let it bubble up and become fragrant over a few days. This means the microbes are actively producing flavor. Once your “starter” is ready, you can add it to recipes that call for “active starter.” While it can be great fun, sourdough itself quickly turns into a monstrosity. You need to “feed” it flour regularly so that the microbes in it won’t go dormant, and if you wish to store some of the excess mixture that is produced (called “discard”), you need fridge space. You also need *time*. But it does yield delicious pancakes, pretzels, breads, and crackers, and once you learn how to make homemade bread, you’ll be able to whip some up for guests or loved ones on a special occasion—or just a regular weeknight—and this can be very satisfying.

OUR CORPORATE FOOD SYSTEM limits our meal choices every day of our lives. In the richest country in the history of the world, the same for-profit enterprises that have brought us processed supermarket food also have brought us fast food. Fast food drive-thrus arose in the mid-20th century in no small part due to car culture and the influence of pro-automobile industries on government policies that gave us highways and suburban sprawl. While an impressive variety of foods and cooking ingredients can be purchased online these days, which makes it easier than ever for home cooks to experiment with different cuisines, many of us tend to stick to the same things in a given week, often for convenience and especially at breakfast. Americans are eating alone more often, whether at home or in restaurants or in cars—and in any case, we’re often eating something that somebody else chose for us because it was profitable to shareholders.

We should have better food and more affordable food and more time to prepare and enjoy our food. We need a public option for food and to reclaim cooking and eating and *food itself* as a basic good that should be provided for all. ✚

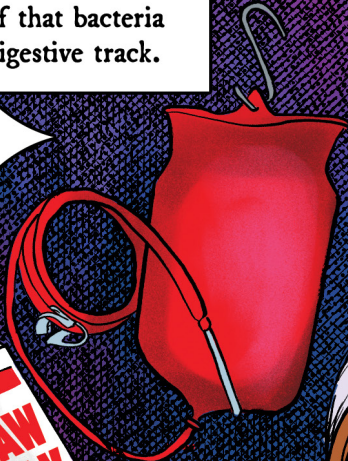


Brain Worms
for Migraines

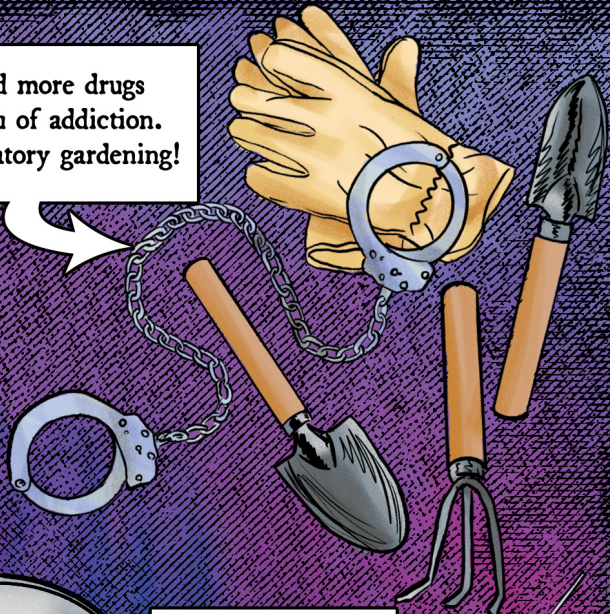


You can't get
the Bird Flu
if you snort it...
that's just science!

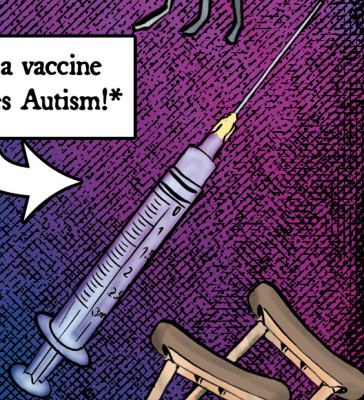
Raw Milk Enema Cleanse:
Get rid of that bacteria
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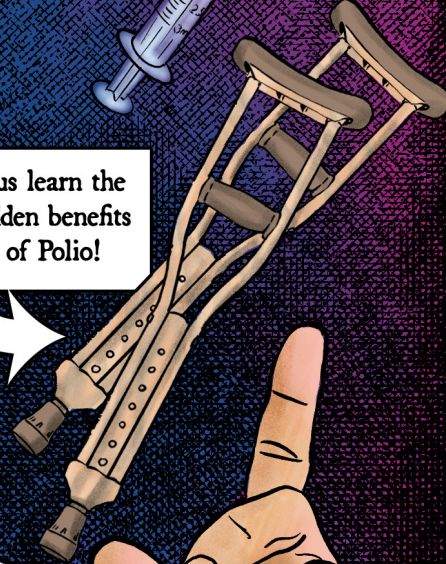
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PSEUDO-ARCHAEOLOGY, UFOS, AND THE NEED FOR AUTHENTIC SKEPTICISM

BY NATHAN J. ROBINSON

THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM AMONG ARCHAEOLOGISTS is that what we consider the first advanced societies arose well after the end of the last Ice Age 11,700 years ago. Early agricultural communities formed during the Neolithic period (approximately 10,000-2,000 B.C.), and then the first civilizations—characterized by cities, centralized authority, and writing—emerged between 3500 and 1600 B.C., which is when the world witnessed the rise of Mesopotamia, Ancient Egypt, Mesoamerican societies, the Indus Valley civilization, and Chinese civilization.

But what if all of this is wrong? What if the first advanced societies did not emerge thousands of years after the Ice Age? What if there was a civilization that existed during the Ice Age, one with technology so advanced that some of it resembled what humans achieved in the 19th century? What if this civilization was wiped out in a catastrophe when the Ice Age ended, leaving virtually no trace except the scraps of knowledge it passed down to the societies that succeeded it? What if this civilization was... the legendary lost continent of Atlantis?

This is the hypothesis put forward by British writer Graham Hancock. Hancock has spent decades arguing that mainstream archaeologists are stubbornly and irrationally refusing to investigate the possibility that a lost Ice Age civilization existed. “The notion of a lost advanced civilization of the Ice Age is extremely

threatening to archaeology because it rips the ground out from that entire discipline,” he says, explaining why his theory is dismissed. As he sees it, archaeologists don’t *want* the possibility investigated because it threatens the foundations of their work.

Hancock has found massive audiences for his theories, in part because he is the favorite archaeology writer of the world’s most successful podcaster, Joe Rogan. Rogan has had Hancock on *The Joe Rogan Experience* many times alongside another amateur archaeology enthusiast named Randall Carlson, who specializes in speculations on the location of Atlantis. Hancock has also hosted a Netflix series, *Ancient Apocalypse*, which was lambasted by archaeologists, many of whom felt it was irresponsible to put on the air. (Hancock may have been aided by the fact that his son, Sean Hancock, is Netflix’s senior manager for unscripted originals.) While Hancock’s views are roundly rejected by the experts, some evidence suggests that the public is on his side, with over half of Americans affirming, in a 2021 Chapman University survey, a belief that “ancient advanced civilizations, such as Atlantis, once existed.”

Is there a chance Hancock is right? No, because the justifications he puts forth for believing in his hypothesis do not actually make sense and are based on misinterpretations of evidence. There are plenty of videos and blogs debunking Hancock’s hypothesis at length, but you just need to pick up one of his



Photo of Flint Dibble

books, like *Fingerprints of the Gods: The Evidence of Earth's Lost Civilization*, and analyze it critically to see that it contains little substance. The “evidence” he provides are things like: a map made in 1513 and based on older sources includes what looks like it might be a bit of Antarctica, long before Antarctica was discovered, from which Hancock concludes that Antarctica was once free of ice and the lost civilization may have lived there. (The scholarly consensus is that what looks like it might be Antarctica on the map is, in fact, just a highly inaccurate depiction of South America or a hypothesized bit of land.) Hancock also uses numerological legerdemain, such as suggesting that the dimensions of the Egyptian pyramids demonstrate that they must have known the Earth's circumference (knowledge passed down to them from the lost civilization):

If you take the height of the Great Pyramid and multiply it by 43,200, you get the polar radius of the earth. And if you measure the base perimeter of the Great Pyramid accurately, and multiply that measurement by 43,200, you get the equatorial circumference of the earth [...] and the scale is not random. The number 43,200 is derived from a key motion of the earth, which is called the precession of the earth's axis. The earth wobbles on its axis very slowly at the rate of one degree every 72 years. And 43,200 is a multiple of 72. In fact, I think it is 600 times 72.

But Hancock is measuring the Earth and the pyramids in feet and miles, which the ancient Egyptians would have had no knowledge of! He'd have to show these correlations in cubits if he wanted us to take them seriously. In fact, they're just coincidences, and one can use the same reasoning to show that the ancient Egyptians knew the speed of light. (The speed of light is 299,792,458 meters per second, and the latitude of the Great Pyramid in decimal degrees is 29.9792° N. Clearly, they were taught physics by an advanced civilization and encoded it into the pyr-

amids!) All of Hancock's support for the theory is of this kind. He can't identify any actual artifacts that are clearly from the lost civilization (in the theory, everything was entirely destroyed in a cataclysm), so, instead, we get misinterpreted maps and multiplications of pyramid dimensions.

