

Chomsky on A Different World is Possible



June 2020

Special Issue on Racism

Prashad on
an Abnormal
Society

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Weapons that Protect White Privilege Prevent Sustainable Community Change

By Kathy Kelly

In her poem, “The Revolution Will Rhyme,” Buffalo Black Lives Matter activist Jillian Hanesworth writes

about the movement for change we now see sweeping across the world:

“It will not be developed just to be displaced

Its focus will not be extracted and refocused or repurposed

And the burden of education and comfort will not be placed on the oppressed

While understanding and tolerance is gifted to the oppressor

You will not be able to binge watch the revolution

Rewinding the comfortable triumphs and

fast forwarding through the hurt”

In strong, confident language, fueled by recognition of hurts and atrocities, Hanesworth calls on white people to ask themselves uncomfortable questions. How does our white privilege contribute to racism and oppression? How can we use our privilege to bring about systemic change?

Mindful not to repurpose or refocus Jillian’s words, I think we must move forward, urgently, to tackle systemic change. We must use our white privilege to insist on and secure decent



Where are the resources, the funding, to do this? I think it's important to examine the so-called security U.S. people purchase through funding the U.S. military and demand redirection of these resources. Money entrusted to the Pentagon and a vast array of military contractors must be spent to meet human needs.

Imagine U.S. complicity with Saudi bludgeoning of Yemen's cities, towns, and critical infrastructure and link that with construction, in Marinette, Wisconsin, of four Littoral Combat Ships which Lockheed Martin has arranged to build and sell to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Saudis use these ships



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to blockade Yemen's ports, causing even more starvation in a country on the brink of famine. Yes, the construction of the ships provides greatly needed jobs. But, are there other, better construction projects that privileged people could demand be given immediate priority in our war-torn world? Could Marinette's engineers, designers, welders and builders work on projects that would help rebuild communities devastated by declining infrastructure and racist neglect within the

United States?

Jillian's poem says the revolution will be a complete overhaul, not just a quick fix. We should join her in settling for nothing less. White people who are among the privileged "haves" in our unjust society must look long and hard into the mirror of our privileged history. Why should people who already have so much be entitled to get more? And if we're to learn how to live together without killing one another, how can we dismantle and repurpose the vast killing

machine that protects our unfair white privilege? **Z**

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Defund the Police, Defund the Military



By Medea Benjamin and Nicolas J S Davies

On June 1, President Trump threatened to deploy active-duty U.S. military forces against peaceful Black Lives Matter protesters in cities across America. Trump and state governors eventually deployed at least 17,000 National Guard troops across the country. In the nation's capital, Trump deployed 9 Blackhawk assault helicopters, thousands of National Guard troops from 6 states and at least 1,600 Military Police and active-duty combat troops from the 82nd Airborne Division, with written orders to pack bayonets.

After a week of conflicting orders during which Trump demanded 10,000 troops in the capital, the active-duty troops were finally ordered back to their bases in North Carolina and New York on June 5, as the peaceful nature of the protests made the use of military force very obviously redundant, dangerous and irresponsible. But Americans were left shell-shocked by the heavily armed troops, the tear gas, the rubber bullets and the tanks that turned U.S. streets into war zones. They

were also shocked to realize how easy it was for President Trump, single-handedly, to muster such a chilling array of force.

But we shouldn't be surprised. We have allowed our corrupt ruling class to build the most destructive war machine in history and to place it in the hands of an erratic and unpredictable president. As protests against police brutality flooded our nation's streets, Trump felt emboldened to turn this war machine against us—and may well be willing to do it again if there is a contested election in November.

Americans are getting a small taste of the fire and fury that the U.S. military and its allies inflict on people overseas on a regular basis from Iraq and Afghanistan to Yemen and Palestine, and the intimidation felt by the people of Iran, Venezuela, North Korea and other countries that have long lived under U.S. threats to bomb, attack or invade them.

For African-Americans, the latest round of fury unleashed by the police and military is only an escalation of the low-grade war that America's rulers have waged against them for centuries. From the horrors of slavery to post-Civil War convict leasing to the apartheid Jim Crow system to today's mass criminalization,

mass incarceration and militarized policing, America has always treated African-Americans as a permanent underclass to be exploited and "kept in their place" with as much force and brutality as that takes.

Today, Black Americans are at least four times as likely to be shot by police as white Americans and six times as likely to be thrown in prison. Black drivers are three times more likely to be searched and twice as likely to be arrested during traffic stops, even though police have better luck finding contraband in white people's cars. All of this adds up to a racist policing and prison system, with African-American men as its prime targets, even as U.S. police forces are increasingly militarized and armed by the Pentagon.