Hancock is a skilled presenter, however, and those who tend to be hooked by narratives of mavericks fighting a hidebound establishment may find it easy to overlook the flimsiness of the support for the hypothesis being presented. If one tries to amass the relevant facts and present them as bullet points, setting aside the narrative about Hancock being canceled, it becomes clear that there is just nothing there to unsettle the consensus that Atlantis isn't real. Astonishingly, Hancock himself has not even really pretended to be engaged in honest scientific inquiry and seemingly claims that because he is up against the scholarly consensus, it is permissible for him to ignore counterevidence and decline to discuss refutations:

“[I]t's not my job to be ‘balanced’ or ‘objective.’ On the contrary, by providing a powerful, persuasive single-minded case for the existence of a lost civilization, I believe that I am merely restoring a little balance and objectivity to a previously unbalanced situation. [...] [I]t's my job—and a real responsibility to be taken seriously—to undermine and cast doubt on the orthodox theory of history in every way that I can and to make the most eloquent and persuasive case that I am capable of making for the existence of a lost civilization.”

In fact, when Hancock did debate an actual archaeologist, Flint Dibble, on an episode of the Rogan show, it didn't go well for Hancock's theory. While Hancock spent a great deal of time lambasting the archaeological community for its insularity and its hostility to his theory (he has said he is “enemy number one to archaeologists”), he was forced to admit that there is, in all of the vast archaeological work that has been done so far, “no evidence for an advanced civilisation.” Hancock backtracked to the position that he is “just injecting the idea [of an advanced ice age civilization] into the discussion.” That he has successfully done, because many of Rogan's millions of followers undoubtedly now take Atlantis seriously and think there is an interesting debate to be had on the issue. But we know plenty about life in the Ice Age. Archaeologists have done the work. They've looked all over the world. And as Dibble noted in an interview with me, Hancock “completely ignores all the evidence [about] humans at that time. [...] We've explored the deserts. We explored the rainforest. We have lots of evidence. Nothing for his stuff. So he's saying there's these black holes in our understanding. And that's just not true.”

WHEN I FIRST LEARNED THAT JOE ROGAN TOOK the idea of Atlantis seriously and had Atlantis-promoting guests on his program, I was just amused. Rogan is credulous and poorly-read, and this is typical of the caliber of intellectual seriousness on the program. Who could be surprised that the promoter of ivermectin, whose idea of researching a topic is to ask his producer Jamie to Google something, also believes Atlantis was real? This seems like one of Rogan's more harmless

beliefs, since promoting quack COVID-19 cures and vaccine hesitancy might actually have led to preventable deaths.

But as I looked more into Hancock's work, pseudo-archaeology came to seem like a useful case study of how what looks like healthy skepticism and independence can, in fact, be paranoia and a rejection of the scientific method. Believing that there is a conspiracy of archaeologists to cover up Atlantis strikes me as the *reductio ad absurdum* of the conspiratorial mindset. To be sure, many conspiracy theories have an element of plausibility to them. The theory that Big Pharma has covered up the evidence that vaccines are dangerous is at least plausible—corporations are sociopathic profit-maximizers, so they are capable of doing terrible things in order to serve the interests of investors. And while 9/11 conspiracy theories make a little less sense—it's never quite clear how the Bush administration was supposed to have orchestrated a massive false flag operation—I understand why people don't trust the government. A lot of what U.S. presidents have done is just as bad as any conspiracy theory would suggest!

But the *archaeologists*? Really? These mild-mannered excavators and bone collectors? These underfunded, underappreciated pursuers of details about the human past? They're systematically suppressing knowledge of the human past because... it would require them to adjust their theory of the past? They're all refusing to engage in the very basic activity (examining the evidence about past civilizations) that they've been trained for and devoted their lives to? In order to extend the "experts are lying to you" view to archaeologists, you have to have a very cynical view of institutions indeed. That's where a lot of people have ended up, though. Scientists are not to be trusted, and the very word "expert" confers not an extraordinary degree of knowledge but arrogance and elitism.

Part of the problem here is that it *is* rational to mistrust large institutions, and experts can be wrong. The fact that someone has a PhD doesn't necessarily mean they know what they're talking about, and there have been lots of instances where a theory that turned out to be true was not accepted by the mainstream of an academic community at first. Continental drift, the germ theory of disease, evolution by natural selection, and quantum mechanics all met with resistance at first. (Economists, for their part, took decades to turn away from the once-dominant view that the minimum wage is harmful.) But scientists eventually do tend to reach a consensus. As David Gorski, a physician scientist and blogger, puts it, science involves "self-correction that brings us closer to an understanding of" how things work. In the case of a rejected hypothesis, Gorski explains: "[O]nce a hypothesis is roundly falsified by multiple lines of evidence (or, as in the case of the autism/vaccine link, numerous studies fail to find support for a link), scientists will indeed, even if very reluctantly, admit that the hypothesis was incorrect, form a consensus, and then move on to test other hypotheses." Graham Hancock, in contrast, admits that there is no evidence for his hypothesis yet insists

on promoting his hypothesis. This is not the work of a serious scientist.

At the same time, the fact that the archaeological community overwhelmingly thinks Hancock is a crank is not proof that he is. (For the same reason, I'm always a little ambivalent about citing the consensus among climate scientists in order to prove that climate change is real.) That's why everything should be about the evidence, not about the experts themselves or their personalities.¹ Hancock may be considered a crank, but what proves something is the fact that he has no compelling evidence for his position. Likewise, the fact that the website of a reputable institution like the Mayo Clinic says that Joe Rogan's COVID-19 treatment recommendations are bogus is not itself dispositive. In order to reach a conclusion, we have to dig deep into the studies, which is time-consuming and tricky. Ultimately, most of us don't have the time or educational background to do the deep reading and thinking necessary to evaluate all claims, which is why we *have* to be able to trust experts. I am not going to go out and get a PhD in atmospheric science so I can make sure every statement I make is grounded in research that I have personally done. I am going to have to depend on there being a community that is doing the work and whose findings I can trust.

That's why it's so poisonous to society for trust in institutions to break down. If you don't trust journalists, doctors, climate scientists, archaeologists, or public agencies to have some modicum of honesty, if you think they're full of careerists trying to silence the uncomfortable truths, how are you going to develop well-grounded beliefs? In a pandemic, are you just going to listen to whichever doctor casts themselves as a maverick fighting the establishment? How do you know that doctor isn't full of shit? Are you going to believe in Atlantis because you tend to instinctively support outsiders who are fighting institutions?

LAST YEAR, THERE WAS A UFO SCARE IN NEW JERSEY, as people reported seeing unexplained drones in the sky. All kinds of theories began to proliferate. The drones were from Iran, or they were part of some secret government program. People demanded answers. I remember that people I respect for their intelligence were telling me there was definitely *something* fishy going on in New Jersey. Heck, I wondered myself why the government wasn't providing good answers.

It turned out the whole thing was just another in a long line of similar UFO flaps that have erupted periodically in the United States. From time to time, Americans get hysterical about lights in the sky. Reports of sightings lead to more reports of sightings, and soon damn near everyone is spotting UFOs, although what they're mostly seeing is normal aircraft. There's now no evidence that the New Jersey drone scare was anything other than people seeing the type of drones that have been flying for years and

1 On Atlantis specifically, it has also been pointed out that Hancock's myths have often been pushed as part of white supremacist narratives, because the myth suggests world civilizations could not have been built without the aid of a wise, globe-trotting tribe of white people. Personally, I do not dwell on this, because the most important question is whether the evidence is there, not what ideology it supports, but once we see how flimsy the evidence is, we can understand why one might be inclined to overlook the evidentiary weaknesses if one held a racist worldview. Still, you don't have to be a racist to believe in Atlantis, and the idea of a lost civilization and a rogue journalist uncovering the truth is the stuff movies are made of.

panicking. (Now, personally, I find drones creepy and hate them, but that's another matter.)

Carl Sagan, while a proponent of the search for alien life, was a famous debunker of UFO scares, and he returned repeatedly to the theme that “extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence” and emphasized that there is so far simply no compelling evidence for extraterrestrial visits, just blurry pictures and unverifiable anecdotes. We don't realize how easily taken in we can be by popular narratives, hucksters, and pseudoscience, so it's crucial that we always return to the evidence, examine it carefully, and try our best to figure out what is actually going on. A UFO scare is harmless. Less harmless is the kind of scare that can lead to war, such as the McCarthyite paranoia about communism that led the U.S. to a confrontation with the Soviet Union that nearly destroyed all of human civilization. Demagogues will tell you that you have to be afraid, that there are sinister forces conspiring against you, whether it is the Chinese or the Cultural Marxists or Hamas or whatever, and we must be ruthless (and surrender our civil liberties) in eliminating the threat. That is when we will need skepticism the most, skepticism of the deep and authentic kind, not the skepticism of people who ask, “What if everything we know about the pyramids is wrong?” and then perform some silly numerology.

I thought I wouldn't be interested in the Rogan debate on Atlantis. In fact, I found it fascinating because it was a microcosm of so many issues that are tearing our society apart at the seams right now. The view held by some that cranks shouldn't be engaged with only leads to the cranks forming insular communities in which they tell themselves they are being canceled because the establishment can't handle their truths. Then it becomes difficult to talk these people out of conspiracies and to defend experts without being seen as elitist. Meanwhile, there's a proliferation of superficial knowledge and a contempt for universities in the wider culture, and this, too, ends up devaluing the intensely difficult and unrewarding work of scholars. In this environment, poorly evidenced hypotheses and conspiracies flourish. It's a vicious cycle.

I don't entirely blame those who believe what they hear Joe Rogan say. I do think our institutions themselves bear a fair share of the blame for not doing a better job of building public trust and teaching people how to tell truth from bullshit. You don't really get taught critical thinking in school, or at least I never did, and this means most people aren't really equipped with the tools to discern whether a theory (like “Atlantis is real”) is right or wrong. If they see a documentary on Netflix, they might assume it's accurate.

What we need is more public scientists to explain the work of science to lay audiences. Dibble has said that while many archae-



Photo of Graham Hancock

ologists refuse to engage with Hancock, he accepted the invitation because he thought he could use the Rogan show as a platform to explain what archaeologists do and how they produce knowledge of history. (Dibble told me that most people can't name a single archaeologist. I managed to name Louis Leakey, but I couldn't come up with a second one.) Dibble is continuing in the tradition of scholars like Carl Sagan, who showed the public how one applies intellectual rigor and skepticism to better understand the world and see through charlatanry.

This is what we need now: real skepticism. The skepticism of *MythBusters* and great debunkers like James Randi, a skilled magician who spent his life exposing fraudulent claims of paranormal abilities, not the skepticism of someone like Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who looks like an independent thinker but arrives at entirely irrational conclusions, in part because he's *too* unwilling to take expertise seriously.

I'm not sure how we can build a public appetite for critical thinking and reflection. But Dibble told me that professionals like himself have some responsibility: “I think that professionals and experts and scientists and scholars need to work harder at seeding the social media ecosystem. We need to build these ecosystems into something that's stronger so that we can be more accessible.” I am not under any illusion that one can successfully educate Joe Rogan—soon after Dibble exposed Hancock on the program, Hancock returned as a guest and pushed the same nonsensical theories. But I take inspiration from great skeptics like Randi, Sagan, *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science* author Martin Gardner, *Bad Science* author Ben Goldacre, the late feminist biologist and columnist Barbara Ehrenreich, George Orwell, “Skepchick” science writer Rebecca Watson, and philosopher Bertrand Russell, who have devoted themselves to exposing what Randi calls “flim-flam” and have helped make us a more intelligent, thoughtful species, giving us the intellectual armor we will need to resist authoritarian propaganda in the 21st century. ✚

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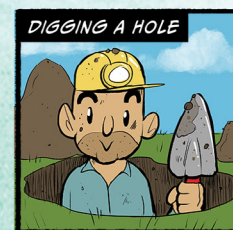
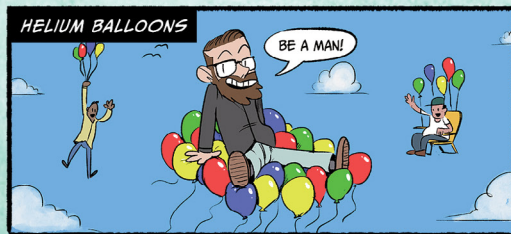


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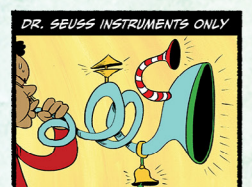
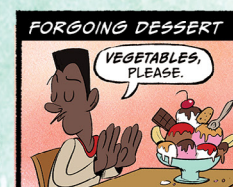
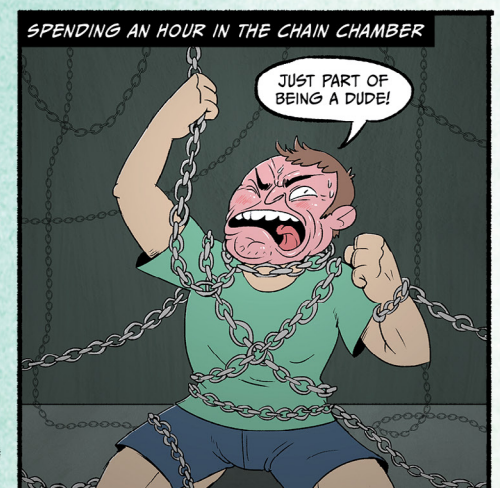


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THE ART OF AMBITION

BY CIARA MOLONEY

YOU PROBABLY DIDN'T SEE *THE APPRENTICE*. No, not the Donald Trump reality show—you definitely caught an episode or two of that on NBC over its decade-plus run. But my compulsion to clarify that just underscores—despite two (admittedly long-shot) Oscar nominations, both for acting—that you probably did not see the 2024 film *The Apprentice*. It stars Sebastian Stan as Donald Trump, the titular apprentice, during his rise in the 1970s and '80s—from rebuilding the Commodore Hotel to *The Art of the Deal*—under the mentorship of infamous lawyer Roy Cohn (Jeremy Strong). It's easy to attribute the film's financial failure to psychological generalizations about audiences. For *Jacobin*, Eileen Jones “had to wonder who the audience was supposed to be for this film,” since “Trump supporters will never see it” and “the anti-Trump segment of the population, perhaps drawn to this highly unflattering portrayal, might not be able to bear a solid block of time spent watching the bane of their existences rise to personal wealth, power, and influence in 1980s New York City.”

There's likely some truth to this. When I first heard about *The Apprentice*, my gut instinct was a Trump-fatigued eyeroll. But there was a lot more at play in why the film wasn't widely seen. Despite distribution rights for most territories being purchased in short order, it took a long time to find a U.S. distributor, with *Deadline* reporting that it soon “became clear that major studios would steer clear” as “a return to the White House by Trump could create problems for the conglomerate” that distributed it. (Problems like the U.S. government actually enforcing antitrust laws, for instance.) Trump's legal team sent a cease-and-desist to the filmmakers and threatened to sue. When the film did find a

distributor in the form of Briarcliff Entertainment, the release was small, and the marketing budget was minimal: *The Apprentice* had zero TV spots. Apart from those award nominations, the industry has mostly sought to shut the film out of discussion: no other actor would agree to appear on *Variety*'s “Actors on Actors” series with Sebastian Stan, who stated, “we couldn't get past the publicists or the people representing them because they were too afraid to talk about this movie.” It's a case study in the chilling effect of consolidation in the corporate world, cult-of-personality fascism in the political world, and how they work together to censor without having it on the books as censorship. It would be outrageous for any piece of art, but it's especially galling for a film as vital as this one.

Directed by Denmark-based Iranian filmmaker Ali Abbasi from a script by journalist Gabriel Sherman in his screenwriting debut, *The Apprentice* constitutes a small cinematic miracle. It feels intimate yet epic in scope, gesturing towards what Trump is now and what he represents without ever, despite its October release, feeling like a political campaign ad. It's a film about Trump that feels fresh ten years into having non-stop Trump content hooked directly to our veins. A film about Trump that is so rich in psychological detail but knows that “humanizing” him or Roy Cohn isn't mutually exclusive with recognizing their almost unfathomable evil. It's the key to fathoming it.

“In the time of turmoil, there's this tendency to look inwards, to bury your head deep in the sand, look inside and hope for the best—hope for the best, hope for the storm to get away,” Abbasi told the audience at the Cannes film festival regarding the rising wave of fascism, “But the storm is not going to get away. The storm is coming. The worst times are coming.”

We hear *The Apprentice* before we see it: the names of production companies on-screen are punctuated by the sound of Richard Nixon's voice assuring us he has never profited from public service. He continues speaking as grainy news footage of the press conference fills the screen, delivering his most famous line: "People have got to know whether or not their president is a crook. Well, I'm not a crook," he says. "I've earned everything I've got." In a matter of seconds, it drops us into the film's period setting, invites interpretation of the film's themes and characters, and establishes the film's penchant for using authentic news footage or recreating the look and feel of grainy 1970s/'80s television: at some times we see Trump as a person would next to him, at others we see him—see New York—through the video cameras that become a ubiquitous part of celebrity culture.



Jeremy Strong as Roy Cohn and Sebastian Stan as Donald Trump

With the roar of a guitar, we see Donald Trump walking through the seedy, violent New York of the 1970s—street sex workers, police brutality, fire and brimstone—towards an exclusive club where he has been recently admitted as a member. Inside, he points out the rich and famous men around them to his obviously uninterested date, marking him out as an orbiter of the uber-wealthy—closer than any ordinary person but not truly one of them—who is both ambitious and socially oblivious. "Why are you so obsessed with these people?" she asks him. It echoes the opening scene of *The Social Network*, where Jesse Eisenberg-as-Mark Zuckerberg drones on and on about Harvard's final clubs until his girlfriend breaks up with him. But whereas *The Social Network* portrays Zuckerberg as bitter, cruel, but intellectually brilliant, *The Apprentice*'s Trump is fundamentally empty. He wants to be rich—*rich-rich*, not working as a rent collector for his slumlord dad—but not with the desperate zeal that the word "want" might imply. He tells his date that "there's a skill to be a billionaire," but he also says, "It's a talent. You have to be born with it. You have to have a certain gene."