Racist persecution does not end when African-Americans walk out the prison gate. In 2010, a third of African-American men had a felony conviction on their record, closing doors to jobs, housing, student aid, safety net programs like SNAP and cash assistance, and in some states the right to vote. From the first "stop and frisk" or traffic stop, African-American men face a system designed to entrap them in permanent second-class citizenship and poverty.



Just as the people of Iran, North Korea and Venezuela suffer from poverty, hunger, preventable disease and death as the intended results of brutal U.S. economic sanctions, systemic racism has similar effects in the U.S., keeping African-Americans in exceptional poverty, with double the infant mortality rate of whites and schools that are as segregated and unequal as when segregation was legal. These underlying disparities in health and living standards appear to be the main reason why African-Americans are dying from COVID-19 at more than double the rate of White Americans.

Liberating a neocolonial world

While the U.S. war on the black population at home is now exposed for all of America—and the world—to see, the victims of U.S. wars abroad continue to be hidden. Trump has escalated the horrific wars he inherited from Obama, dropping more bombs and missiles in 3 years than either Bush II or Obama did in their first terms.

But Americans don't see the terrifying fireballs of the bombs. They don't see the dead and maimed bodies and rubble the bombs leave in

their wake. American public discourse about war has revolved almost entirely around the experiences and sacrifices of U.S. troops, who are, after all, our family members and neighbors. Like the double standard between white and black lives in the U.S., there is a similar double standard between the lives of U.S. troops and the millions of casualties and ruined lives on the other side of the conflicts the U.S. armed forces and U.S. weapons unleash on other countries.

When retired generals speak out against Trump's desire to deploy active-duty troops on America's streets, we should understand that they are defending precisely this double standard. Despite draining the U.S. Treasury to wreak horrific violence against people in other countries, while failing to "win" wars even on its own confused terms, the U.S. military has maintained a surprisingly good reputation with the U.S. public. This has largely exempted the armed forces from growing public disgust with the systemic corruption of other American institutions.

Generals Mattis and Allen, who came out against Trump's deployment of U.S. troops against peaceful protesters, understand very well that the fastest way to squander the military's "teflon"

public reputation would be to deploy it more widely and openly against Americans within the United States.

Just as we are exposing the rot in U.S. police forces and calling for defunding the police, so we must expose the rot in U.S. foreign policy and call for defunding the Pentagon. U.S. wars on people in other countries are driven by the same racism and ruling class economic interests as the war against African-Americans in our cities. For too long, we have let cynical politicians and business leaders divide and rule us, funding police and the Pentagon over real human needs, pitting us against each other at home and leading us off to wars against our neighbors abroad.

The double standard that sanctifies the lives of U.S. troops over those of the people whose countries they bomb and invade is as cynical and deadly as the one that values white lives over black ones in America. As we chant "Black Lives Matter," we should include the lives of black and brown people dying every day from U.S. sanctions in Venezuela, the lives of black and brown people being blown up by U.S. bombs in Yemen and Afghanistan, the lives of people of color in Palestine who are tear-gassed, beaten and shot

NEW YORK, NEW YORK - MAY 29, 2020: A young woman confronts police officers at a protest over the death of George Floyd at the entrance to the Brooklyn Bridge. Photo by Jennifer M. Mason/Shutterstock.com

with Israeli weapons funded by U.S.-taxpayers. We must be ready to show solidarity with people defending themselves against U.S.-sponsored violence whether in Minneapolis, New York and Los Angeles, or Afghanistan, Gaza and Iran.

This past week, our friends around the world have given us a magnificent example of what this kind of international solidarity looks like. From London, Copenhagen and Berlin to New Zealand, Canada and Nigeria, people have poured into the streets to show solidarity with African-Americans. They understand that the U.S. lies at the heart of a racist political and

economic international order that still dominates the world 60 years after the formal end of Western colonialism. They understand that our struggle is their struggle, and we should understand that their future is also our future.

So as others stand with us, we must also stand with them. Together we must seize this moment to move from incremental reform to real systemic change, not just within the U.S. but throughout the racist, neocolonial world that is policed by the U.S. military.

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The Subversion of New York City's Official Policy to Curb Police Brutality





0, Times Square Protest, Kevin RC Wilson
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plaint Review Board in 1953. It was composed of three deputy police commissioners, tasked with investigating civilian complaints and deciding on whether or not to recommend disciplinary action against police officers.

This control of the process by the Police Department did little to correct police behavior, and civil rights groups, calling attention to ongoing police brutality, demanded the

creation of an independent, civilian Board. In the mid-1960s, after African-American uprisings swept through Harlem and Bedford Stuyvesant, John Lindsay, the city's new mayor, added four civilians to the Board. This action, however, which Lindsay thought a reasonable compromise, enraged the police. John Cassese, president of the PBA, fiercely objected to a civilian presence, stating:

"I'm sick and tired of giving in to minority groups with their whims and their gripes and shouting." As a result, the PBA gathered enough signatures to place a measure on the ballot that would bar civilians from having any oversight of complaints against the police.