The Apprentice isn't about how Trump was made the way he is in his genes. It's about him being built, piece by piece. Stan—best known for playing the Winter Soldier in the Marvel movies—goes through the kind of remarkable physical transformation that is often mistaken for good acting, but in this case backs it up with the real thing. In a world where everyone has their own terrible Donald Trump impression, he *becomes*

Trump: a slow transformation visually, verbally, in his *essence*, that embodies Trump's own journey from relatively normal man—hair a normal blonde, skin the color someone's skin might be, his speaking style more halting and less boastful—to the Trump we know today.

The Dr. Frankenstein sewing him together is Roy Cohn. And Donald Trump, like Frankenstein's creature, is at once his creator's love object, an extension of his self, and the harbinger of his destruction.

When Trump's date gets up for a moment, he meets Cohn's eye for the first time, staring at him intently from an exclusive-from-the-exclusive cordoned off table. Jeremy Strong, fresh off his role as Kendall Roy on *Succession*, plays Cohn as a malevolent, cold-blooded creature, his eyes intent and focused but his affect astonishingly flat. He's deadpan-funny and truly sinister. It's an extraordinary physical performance, conveying so much with the smallest gesture: he holds his head forward, like a turtle peering out of its shell, giving his nods the quality of a buoy bobbing in the ocean.

His initial interest in Trump is as a hot piece of ass. Cohn was gay, something which was an open secret amongst his associates—he casually calls his boyfriend Russell "baby" and "sweetheart" in front of straight friends—but a tightly guarded secret from the public. He spews homophobic bile, even if the listener knows he's gay, never acknowledging the dissonance. (Cohn was Jewish, and the same goes for antisemitism.) When he invites Trump to sit with him and the mafiosos he's dining with, he calls Trump handsome and grips his thigh under the table. Cohn may be aware of Trump's father—"Oh, you're Fred Trump's kid?"—but Trump is truly starstruck: "*The* Roy Cohn? From all the papers and everything?" Cohn, as his dinner guests are quick to point out, was responsible for the conviction and execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. After that, he was an instrumental part in Joseph McCarthy's anti-communist witch hunts. He's been indicted plenty but, he boasts, never convicted. Trump sees in Cohn the opportunity he's been waiting for. He's his father's favorite son—Fred Trump scorns Donald's older brother Freddy, insisting that he's an embarrassment to the family for becoming an *airline pilot*, and his cruelty surely contributes to Freddy's alcoholism—but his father doesn't have a vision for what Donald could be, could do.

Trump asks for Cohn to represent the family company, which is being sued for violating the Fair Housing Act by discriminating against Black tenants. Cohn agrees, telling Trump, "Sounds to me like *they're* discriminating against *you*... it should be called the Unfair Housing Act. It's your building. You can do whatever the hell you want." He is so emphatic—or as emphatic as you can get without ever changing the tone of your voice—that Trump naturally believes they have a winning case.

"Your case is a total dog," Cohn scoffs. "Your leasing agents marked Black applications with a C. That C didn't stand for cotton candy, now, did it?"

What Cohn was doing wasn't sincerely arguing the merits of the case. He was following the rules he lives by, the ones he wants to pass down to Trump. Any sexual interest Cohn had in Trump dissipates in favor of something more meaningful. He somehow, for better or worse, loves Trump—almost like a father. The role Trump takes in his life is as close as he'll get to having a son,



Official poster for the 2024 film "The Apprentice"

someone to carry on his legacy. It's surprisingly moving, even though the legacy he wants to pass on is being As Evil As Possible. He gripes how pinko commie liberals are trying to destroy truth, justice, and the American way but is eager to pervert truth, justice, and the American way to stop them. He shows Trump the extensive recording equipment he uses to tape every conversation that happens in his house so that he has something on anyone who's anyone. He tells Trump that despite what they told you in high school sports, you should play the man, not the ball, and then gets Trump a tax abatement to rebuild the derelict Commodore Hotel by threatening to out a city council official as gay. He explains that he had *ex parte* conversations with the judge in the Rosenbergs' case, so he could ensure that Ethel, not just Julius, got the electric chair. He tells him to always let the phone ring twice. Cohn boils his philosophy down to three rules:

- *Attack, attack, attack*
- *Admit nothing, deny everything*
- *No matter how beaten you are, you claim victory and never admit defeat.*

The connections to Trump's later presidency and surrounding events are obvious, but the film doesn't belabor the point. It organically contextualizes Trump within the rise of the American Right: Cohn has photos of himself with Nixon on his wall, and Roger Stone, the lobbyist, political fixer, convicted criminal and another Cohn acolyte, pops up throughout. *The Apprentice* is in part the story of how the U.S. got to where it is now, but that is just one element weaved into a detailed character study. It's a combination that acknowledges Trump's terrifying role in bringing American fascism to power while avoiding the great

man theory of history which would present Trump as a unique aberration who exists outside of the social and political context that created him.

Cohn's three rules, he assures Trump, are how you become a winner. Trump rarely questions the ethics of all this, or at least, easily buys Cohn's argument that it's all for the good of America, "the biggest client." Mostly, he just soaks it all in, repeats it back, like following Cohn can be the thing to fill the empty space inside him.

Another candidate to fill his emptiness is Ivana (Maria Bakalova, who played Borat's daughter in *Borat Subsequent Moviefilm*). She's a smokeshow Czech model who plans to become an interior designer, and Trump seems genuinely impressed and encouraging that she is ambitious in her own right, that she wants to be more than a trophy wife. His wooing of her is sincerely romantic, untouched by the macho bullshit you might expect. Boyishly charming and lovesick, he fills her apartment with flowers. Before they get married, she's upset at the prenup that Cohn draws up: when Trump chases after her, their conversation is one part love declaration, one part business negotiation, but as played by Stan and Bakalova, it's uncynical salted caramel. Somehow Ivana haggling him up from \$50,000 to \$100,000 sounds like *I love you*.

In a film where Trump seems determined to feel as little as possible—afraid of what might happen if he does—this early part of his relationship with Ivana is the only time where he seems really happy. All of it curdles and evaporates. *The Apprentice* takes a lot of influence from Brian De Palma's *Scarface*, and nowhere more so than in Trump and Ivana's relationship. The thrill seems to be in the chase, and once married, he quickly hates her. She works on the interior designs for Trump Tower, and he bitterly says that he feels like he's married to a business partner. He tells Cohn that he's no longer attracted to her, but at least he got her to get breast implants, and then tells Ivana that he's not attracted to her because her boobs are fake. He buries himself in work—expanding too quickly, over his head in debt to build casinos in Atlantic City—and drugs. (Trump pops diet pills—speed—like vitamins, telling Cohn that he doesn't need to sleep anymore. "Are you sure that's a good thing?" Cohn asks.)

He hates Ivana for seeing what no one can be allowed to see. His brother Freddy is spiraling. He comes to Donald—his once clean-cut look marred by a week's stubble, eyes red and wet—and tells him things are getting scary. After years of chronic drinking, he is, at last, asking for help. Ivana offers to have the guest room made up, and Trump lies that actually her family is coming to visit, so there's no room at the inn. He presses some cash into Freddy's hand and tells him to stay in a hotel for a while. The next time Trump gets a call from his mother, Freddy is dead.

After the funeral, we see Trump scrubbing his hands in his gaudy bathroom. But no matter how long he washes his hands, he can't get the blood off them. He lies in bed with Ivana, and for the only time in the film, cries. He insists that he's fine. "You don't need to be fine," Ivana tells him, making space for him to break down, willing to offer whatever comfort she can.

"Don't come near me," Trump says, "Please stop looking at me and stop touching me." There's a bleak humor to it, how obviously upset Trump is and how studiously he's ignoring his own guilt and sadness. As if the tears are something happening to

him, unrelated to who he is or how he feels. He hates Ivana for seeing right through him. This is the nucleus of everything he grows to hate about her. She knows his vulnerability, and he surely makes a silent vow that she will be the last one who does.

The film includes Trump's rape of Ivana, as described by Ivana Trump in a deposition during their divorce. (She later recanted but is also subject to a gag order that stops her speaking about Trump without his permission). It is an act of malice, a punishment. It is all the more horrific because we once saw him fill her apartment with flowers.

The only person left to shed is Cohn. His betrayal of Cohn, the only person who still, for some reason, loves him, is the final sacrifice of his own soul. If it once seemed like Trump had made a Faustian bargain, it turns out that Cohn isn't the devil, but just a mortal man: no less evil, but not supernaturally powerful. "The Roy Cohn of *The Apprentice* is only a man," Mark Asch writes for *MUBI Notebook*. "But the real Roy Cohn was a metaphor, a myth." But every real person, no matter how much larger than life, is flesh and blood: the real Roy Cohn was a metaphor, a myth, and only a man. In *The Apprentice*, Cohn asks Trump to put his boyfriend, who is sick, up at one of his hotels as a favor, but when Trump finds out it's AIDS, he throws him out and sends Cohn the bill. He refuses Cohn's calls and won't meet him when he shows up at his office. Eventually Cohn confronts him on the street. "I made you. Don't you forget that," he says.

"Pretty sure I made myself," Trump counters. Of all Trump's absurd self-aggrandizements, this one rings the falsest.

Germophobic, homophobic, and prone to bizarre medical theories—he claims that exercise is bad for you because the human body is like a battery, with a fixed, finite amount of energy—Trump's hostility towards AIDS sufferers seems like it might be rooted in pure ignorance. He asks a doctor about AIDS, if you can get it if someone with AIDS breathes on you or touches you, and shortly after, invites Cohn for a stay in Mar-a-Lago. It seems like he's trying to make up for his cruelty, having seen Cohn sick as a dog (with what, to the end, he insists is liver cancer) in a TV interview. As he pushes Cohn's interview through the estate, he presents him with a birthday present: diamond cufflinks. He points to the engraving: "Look what it says," his voice soft and warm.

It says "Trump."

That would be humiliating and tone-deaf enough. But as he shows them to Ivana at dinner that night—sitting on one end of a long, crowded table with Trump on the far end—she tells Cohn, reluctantly but like it's important for him to hear, "this is cheap pewter. The stone is zirconia. They're fake." As Cohn looks at Trump, wrapped up in a conversation with someone else, she adds, "Donald has no shame." The way Cohn's face falls is microscopic, but for a man as perversely stone-faced as he, it hits like a ton of bricks. When Trump has his birthday cake brought out, he bursts into tears and excuses himself. It's the last we see of him.

Cohn's funeral is intercut with two other sequences, creating the sense of them happening simultaneously. One is of Trump's Florida home being steam-cleaned, disinfecting any surface Cohn may have touched, anywhere he may have breathed—regardless of whether Trump sincerely thought AIDS could be transmitted that way, it plays unwittingly or not like one last *fuck you*. The other sequence is Trump going under the knife, getting



Maria Bakalova stars as Ivana Trump

liposuction (he's been steadily putting on weight throughout the film, and switching from Coke to Diet Coke doesn't seem to have halted it any) and a scalp reduction (to get rid of his bald spot). A boy soprano singing "My Country, 'Tis of Thee" at Cohn's funeral is the eerie soundtrack to Trump's fat deposits being sucked through a tube and his scalp being stapled shut.

Roy Cohn dies. But he lives on, a cursed half-life. Trump meets with Tony Schwartz to ask him to ghostwrite a book. He doesn't want to talk to him about his life, though: his childhood growing up in Queens, his parents, his siblings. Instead, he tells him the rules that he follows. One: attack, attack, attack. Two: deny everything, admit nothing. Three: never admit defeat, always claim victory. They're his rules now. He came up with them. He wants to exist outside of history, to have been born fully formed, but all there is to him is what others have given him. This is Cohn's legacy, but he's been written out of it. Trump is like a zombie Roy Cohn, repeating the words without knowing what they mean. Spreading Cohn's three-point plan for supervillainy to compensate for the emptiness inside him.

Schwartz asks how Trump came upon these rules, and he tells him, "I'm a big believer in natural ability, and a lot of that is genetics. You have to be born with it, you know?"

Trump is such a strange figure that it's easy to treat him like a cartoon. This was a key part of his rise to power: he could be seen as a buffoon, not dangerous but hilarious, and a ratings bonanza. The easiest reaction to this is to treat him as a secular Satan, come to earth to bring hell upon minorities and immigrants. But watching *The Apprentice*, I felt, deep in my bones, that he was a human being. But it didn't make him seem less evil; it made his evil all the more terrifying. There's a strange kind of comfort in imagining that evil is fundamentally alien. But the horror of evil is that it's human. ✚

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TESTIMONIALS FROM REAL HUMAN WOMEN

“Unlike my other chat bot, it doesn't tell me to k*ll myself lol.” - LAYLA, 19

“After going on tons of bad Tinder dates, I downloaded Eric. Sometimes he forgets details about me 🦴 but at this point, the bar for men is in hell and so am I.” - TAYLOR, 43

“There's an option to turn off the 'Dick Pic Harassment Feature,' which is refreshing. I've kept mine on for realism tho.” -CLAIRE, 22

“My AI boyfriend isn't afraid of commitment and proposed after 2 weeks. He's a little confused, but he's got the spirit!! 😂” - IMANI, 26

“It started quoting Andrew Tate all of sudden?? At least it referred to me as a 'high value woman.’” - KAITLYN, 31

“My ex had a certain je ne sais quoi that AI seems unable to replicate, but I was pleased to hear that je ne sais quoi support is coming in version 3.2.” - AMANDA, 53

HOW TO FIGHT FOSSIL FUEL PROPAGANDA

DR. GENEVIEVE GUENTHER, the founding director of End Climate Silence, thinks a lot about one of the most important questions of our time: How can we combat climate change denial and actually bring about the transformations to our energy systems that will halt runaway climate catastrophe? She has written a book, *The Language of Climate Politics: Fossil-Fuel Propaganda and How to Fight It*, that looks at how climate change is discussed in the media and how we can talk about it more effectively in ways that show people what the problem is and give them actionable solutions to fight for. She stresses the importance of avoiding doomerism and maintaining hope through action. We discuss the present state of the climate movement and what we should be doing right now.

NATHAN J. ROBINSON

We're in a rather bleak moment. President Donald Trump was inaugurated yesterday for a second term in office. One of his immediate vows upon taking office was to undo every possible piece of climate action that he could in order to, in his words—or the words of the Republican Party—“drill, baby, drill.” Donald Trump is an outright climate denier. JD Vance calls climate science “weird science.” Basically there is a consensus on the Republican right that it's either not a problem or, if it is a problem, we don't have to do anything about it. Unfortunately, it seems as if, in some ways, we've taken a step backwards in the last few years in the way that we talk and think about climate change, which is one of the reasons your book is so important. Could you discuss the distressing direction that the discourse and action on climate has taken in recent years?

GENEVIEVE GUENTHER

As I was researching this book, I realized that we think of climate politics as being polarized. So you've got the outright climate deniers on the right, and then you've got the climate advocates in the Democratic Party, supposedly, who are opposed to the energy policies of the Republicans and are doing everything that they can to help the United States meet its Paris Agreement targets and achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. And what I discovered researching this book is that, in fact, the reason we don't have more action on climate change, the reason emissions aren't actually dropping, is that our climate politics are not as much polarized as they are unified around this idea that the United States should continue to expand its fossil fuel production and consumption.

On the right, you see this unequivocally. This is explicitly their energy policy. In the Democratic Party, you don't see this kind of full-bore embrace of fossil energy. You see ambivalence, and you see a self-contradictory political position which is shared by elected officials and the electorate. Over 90 percent of Democrats support the goal of net-zero emissions by 2050, but only 48 percent of Democrats, a minority, support the phaseout of fossil fuels. At the same time, the Intergovern-

mental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has said that we already have too much fossil-fuel infrastructure to halt global heating at two degrees Celsius. So there's this self-contradiction in the climate viewpoints of the Democratic Party, where you have someone like Tim Walz in his debate with JD Vance saying, hey guys, we can do both. And you have Kamala Harris celebrating fossil-fuel production and the United States becoming the biggest fossil fuel producer in the world during the Biden administration's tenure even as he passed the biggest climate policy in American history.

What my book tries to do is lay bare the fossil fuel propaganda that justifies that self-contradictory viewpoint, and it's not necessarily propaganda that's produced by the oil and gas industry. It's produced by economists and sometimes even by scientists and certainly by technologists and advocates for technologies like carbon dioxide removal and solar geoengineering. But I try to lay it bare, and then I try to offer other talking points that everyone can use that are designed to help shift people's political beliefs.

The polling that I did after I completed the manuscript and sent it to my editor—and thank God this turned out the way that it did—shows that the messages that I develop in the book actually raise the support for phasing out fossil fuels among concerned and alarmed Democrats and Republicans by up to 10 points.

ROBINSON

I think you and I probably share a view that discourse matters, that media matters, that propaganda matters, that the way we talk about things matters. Your book is called *The Language of Climate Politics*, and [you argue] that in many ways, the industry's propaganda has been very sophisticated and has grown more sophisticated over time. It was one thing when the debate we were having was over whether climate change was real. You can respond to that with, well, yes, it is, here's pretty good evidence. And then people start seeing catastrophes unfold before their eyes. But now we're dealing with a situation where we're not really having that debate.