Naturally, in this context, my sister and I were wary of being caught by the police while pasting our "Vote No"



W 41 St

**BLACK
POLITICS**

ABOLISH
THE
NYPD
JUSTICE
FOR
FLOYD

JUSTICE
FOR
GEORGE FLOYD

MIT LONG TERM TO
POLITIONED WORLD IS
POSSIBLE.

ABO
PO

signs on walls and abandoned storefronts. Consequently, we set out after midnight, wearing dark clothing, and made sure to do each posting job rapidly, and then quickly move on. The police had an easier time of it, especially given the racial turmoil of the era that was sparking white backlash and widespread demands for “law and order.” Ultimately, thanks to a PBA campaign of racism and misinformation, the ballot measure passed by an overwhelming margin, and the Board again became an all-police venture.

Over the ensuing decades, however, police misconduct led to the establishment of civilian review boards in cities around the nation and, in New York City, revived public pressure for taking the Board out of the hands of the police. Finally, in 1993, Mayor David Dinkins and the New York City Council re-organized the Board as an all-civilian operation.

Even so, the Board remained weak and fairly ineffectual. The Board’s minimal impact can be attributed in part to Dinkins’s mayoral successors, Rudy Giuliani and Michael Bloomberg, who limited its funding while instituting “zero tolerance” and “stop and frisk” programs that dramatically enhanced the power and impunity of the police. Between June 1996

and June 1997, the city administration settled 503 police brutality cases in court, but no member of the police department associated with them was punished. The well-publicized case of Eric Garner, who died from a police chokehold in 2014, merely highlighted the widespread problem of police brutality.

More important, however, is that fact that, as critics of police practices have argued, the agency lacks the capacity to hold police officers accountable. This weakness of the Board is underscored by the New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU), which, in March 2019, pointed out that, although the agency has the authority to investigate and, in certain instances, prosecute cases of police misconduct, “its recommendations on disciplinary outcomes are ultimately not binding” on the New York Police Department (NYPD). The reason is that the police commissioner retains “exclusive authority to decide and impose discipline” for police officers. Thus, in 2017 (the most recent year for which the NYCLU had full data), the police commissioner imposed penalties weaker than those recommended by the Board in a majority of cases that came before him. Furthermore, in the most serious misconduct cases that involved full ad-

ministrative trials, the police commissioner imposed discipline consistent with Board recommendations in only 27 percent of the cases. The NYCLU concluded that “the current system in which the NYPD is accountable only to itself is untenable.”

Unfortunately, the situation has not changed dramatically since then. In November 2019, voters in New York City—despite a fierce opposition campaign by the PBA, again incensed by the prospect of civilian control of the police—overwhelmingly approved measures to strengthen the Board. But, in fact, these changes were rather modest, and still left the civilian oversight body without the final authority to discipline police officers. Meanwhile, police brutality continues, sometimes quite flagrantly, in New York City.

Although the Civilian Complaint Review Board reports that it has “investigated tens of thousands of complaints, leading to discipline for thousands of police officers,” it’s clear that it could do much more toward ending the scourge of police brutality. And it probably would do more if it were not obstructed every step of the way by New York’s City’s police and their friends in high office.

New York, of course, is the nation’s largest city and, as



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such, often serves as a bellwether for urban areas in the rest of the country. Consequently, this story of New York's lengthy history of efforts to curb police brutality, as well as the sabotage of such efforts, provides useful background information for

the current nationwide debate over reforming police practices. Overall, it leads to the conclusion that, however difficult eliminating police misconduct might be, the job cannot be left to the police. **Z**

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However difficult eliminating police misconduct might be, the job cannot be left to the police



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The Murder of George Floyd Is Normal in an Abnormal Society

By Vijay Prashad

Silence

There is no need to write these words, no need to read them. All this has been written before. There is no need to wonder why George Floyd (age 46) was murdered in broad daylight in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on May

25, 2020. The script of his death is written deep in the ugly drama of U.S. history.

I Can't Breathe 2020





Officer Derek Chauvin's knee sat on George Floyd's neck for two minutes and 53 seconds. After that time, George Floyd was dead. From the moment Chauvin put his body on an unarmed man, George Floyd said—11 times—I can't breathe.

Scientists who study human respiration say that untrained people can hold their breath from between thirty seconds and two minutes; anything more than that results in a process that leads eventually to death.