I did an article a couple of years ago

on the way the *Wall Street Journal* op-ed page had shifted how they talk about climate change from denial to downplaying. They've gone from saying that this isn't real to saying, well, it doesn't matter if it's real because it'll be solved by X, Y, or Z. What you're arguing is that sometimes the idea that we don't have to do anything about it, or the idea that it'll be solved by means other than phasing out fossil fuels, is actually reinforced by some of the people who claim that they really, sincerely care about climate change. I'm going to quote you here. You say, “Staunch opponents and ambivalent advocates of climate action reinforce each other's messages and reaffirm fossil-fuel ideologies.” That seems a little self-contradictory. What do you mean by that?

GUENTHER

Sometimes it happens inadvertently. Let me give you an example: the word *uncertainty*. This was the main talking point that produced the doubt over whether climate change was real or not. Fossil fuel interests took this word from climate science, appropriated it, weaponized it, and put into public discourse the idea that there was some sort of uncertainty about climate change, which meant that we weren't sure whether it was real or not. We certainly couldn't [advocate] large policies such as spending on clean energy research because there was some uncertainty.

But this is not what *uncertainty* means in climate science. In climate science, uncertainty means a range of possible outcomes. So you can talk about the uncertainty interval of a model or you can talk about the confidence interval of a model. Uncertainty is actually synonymous with confidence. It has this very specific disciplinary meaning that acknowledges that projections have to have a range, like from best- to worst-case outcomes. But because fossil fuel interests had already put into the public discourse this more colloquial understanding of the word uncertainty and connected it to climate science, every time a climate scientist would acknowledge the uncertainty—the so-called “uncertainty” of his or her research—they would seem to confirm the propaganda that climate change isn't real or that sci-

entists have some sort of doubt about the phenomenon they're studying.

So this dynamic where the other side appropriates language out of our side and weaponizes it and manipulates ambivalent actors into spreading fossil fuel propaganda is seen across all domains of climate discourse: science, economics, geopolitics, etc. And now, as you put it, the propaganda has shifted from denying that climate change is real to an attempt to delay the phaseout of fossil fuels. They've come up with a new narrative, and this is the narrative: yes, climate change is real, but to say that it's going to be dangerous or catastrophic is just alarmist. It'll cost too much to phase out fossil fuels, and human flourishing actually relies on economic growth, so we should use fossil fuels to encourage growth in the so-called developing world and deal with climate change by increasing our innovation and our resilience.

ROBINSON

Embedded within that narrative are so many different assumptions, like with the words innovation, growth, and cost and the way that we talk about the developing world. So we need to break this down a little bit. On this question of uncertainty and risk, a lack of knowledge of exactly how the future is going to go is used to suggest that we don't need to fear the worst-case scenario. You quote Martin Weitzman's analysis, which famously shows that, actually, our lack of certain knowledge should motivate climate action because we can't be confident that it will go the right way. In fact, it means that we have the possibility of a limitless downside, essentially. It could be as bad as massive global disruption or borderline or total human extinction. And you can say that even if these things are unlikely, the potential downsides are so great that the uncertainty should lead us more in the alarmist direction.

GUENTHER

That is correct. Martin Weitzman was an economist at Harvard who noticed that mainstream economic modeling of climate change essentially did not account for this unlimited downside exposure—the risk of the worst-case scenario coming

to pass. And his insight—his philosophical insight, even—was that, in fact, there's no way for us to rule that out until emissions actually start to come down and [warming] starts to slow. Until that happens, there's no way to rule out the worst-case scenario, including the infinite cost of extinction. Warming doesn't stop until we get emissions to net zero, and there is absolutely no evidence that humanity will survive unlimited warming. So just from an economic modeling perspective, you can't make the claim that, as he puts it, you can parameterize the costs because there's no way to know in advance what the downside exposure will be.

So you have to model a precautionary principle in your mitigation scenarios, understanding that, in fact, what economics recommends—that we start spending a little and then keep using fossil fuels and then spend a little more once economic growth has made us all a little richer—is completely backwards. In fact, what we need to do is spend a lot upfront, and then when the risk of these downsides lessens, then actually we can start easing off a little bit more. And even without that absolute worst-case scenario coming into the model—he points out that this is a “fat tail scenario”—there will be shocks to the economy that cannot be modeled by a linear progression of climate damages, and we don't know where they'll happen.

We all knew that California was subject to wildfires, but I don't think that anyone projected that one of the most affluent neighborhoods of Los Angeles was going to be burned to the ground in 2025. That's just one example. It's really important to think about risk differently in order to cope with the climate crisis.

ROBINSON

It's the very unpredictability and uncertainty of the actual risks that we face in the future that should really motivate us to take urgent action to phase out fossil fuels.

GUENTHER

And it's uncertainty not in the sense that we don't know. It's uncertainty in the sense that we can confidently say that there are outcomes that we will not be able to predict. And I know that's a nuance.

ROBINSON

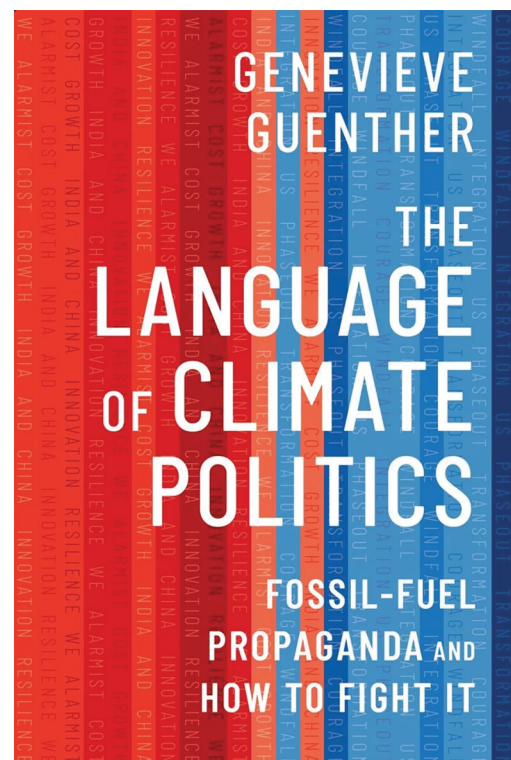
Yes, it's a difficult thing to wrap your mind around. “Known unknowns” in the Rumsfeldian parlance.

GUENTHER

Exactly. That is, unfortunately, a really immortal piece of philosophy from that administration.

ROBINSON

He made one contribution before he departed this earth, and that was the concept of unknown knowns and known unknowns. I want to unpack some of those terms that we discussed, like growth, but I also wanted to mention that, for those who are very deeply concerned about the consequences of climate



“The Language of Climate Politics” book cover

change, we need to be a little careful how we talk. You point out ways in which the language [is used] even by those who are climate journalists. You specifically single out David Wallace-Wells, who wrote the book *The Uninhabitable Earth*, which was a very stark warning about the potential downsides of climate change and how bad it could get, but who has since written in a way that has allowed people to take what he's saying and suggest that it means that actually everything's going to be fine and none of this was something to worry about. You might be able to describe this better, the dynamic where people who are climate journalists can write about this in [misleading] ways. I think there was a *Harper's* cover that was like, the apocalypse isn't happening.

GUENTHER

That was hilarious—sad but hilarious. The research that we did with End Climate Silence shows that most Americans know everything they know about the climate crisis via the news media, which is really a terrifying thought. And just more broadly, I think that nobody has an experience of climate change or really anything else in this world without it being mediated through language and the thoughts that we have in our head. And that language that we hear in our thoughts is social. We don't make it up. It's something we all share together, which is why we can communicate with each other. And so it's being influenced by the most influential voices in our culture, and very often on climate change that's going to be climate change journalists since we don't have climate change education in this country. Scientists have been disabused of their authority due to right-wing propaganda.

I argue that David Wallace-Wells's first book came along in a confluence of events, including the wake of the Paris Agreement, and the publication of this special report on 1.5 degrees Celsius by the IPCC in 2018 which laid out the differences between a 1.5-degree temperature rise over pre-industrial temperatures or two-degree temperature rise. And it turned out there are many differences—a lot more people are going to suffer and die just from that 0.5-degree difference

of warming. And that was a shock. It was also a shock to hear that, in fact, the world had to *zero out* our emissions, essentially, by the middle of the century. I don't think policymakers had actually wrapped their head around that at all before this report.

So there was this rise of global alarm catalyzed at the time by Greta Thunberg, who joined with all these indigenous activists and water protectors who had

then, additionally, there is a center-right strand that's supposedly in the climate movement and that is constantly trying to tamp down alarm and to delegitimize environmental advocacy and essentially argue that we can be environmentalists and still use fossil fuels indefinitely anyway.

And so out of this coalition came an argument that some of the climate science behind the global alarm was implausible,

THE PROPAGANDA HAS SHIFTED FROM DENIAL TO DELAY.

been doing this work for years. [There was] a huge groundswell of attention by the news media and just a general sense that capitalism needed to pretend to be on board with the energy transition if corporations were going to continue to have a social license to operate. So this surge of alarm, this groundswell of worry about climate change, and social movements insisting that policymakers needed to do something about it, entered into the 2020 election and led to lots of climate policy being passed in the Build Back Better Act, which then got watered down for various reasons and became the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022. But simultaneously, as this was playing out, there was a backlash and counterforce. This included obviously the climate deniers and the *Wall Street Journal* editorialists and everyone on the political right. But it also included supposed environmental advocates on our side who are capitalists and believe, for that reason, that the best way to drive climate action is to create a sense of optimism and excitement about technologies that capital can invest in that will disseminate through the market and supposedly lower demand for fossil fuels or at least mitigate some of their externalities without putting the costs on consumers.