I Can't Breathe 2014

Officer Daniel Pantaleo slammed Eric Garner onto the New York City sidewalk just minutes after Garner had helped resolve a dispute on the street. Pantaleo pushed Garner's face onto the pavement, and Garner said—11 times—I can't breathe.

Garner lost consciousness, did not receive medical care in the ambulance, and was pronounced dead soon after arriving at the hospital. He died, effectively, of strangulation.

Dismayed

Both Floyd and Garner were African American; both were men who struggled to make a living in a harsh economic environment.

The UN Human Rights head Michelle Bachelet wrote a powerful statement in response to the death of George Floyd: "This is the latest in a long line of killings of unarmed African Americans by U.S. police officers and members of the public. I am dismayed to have to add George Floyd's name to that of Breonna Taylor, Eric Garner, Michael Brown and many other unarmed African Americans who have died over the years at the hands of

the police—as well as people such as Ahmaud Arbery and Trayvon Martin who were killed by armed members of the public."

Each year in the United States, more than 1,000 people are killed by the police; African Americans are 3 times more likely to be killed by the police than whites, and African Americans who are killed by police are more likely to be unarmed than whites. Most of these killings are not associated with serious crime. Astoundingly, 99 percent of the officers who kill a civilian are not charged with a crime.

Permanent Depression

"The Depression," the poet Langston Hughes wrote of the 1930s, "brought everybody down a peg or two." It was different for African Americans, for they "had but few pegs to fall."

Garner was accused of selling loose cigarettes on the street, violating excise tax laws to make a few dollars; Floyd was accused of using a counterfeit \$20 bill. Even if these accusations could have been proved, neither were earth-shattering crimes; if they had gone to court, neither would have earned these men death sentences. They were killed after being accused of minor infringements.

When Hughes wrote that sentence, Lino Rivera, a 16-year-old Afro-Puerto Rican boy, had been arrested for shoplifting a 10-cent penknife. A crowd gathered when the police went to arrest him, a rumor spread that he had been killed, and Harlem rose up in anger. A government report later showed that the protests were "spontaneous" and that the causes of the unrest were "the injustices of discrimination in employment, the aggressions of the police, and racial segregation." This report could have been written last week. It suggests a permanent Depression.





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System Cannot Be Reformed

Historically, police aggression has come before any unrest. In 1967, unrest in Detroit spurred the U.S. government to study the causes, which they assumed would be communist instigators and an inflammatory press. The riots, the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (the Kerner Commission) said, “were not caused by, nor were they the consequences of, any organized plan or ‘conspiracy.’”

Instead, the Kerner Commission said that the cause of the unrest was structural racism.

“What white Americans have never fully understood,” the report noted, “is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it.” By “ghetto” the report’s authors meant the atrocious class inequalities in the United States that had—because of the history of enslavement—been marked by race.

Rather than address the deep inequalities in society, the American government chose to heavily arm police officers and send them to discipline populations in distress with their dangerous weapons. The commission proposed instead “a policy which combines ghet-

to enrichment with programs designed to encourage integration... into the society outside the ghetto.”

Nothing came of that report, as nothing has come of any of the reports that stretch backward 150 years. Rather than genuinely invest in the well-being of people, the American government—whether governed by Republicans or Democrats—cut back on social programs and cut back on welfare spending; it allowed firms to erode wages and it allowed them to diminish working conditions. What was terrible in 1968 only became worse for the working-class Black population.

The financial crisis of 2008 stole from African American households’ savings that had been accumulated through generations of work. By 2013, Pew Research found that the net worth of white households was 13 times greater than African American households; this was the largest such gap since 1989, and it is a gap that has only widened. Now, with the global pandemic striking the United States particularly hard, data shows that the disease has struck African Americans and other people of color the most. Some of this is because it is African Americans and other people of color who often have the most dangerous frontline jobs.

If Eric Garner and George Floyd earned a minimum wage of \$25 for decent work, would they need to be in a position where a belligerent police officer would accuse them of selling loose cigarettes or of passing a counterfeit bill?

They Are Normal

Society in the United States has been broken by the mechanisms of high rates of economic inequality, high rates of poverty, impossible entry into robust educational systems, and remarkable warlike conditions put

in place to manage populations no longer seen as the citizenry but as criminals.

Such processes corrode a civilization. The names of Michael Brown, Sandra Bland, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice... and now George Floyd are only the names of the present moment, written in thick ink on cardboard signs across the United States at the many, many protests that continue to take place. The taste of desperation lingers in these protests, along with the anger at the system, and the outrage seems to have no outlet.

Donald Trump is an exaggeration of the normal course of history in the United States. He takes the ugliness to the utmost limit, bringing in the army, sniffing around for the legal possibility of the mass detention of demonstrators. His is a politics of violence. It does not last long. It is hard to beat the urge for justice out of an entire people.

As you read this, somewhere in the United States, another person will be killed—another poor person whom the police deem to be a threat. Tomorrow another will be killed; and then another. These deaths are normal for the system. Outrage against this system is a logical, and moral, response. **Z**

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Amid Protests and Pandemic, Trump's Priority Is Protecting Profits

CJ Polychroniou interviews Noam Chomsky

CJ. Polychroniou: Noam, for the past 40 or so years, we have been witnessing in the U.S. the demolition of the welfare state and the supremacy of the ideology of market fundamentalism to the point that the country is unable to deal with a major health crisis, let alone resolve long-standing issues like large-scale poverty, immense economic



Photo by Akhil App

inequalities, racism and police brutality. Yet, Donald Trump did not hesitate in the midst of the George Floyd protests to declare that, “America is the greatest country in the world,” while he is seeking at one and the same time to start a new civil war in this country through tactics of extreme polarization. Can you comment on the above observations?

Noam Chomsky: I don’t think Trump wants a civil war. Rather, as he says, he wants to

“dominate” by violence and terrify any potential opposition. That is his standard reflex. Just look at his outburst when one Republican Senator, Lisa Murkowski, broke strict Party discipline and raised some mild doubts about the magnificence of His Royal Majesty. Or his firing of the scientist in charge of vaccine development when he raised a question about one of Trump’s quack medicines. Or his purge of the inspector generals who might investigate the fetid swamp he’s constructed in

**I don’t think Trump wants a civil war. Rather, a
and terrify any po**



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Washington.

It's routine. He's a radically new phenomenon in American political history.

Another Trump reflex is his call for "the most vicious dogs, and most ominous weapons, I have ever seen" when peaceful protesters appear near his abode. The phrase "vicious dogs" evokes the country's horror when images of vicious dogs attacking Black demonstrators appeared on the front pages during the civil rights movement. Trump's use of the

phrase was either by intent, to stir up racist violence, or reflexive, arising from his innermost sentiments. I leave it to others to judge which is worse, and what either tells us about the malignancy at the center of global power.

With that qualification, there is no inconsistency. Both the claim that America is the greatest country in the world, in his special sense, and his call for domination, follow from his guiding doctrine: ME.

A direct corollary to the doctrine is that he

as he says, he wants to "dominate" by violence
potential opposition

must satisfy the demands of extreme wealth and corporate power, which tolerate his antics only insofar as he serves their interests abjectly, as he does with admirable consistency in his legislative programs and executive decisions, such as the recent Environmental Protection Agency decision to increase air pollution “in the midst of an unprecedented respiratory pandemic,” risking tens of thousands of deaths, disproportionately Black, the business press reports, but increasing wealth for those who matter.

The success of his tactics was revealed clearly at the January extravaganza at the Davos ski resort, where the masters of the universe, as they are called, meet annually to cavort and congratulate one another. This year’s meeting departed from the norm. There was visible concern about “reputational risk”—recognition that the peasants are coming with their pitchforks. Therefore, there were solemn declarations that, We realize we’ve made mistakes, but we are changing, you can put your faith in us, we will become “soulful corporations,” to borrow the phrase used in accolades to corporate America in the 1950s.

The keynote address was, of course, handed to Trump, the Godfather. The elegant figures assembled don’t like him. His vulgarity and general brutishness disrupt their preferred image of enlightened humanism. But they gave him rousing applause. Antics aside, he made clear that he understands the bottom line: which pockets have to be stuffed lavishly with more dollars.

Another direct corollary of the guiding doctrine is that the con man in charge must control his voting base while he is stabbing most of them in the back with his actual programs—a difficult feat, which he has so far carried off with much skill. The voting base includes not only avid white supremacists but others in the grip of the fear of “them” that is a core part of the culture—and is of course

not without foundation. One consequence of bitter repression is that “they” often resort to crime—that is, the retail crime of the weak, not the wholesale crime of the powerful.

For Trump’s prime constituency of great wealth and corporate power, America is indeed the greatest country in the world. How can one fault a country in which 0.1 percent of the population hold 20 percent of the wealth while the majority try to survive from paycheck to paycheck and CEO compensation has reached 287 times that of workers? And calls for domination by vicious dogs placates much of the voting base.

So, all falls into place.

The actor George Clooney responded with an essay for the Daily Beast to the killing of George Floyd by saying that racism is America’s pandemic, “and in 400 years we’ve yet to find a vaccine.” Why is racism so entrenched and intractable in the United States?