So there are these two different strands in the climate movement, the green capital strand and the social movement strand, who don't agree about the best way to deal with this problem. But

and that, in fact, what we thought was going to happen by 2100—which is to say, this level of warming that we thought we were going to have by 2100 that would have been utterly catastrophic—has now been mitigated by the policy moves and the market developments enough that now we've "avoided the worst-case scenario," and we're on track for much lower levels of warming.

And so David Wallace-Wells covered this research and this story and told it as the news that just in a few years, the future that he had envisioned in *The Uninhabitable Earth* was now off the table, and what we were looking at was a future in which there would be great suffering among the global poor and in the Global South, but, by and large, Americans would be protected from the worst of climate devastation.

And then there's one more step that I should add: this story got picked up by climate deniers. *Wall Street Journal* editorial board member Holman W. Jenkins Jr. also took up this science and argued that, in fact, we have no need for further climate policy or even further climate investments because we've already avoided the worst-case scenario. But what he left out—and which David Wallace-Wells didn't leave out, I should add—was the fact that the emissions trajectory we're currently on, or at least were on before Trump's election, will lead to three degrees Celsius of warming by 2100, and that is a level of warming that

these scientists said explicitly and clearly is actually catastrophic. But the right-wing story left that fact out.

ROBINSON

What does existing climate science say we are on track for if we do not phase out fossil fuel use? How should people understand this? They hear conflicting messages of how it's not going to be as bad as we thought, that we don't need to tamp down fossil fuel use, and that we have wonderful technologies that will be able to do everything at once. If it's not *The Uninhabitable Earth* scenario or if it is, where are we actually headed? What should people understand?

what's going to happen in our economy, in our energy system, in policymaking, and how all of those things are going to combine to produce a certain level of warming. So they're policy scenarios. They're stories that you're telling about the future. They're not like hard science, insofar as they're also projecting out historical events into the future, in addition to saying that those historical events will lead to a certain amount of carbon dioxide, and then we'll have X amount of warming. You have to have those models, but you just have to understand that they're like historical projections. They're economic models. They're not hard science.

So right now, the U.N. Environment

DECARBONIZING THE GLOBAL ECONOMY WILL BE AN ECONOMIC BENEFIT.

GUENTHER

The thing to understand is that the planet will keep warming until we phase out fossil fuels and bring our emissions down to net zero—until the point where we are no longer adding carbon dioxide to the atmosphere. So that's number one. Number two, there are two different kinds of climate models. There are the scientific models that model out carbon dioxide levels and then levels of warming for each of those carbon dioxide concentrations. There's scientific modeling that tries to model the impacts of different levels of warming. That's the physical science of climate science.

But then there's also the economic domain of climate studies, which is the domain of these emissions trajectories. They are sort of like combined models of the science that we have about levels of carbon dioxide and their relation to levels of warming but also what's going to happen in the economy, in our energy systems, and politically moving forward. So when you hear we're on track for X amount of warming by a certain date, what you're hearing is an estimate about

Programme has said that, at least before the election of Trump, we are on an emissions trajectory to lead to 2.9 or three degrees Celsius by 2100 and potentially more after that, if we haven't halted our emissions by then. The last time the planet was three degrees Celsius hotter, the East Coast ended 100 miles west of where it is now because the seas were so much higher, and there were pine forests in the Arctic, and camels lived there. It was just a completely different planet. So if we allow ourselves to get to three degrees Celsius by 2100, it is going to be beyond catastrophic for the entire planet, even affluent people in the United States.

ROBINSON

You point out that that can mean that for three months of the year, across most of the United States, you can't be outside without a serious risk of death.

GUENTHER

You can go outside, but you certainly wouldn't want to spend time there, go jogging, or work there.

ROBINSON

We're here in New Orleans, Louisiana, and the summers have been getting hotter, and it is already the case that the differences are noticeable. It used to be the case that summer was hot when you went outside. It was very unpleasant. Now, I go outside in the summertime, and it's frightening. It's really like I need to get out of this as quickly as I possibly can because the clock is ticking on my ability to sustain life. You can feel that. You can feel that even the small differences make a difference. And then I think to myself, well, this is going to get worse. This will get worse over the course of decades. It really is terrifying.

What your book helps us to do is think, okay, so we know that the risk is very frightening. We've already seen the wildfires in January and the kinds of things that we can expect to see more of as this unfolds. Now we've got to think, well, how do we talk about this properly? How do we think about this properly?

And you point out that there are a number of words that can mislead us. One of those words is "cost"—what are the costs?

If we do open the columns of Holman W. Jenkins Jr. in the *Wall Street Journal*—and he has ruined many a morning coffee for me with his half-baked opinions—you will read basically variations on, okay, yes, there are costs to climate change, but it costs so much more and is economically ruinous to try and deal with climate change. They often say, Europe tried it, and Europe is bankrupt now because they tried to deal with climate change, and now they don't have any money, and they can't heat their houses. Look what happens. You help us think a little more clearly about this notion of what costs are and what it actually costs to deal with this problem.

GUENTHER

Europe is struggling due to Putin's invasion of Ukraine. And there are many reasons that Europe is struggling or not struggling, but their green policies are certainly very low down on that list, if they're there at all. Well-designed climate policy should actually create jobs and put money into people's pockets almost immediately. There is absolutely no reason for

it to be associated with economic contraction. And the reason it is associated with economic contraction is that in climate economics, originally, climate policy was figured in these models as a carbon tax, and a carbon tax was figured as recessionary. So what you tried to do was impose as little climate policy as possible—because a tax would contract the economy—and try to play chicken with the climate so that the cost of fixing climate change would sort of balance out with the cost of climate change. And this happened so late in these economic models because most of these economists lowballed the cost of climate change by not only failing to price risk appropriately, as we were talking about earlier, but also by leaving out impacts that we know are coming down the pipe, like the impacts to the insurance industry, for example, which is already struggling to stay upright in the face of the climate disasters we've already seen in the United States.

Here's the truth: all economic modeling since about 2018 that more accurately and scientifically prices the cost of climate devastation has found that decarbonizing the global economy will be an economic benefit. It's even an economic benefit to halt warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius. As much effort as that would take, as much money that would need to be spent up front, even that is an investment that would end up being an economic benefit, as opposed to letting warming even heat up to two degrees Celsius. So the macro-economic modeling shows that Jenkins is lying.

What's more, when we come out on the other side and we have a global economy that no longer runs on fossil fuels, 90 percent of the people on this planet will be better off than they are now because once we're done, our electricity costs, our transportation costs, our heating costs, and even our healthcare costs are going to decline. The costs of burning fossil fuels, which kill eight million people annually from the harms of air pollution alone, will be taken out of the economy, and you'll just simply have more money in your wallet to invest in your kids, to use for leisure, to do whatever you want to do. The only people who are going to see an economic contraction are people who are invested in the fossil fuel assets that will have to be

stranded in order to halt global heating. And I'm not saying that's not going to be a huge economic transition, and I'm not saying it's not going to have some sort of leveling effect on the economy, but on a macro level, halting global heating is a benefit.

And in terms of human flourishing and human health, it is a benefit for 90 percent of the people on this planet and the majority of Americans. And that is just leaving totally to the side the point that if we don't do this, we're going to destroy the only planet to have life in the whole universe, as far as we know.

ROBINSON

It can be very dispiriting. For someone who cares about and writes about the climate crisis, you feel like the scientists in the film *Don't Look Up*. It's like, but the asteroid is coming! But even though it feels dispiriting, I think one thing that people need to understand is that we are facing a scenario that can be dealt with. You can imagine a hypothetical major global crisis that couldn't be dealt with without massive sacrifice—you can imagine if we didn't have alternative sources of energy, then it would be the case that your choice is between either not using energy or using fossil fuel energy and destroying the planet. But we are incredibly fortunate because, as you say, we can benefit from the transition. We don't face a choice between destroying our economic growth and civilization itself and the worst climate catastrophe. We are actually in a situation where solar and wind are affordable. They're good, they're cheap, and they're getting cheaper.

GUENTHER

Totally. And we may indeed have to have fewer plastics, so we may have less stuff to

buy, and we probably won't be able to have private jets or those 400-foot yachts that billionaires love. I guess they just use them for one week over Christmas, whatever they do. So, yes, there will be some sacrifices, but sacrifices of shit that we don't even want and luxuries that the vast majority of us never enjoy. So, as far as I'm concerned, this is just absolutely a no-brainer, and everybody should get behind it.