The answer is given by what happened in those 400 years. It’s been reviewed before, but for me at least it’s useful to take a few minutes to think it through again until it becomes deeply ingrained in consciousness. In summary:

The first 250 years created the most vicious system of slavery in human history once the colonies had gained their liberty, the foundation of much of the nation’s wealth. It was unique not only in hideous cruelty but also in that it was based on skin color. That is ineradicable, a curse reaching to future generations. Other minorities were brutally treated, even barred from the country by racist laws (Jews and Italians, the prime target of the 1924 immigration law, which lasted for 40 years, long enough to condemn European Jews to crematoria, and post-war, to ensure that survivors went to Palestine, whatever they might have preferred). But the stigma was not permanent.





Photo by bgrocker/Shutterstock.com

They could be assimilated and turn to more “acceptable” professions than running Murder, Inc.

Also unique is the fervor of American racism. The “one drop of blood” criterion for the U.S. anti-miscegenation laws that remained on the books until the civil rights movement of the 1960s was so severe that the Nazis rejected it when they were searching for a model for the racist Nuremberg laws—though they did appeal to the American precedent as the only one they could find.

Formal slavery ended in 1865, and a decade of reconstruction offered Black people a taste of freedom, which they used with remarkable effectiveness, given the horrifying legacy. That soon ended. A North-South compact offered southern racists free rein to murder and repress, and to provide a fine workforce for agribusiness and the southern industrial revolution by criminalizing Black life and offering employers a disciplined work force with zero rights. One of the best general books on the post-reconstruction period is called *Slavery by Another Name*, by *Wall Street Journal* Atlanta Bureau Chief Douglas Blackmon.

That stain on American history lasted pretty much until WWII, when free labor was needed for war industry. I remember well when Black domestic servants disappeared from middle-class homes. During the great growth period after the war, some opportunities opened for Black Americans, though serious impediments remained. The educational opportunities offered by the GI Bill, a major contribution to the health of the society, were denied to Black people. Home ownership, the basis for wealth for most people, was restricted by federal laws barring Black people from federally funded housing—laws that were hated by the liberals who voted for them, but there was no recourse if there was to be any housing at all, thanks to the iron grip of influential southern Democrats, whose racist passions shifted

to the Republicans under Nixon’s southern strategy. By the time these racist laws were withdrawn under pressure of the activism of the 1960s, the opportunities for many Black Americans were lost. The economy suffered stagflation in the 1970s and then the hammer blow of neoliberalism, designed to keep the poor and working people in their place, with Black communities as usual the most brutally affected. That assault was compounded by a new wave of criminalization of Black life initiated by the deeply racist Reagan administration. That was amplified by Clinton under the cloak of “I am one of you,” and on to George Floyd.

It’s not hard then to answer the question, at least on one level. At a deeper level, we can ask why the disease is so hard to cure.

It is worth bearing in mind that racism is not unique to the U.S. It has always existed in one form or another, but it was not until the Age of Enlightenment and the imperial conquests that it assumed its contemporary virulence. To see it on display in Europe, it is enough to view the intensive efforts of “civilized” Europeans to keep the victims of centuries of hideous European slaughter and terror from “soiling” their shores. Better that tens of thousands should die in the Mediterranean, fleeing from Libya, the scene of the first post-World War I genocide at the hands of the Italian fascist regime—which, we might recall, was highly praised in the liberal democracies of the West, including the guru of “libertarianism,” Ludwig von Mises, who wrote in 1927 that, “It cannot be denied that Fascism and similar movements aimed at the establishment of dictatorships are full of the best intentions and that their intervention has for the moment saved European civilization. The merit that Fascism has thereby won for itself will live on eternally in history.” (His apologists plead that he only intended for these “best intentions” to be a temporary means to





**There is no precedent for the denunciation of his call for violence
office**

Photo by Real Window Cr



Violent suppression of protest by some of the highest military officers

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“save civilization”; the Blackshirts could then retire.)

Aside from Trump’s criminal negligence of the spread of COVID-19 and his complete insensitivity to the frustration and anger of the people seeking justice through their street protests against the killing of George Floyd and police brutality generally, the United States does not seem to be well served by its version of federalism.

Federalism in its modern form dates back to the Civil War, which changed the phrase “United States” from plural to singular (in English at least). But the problems with U.S. federalism trace back to the country’s founding, and are becoming very severe. In the late 18th century, the U.S. Constitution was a progressive doctrine in comparative terms, even though it was a “framers’ coup” against popular pressures for democracy, to borrow the title of the fine study by Michael Klarman that is the gold standard for scholarship on the establishment of the Constitution. Even the words “We the people,” however remote from reality, were a serious challenge to the regimes of the day. The challenge was serious enough to evoke the venerable domino theory among the leaders of the day. King George III feared that the example of the American revolution might lead to erosion of the empire. The Tsar and Metternich had similar concerns about “the pernicious doctrines of republicanism and popular self-rule” spread by “the apostles of sedition” in the colonies that had cast off the British yoke.