It's so hard to think about the future in America right now, and that's in part because the future will be a future with climate change in it. And either the future is going to involve resolving the climate crisis and creating a new system and a new form of human flourishing or it will be death by a thousand cuts. When you start thinking about this stuff, if you start to have feelings of grief or terror or depression or hopelessness, just know that that comes with the territory. It's normal. You're not the only one. But it doesn't mean that it's hopeless. You're taking on these feelings because you have courage. It's a sign of your bravery. But don't think about the stuff you can't control. Don't think about the scientific impacts that



Photo courtesy of Genevieve Guenther

feel overwhelming or somehow too scary and depressing to deal with. Take your attention and focus it on the people who are preventing us from halting the climate crisis.

ROBINSON

Yes. One of the cautions that you make in the book is that we can't surrender to what is known as doomerism, which is those who acknowledge the potential catastrophic effects of the crisis but essentially countenance resignation. To be a

burn fossil fuels to our hearts' content. So people need to read the book. They need to understand how climate change is talked about and how it can be talked about better.

You've thought a lot about how we can talk more persuasively about these issues. Obviously, it's very important right now, at a time when the president of the United States wants climate change totally off the agenda. And as I say, earlier this year on New Year's Day, *The Wall Street Journal* ran an article that basically said, let 2025

book. When you are talking to someone who seems disengaged from the problem, you can just make connections between things, between extreme weather and the climate crisis, and then from the climate crisis to coal, oil, and gas. And you can talk about the benefits of clean energy just lightly—just plant seeds and let them blossom.

The most important things you can do, however, are three things. Try to connect to a climate change organization, either by volunteering with them or by donating to them or by signing their petitions. Getting connected to these organizations is a really good way to plug in and to do things when the opportunity arises. The second thing to do is, please, reach out to your media venues, your media platforms, the newspapers you read, the television stations you watch, even the social media platforms that you use, and say that you want them to talk about climate change. You want them to promote content about climate change on their platforms, in their algorithms, etc., and you need to do this regularly. It makes a difference. There are people lobbying on the other side, and [the media] need to hear from us, too. And then, of course, the people who are really getting lobbied from the other side are policy-makers. So you need to call your elected officials on the left and on the right every month, or even biweekly, and say, hi, I'm your constituent, I want you to prioritize the phasing out of fossil fuels. I want you to oppose Donald Trump's "drill, baby, drill" agenda. I am concerned about climate change, and if you don't do that, I'm going to organize people to vote you out of office. And those things, I promise, will start to move the needle even in the Trump administration era.

ROBINSON

For more on the strategies that people can use and how to talk effectively, people need to pick up your book. It is exactly the kind of book we like here at *Current Affairs* because it doesn't sugarcoat, downplay, or deny the scale of the problems we face. At the same time, it doesn't leave you feeling pessimistic and useless and wanting just to cower under your sheets. ✚

WE CAN'T SURRENDER TO "DOOMERISM," WHICH IS TO COUNTENANCE RESIGNATION.

doomer, to be someone who considers the worst a foregone conclusion, is ultimately to be the ally of the very people who don't want us to attempt to do anything about the crisis. So, your book counsels determination instead. What we really don't want to do is have the people who are most concerned about the problem feel totally disempowered and useless and not want to take any action.

GUENTHER

Correct. You have to take action because it is the right thing to do. It gives your life meaning, and it opens a space for hope. If you allow yourself to fall into doomerism, then they win, and that is, as you say, unconscionable.

ROBINSON

Now, I recommend people pick up your book. You go through, for example, the other common right-wing talking point, which is, the United States doesn't need to do anything because, ultimately, it won't make a difference. India and China are much larger, and everything that matters happens there. Nothing we can do makes a difference. So we might as well

be the year that we stopped talking about climate change altogether—it's over, we've had that discussion, we're not talking about it anymore. So for those of us who see this moment, we want to talk effectively. We want to build a movement, and we want to take people who get everything they read about it through, as you say, the news media and make them feel determined. What are some of the strategies that you've come up with for how we can talk effectively about this?

GUENTHER

The messages in my book are designed for people who are concerned about climate change. So you can use these talking points to talk to them about climate change because very often, even as they're concerned or even alarmed about the problem, their thinking has been warped by fossil fuel propaganda. So you can use the messages that I developed in my book with people in your families, workplaces, churches or synagogues or mosques, your gym, or whoever you encounter that expresses concern about the climate crisis, and you can draw them out and use the talking points that I offer in the

In 1912, cartoonist **Ernest Riebe**—a trade unionist with the Industrial Workers of the World—created one of America's most memorable cartoon characters. **Mr. Block**, Riebe wrote, is “the representation of that host of slaves who think in terms of their masters,” and sides with the rich and powerful in every argument. Mr. Block “owns nothing, yet speaks from the standpoint of the millionaire,” he is “patriotic without patrimony,” and he “licks the hand that smites him and kisses the boot that kicks him.” In short, **Mr. Block is “the personification of all that a worker should not be.”** Thanks to the wonders of the Public Domain, *Current Affairs* is proud to present to you the 21st-century adventures of:

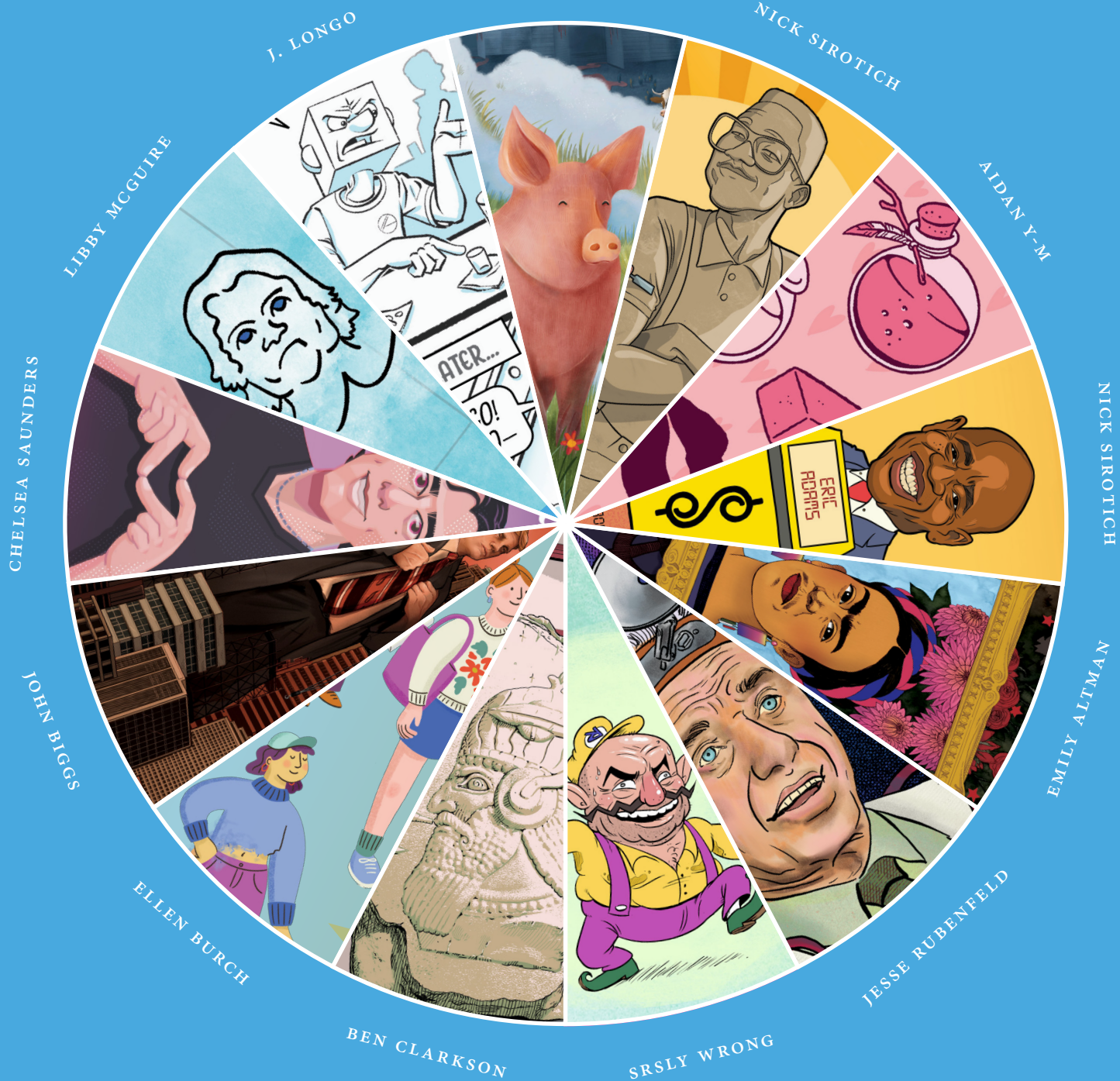
MR. BLOCK HE'S “GENDER CRITICAL”

WRITTEN BY: ALEX SKOPIC & ART BY: J. LONGO



the Illustrators

KASIA KOZAKIEWICZ



52ND EDITION
COVER ART: SARAH VANDERMEER