That was then. By today’s standards, the U.S. political system is so regressive that if the U.S. were to apply for membership in the European Union, it would probably be turned down by the European Court of Justice. The Senate is a travesty of democracy. Wyoming, with 500,000 people, has the same number of

senators as California, with 40 million. This extreme perversion of democracy affects the Electoral College as well. The House was carefully designed by Madison with measures to reduce the threat of democracy, but all of that has been effaced by radical gerrymandering and an array of devices, mainly devised by contemporary Republicans, to suppress voting by the wrong people. The powers of the presidency have been constrained by good faith and trust, the way the British Constitution functioned for centuries (now eroding). With a wrecker like Trump in office, backed by a party of trembling cowards, these powers verge on dictatorship, as we are now seeing.

By now a small minority—rural, white, devoutly Christian or evangelical—can run Congress. Furthermore, this is ineradicable. The small states can block a constitutional amendment.

These remarks keep to the formalities of the democratic system, putting aside those whom Adam Smith called “the masters of mankind,” FDR’s “economic royalists.” Smith recognized them to be the “principal architects of policy” in 18th century England, the model of democracy in his day. As he wrote, they made sure that policy served their interests, however “grievous” their impact on the general population. Today, they virtually own the political system, from campaign funding to the overwhelming force of lobbyists and innumerable other devices to keep the government securely in their pocket.

Though their power is immense, it is fragile. Hence the concern at Davos about “reputational risks,” and the statements of top executives that they are mending their ways. They don’t have to read David Hume to learn that since “FORCE is always on the side of the governed, the governors have nothing to support them but opinion,” which can be withdrawn.

The power of the masters is indeed fragile. It



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A different world is possible

Photo by David Brickner

can be restricted, even overturned, by a public dedicated to different goals. But that requires organization. Thatcher and Reagan knew what they were doing when they launched the neo-liberal era with a sharp attack on labor unions, traditionally the spearhead of struggles for social justice.

Just keeping to the formal democratic sys-

tem, a serious constitutional crisis is inevitable for structural reasons—and Trump is edging toward it right now. It is a matter of concern in high places committed to the constitutional order. There is no precedent for the denunciation of his call for violent suppression of protest by some of the highest military officers—the two previous chairs of



le, a very different one
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the Joint Chiefs of Staff, his former defense secretary and former chief of staff, the former commander of NATO and U.S. forces in Afghanistan, all top-ranking generals—some of whom went on to eloquent support for the protesters. More important, also without precedent is the remarkable mobilization of whites all over the country to participate in the mass

nonviolent protests, braving the serious threat of succumbing to the virus along with some police violence. A poll in the first days of June found 64 percent of American adults were “sympathetic to people who are out protesting right now,” while 27 percent said they were not and 9 percent were unsure.

Where this will lead is anyone’s guess, and

more may be coming as a fateful election approaches. It's hard to determine what is more ominous: another four years for the malignancy to spread its poison, or an electoral loss that Trump will declare illegitimate, refusing to leave the White House, calling on the heavily armed "tough guys" he regularly urges on to defend their "Second Amendment rights" by protecting the self-declared "chosen one," eyes lifted to heaven.

Is this a wild fantasy? Maybe, maybe not. It's being discussed in respectable circles. Specialists on the topic have warned that Trump is bringing fascism to the U.S. Personally, I think that gives him too much credit. Fascism is too sophisticated a doctrine for him to grasp. It is, furthermore, a doctrine that is antithetical to his own simplistic conception of how the world should be run: by the masters of the universe, with Trump wielding the wrecking ball at whim. Fascist ideology calls for strict control of the society by the fascist party led by the maximal leader; crucially, control of the compliant business classes. That is almost the opposite of what prevails and what Trump's limited vision seeks to entrench further. He may advocate fascist tactics, but that's far from fascism. It resembles more closely a tin-pot dictatorship.

Well-regarded analysts in the mainstream are concerned. One is former CIA analyst Robert Baer, who has had lots of experience in tin-pot dictatorships. In his view,

If I were a foreign intelligence officer assigned to Washington, I'd ask how close he is to imposing martial law because it looks pretty close to me. I mean, he said he will. He's preparing for it. He's got a secretary of defense right now who's balking. It's very easy to remove him and put somebody in his place. This president is very insecure. And we've watched him go after the FBI and the Department of Justice, and he will go after the Pentagon until he gets the officers in that don't

countermand his orders.... I have never seen this in the United States, never heard since the Civil War.... If I were a foreigner, I would really wonder ... what's happening to American democracy.

We can remind ourselves of how fateful the coming election is by keeping our eyes on current science—for example, the recent report from the Scripps Institute of Oceanography, the main monitor of atmospheric CO₂, that levels have not only long surpassed all of human history, but are approaching the highest they have been for 3 million years, when sea levels were 50 to 80 feet higher than they are today.

The coronavirus dip is a statistically insignificant deviation, though it does serve to instruct us that there is still time to avert a cataclysm, though not much.

The countries of the world are seeking to do something to respond, not enough, but at least something. The country that is doing the least is the United States, in the hands of the wrecker-in-chief.

Trump does not waste a minute in his relentless drive to race toward the cliff. His February 2020 budget proposal, while naturally calling for continued defunding of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the midst of a raging pandemic, also called for further subsidies to the fossil fuel industries that are laboring to destroy organized human life. To accelerate the disaster, Trump is using the cover of the pandemic to dismantle "federal regulations designed to protect workers, consumers, investors and the environment," rescind requirements for factories and power plants to monitor or report missions, waive environmental laws for pipelines and other projects, and instruct "agencies across the government to rescind, modify or simply stop enforcing regulations if they burden the economy."

The last phrase is a euphemism for interfer-



ing with profits. Helping the economy would mean building infrastructure and productive capacity, not pouring funds into keeping stock prices high for the benefit of rich investors and predatory financial capital.

“The White House will seek to make many of those roughly 600 deregulatory actions permanent,” according to a former White House official speaking on the condition of anonymity. Trump’s May 19 proclamation,

on which this press account is based, drops enough hints to render the prediction plausible. The heads of all agencies are instructed to “review any regulatory standards they have temporarily rescinded, suspended, modified, or waived” and other actions they have taken, and “determine which, if any, would promote economic recovery if made permanent,” subject to conditions that are meaningless; and to consider an array of actions that “temporarily



or permanently” relate to “regulatory standards that may inhibit economic recovery” (emphasis added).

The phrase “economic recovery” has always had a definite meaning in the Trumpian lexicon that there is no need to review.

Trump’s dedication to destroy organized human life in the near future for the sake of short-term profit for his constituency is by far the worst of his crimes, in fact the most extreme crime in human history. It is approached in malignancy only by his systematic dismantling of the arms control regime that has reduced the severe threat of terminal nuclear war; and, concomitantly, his promoting the development of more advanced weapons that enemies can use to destroy us.

Amazingly, none of this enters into current discussion, except at the margins.

In the age of COVID-19, we have seen the sudden return of economic thinking guided however loosely by Keynesian ideas (such as increasing government spending and lowering taxes in order to reboot economic activity, and maintaining a solid welfare state) especially in Western Europe. Is this an indication that neoliberalism is finally on its way out? Or will we see a return to the “normal state of affairs” once the health crisis is over, especially in the United States, where there is significant resistance to the ideas of social democracy?

Like a lot of good questions, this one is virtually impossible to answer. The forces that created the current socioeconomic regime, including the pandemic and the race to self-destruction, are not wasting a moment in their dedication to ensure that the neoliberal disaster persists, indeed in harsher form, with more sophisticated means of surveillance and control. They will succeed unless the general population withdraws consent, makes use of

the power that is in the hands of the governed, and becomes organized to create a world that is more humane and just—in fact, survivable.

That requires at the very least constructing a minimal social state. We can see what a difficult step that will be by looking at the liberal commentary on the Sanders campaign: good ideas, but the American people aren’t ready for it. That is an incredible indictment of American society, which, according to this judgment, is not able to rise to what is normal elsewhere: universal health care and free higher education, Sanders’s major planks.

But joining the world should be the least of the objectives for a progressive popular movement. Why should decisions about our lives be transferred from elected representatives, over which people have at least some control, to unaccountable private hands, as neoliberal doctrine dictates? Going further, why should people spend almost all of their waking lives under controls so extreme that Stalin couldn’t have dreamed of them—what is called “having a job”? Work under external command is an attack on fundamental human rights and dignity that had been regarded with contempt from classical Greece and Rome until the 19th century, and was bitterly condemned by working people in the early industrial revolution.

That’s only a bare beginning. A different world is possible, a very different one. **Z**

This interview has been lightly edited for clarity and length.

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Wendy, Atlanta - June 15 2020: Riots and protests in Wendy, Atlanta after the death of Rayshard Brooks shot dead by police officers By Pix_Arena/Shutterstock.com



EDSON DA COSTA
RASHAN CHARLES
MICHAEL POWELL
NUNO CARDOSO
SEAN RIGG
NOT INNOCENT

BE HAPPY
WE WANT
JUSTICE
AND NOT
REVENGE

