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February
2021



Hartmann on Trump's
Racism and COVID-19

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Three Major Threats to Life on Earth That We Must Address in 2021

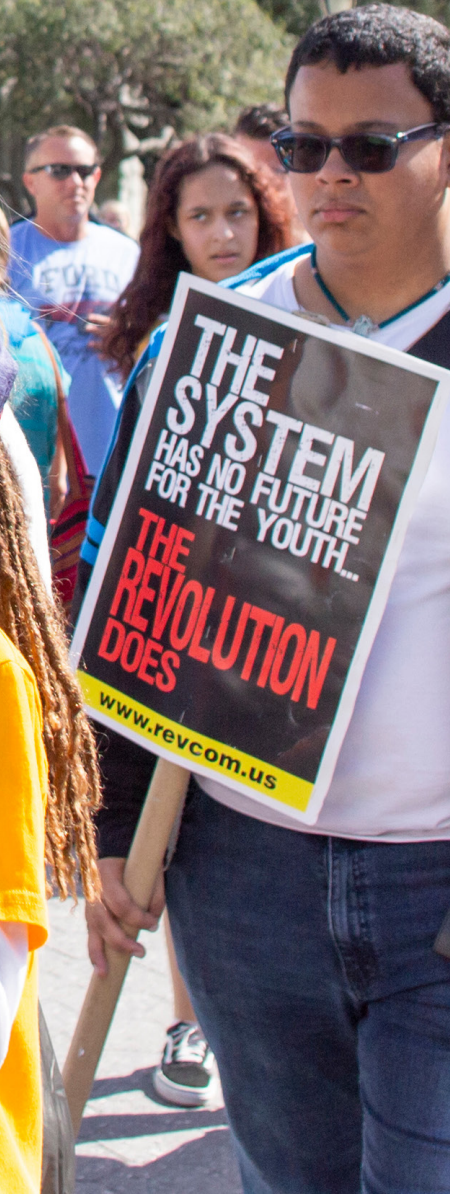
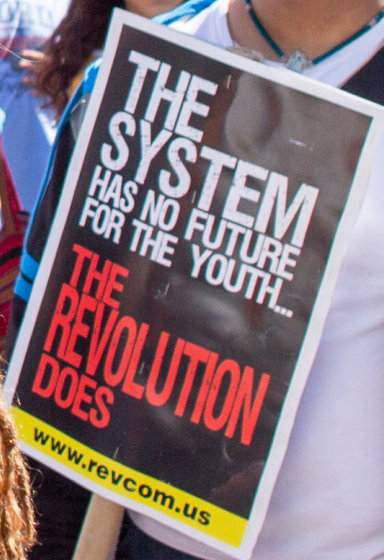
By Noam Chomsky & Vijay Prashad

Large parts of the world—outside of China and a few other countries—face a runaway virus, which has not been stopped because of criminal incompetence by governments. That these governments in wealthy countries cynically set aside the basic scientific protocols released by the World Health Organization and by scientific organizations reveals their malicious practice. Anything less than focused attention to managing the virus by testing, contact tracing, and isolation—and if this does not suffice, then imposing

a temporary lockdown—is foolhardy. It is equally distressing that these richer countries have pursued a policy of “vaccine nationalism” by stockpiling vaccine candidates rather than a policy for the creation of a “people’s vaccine.” For the sake of humanity, it would be prudent to suspend intellectual property rules and develop a procedure to create universal vaccines for all people.

Although the pandemic is the principal issue on all of our minds, other major issues threaten the longevity of our species and of our planet.





These include:

Nuclear Annihilation

In January 2020, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists set the Doomsday Clock to 100 seconds to midnight, too close for comfort. The clock, created two years after the first atomic weapons were developed in 1945, is evaluated annually by the Bulletin's Science and Security Board, who decide whether to move the minute hand or keep it in place. By the time they set the clock again, it may well be closer to annihilation. Already limited arms control treaties are being shredded as the major powers sit on close to 13,500 nuclear weapons (more than 90 percent of which are held by Russia and the United States alone). The yield of these weapons could easily make this planet even more uninhabitable. The United States Navy has already deployed low-yield tactical W76-2 nuclear warheads. Immediate moves toward nuclear disarmament must be forced onto the world's agenda. Hiroshima Day, commemorated each year on August 6, must become a more robust day of contemplation and protest.

Climate Catastrophe

A scientific paper published in 2018 came with a startling headline: "Most atolls will be uninhabitable by the mid-21st century because of sea-level rise exacerbating wave-driven flooding." The authors found that atolls from the Seychelles to the Marshall Islands are liable to vanish. A 2019 United Nations (UN) report estimated that 1 million animal and plant species are threatened with extinction. Add to this the catastrophic wildfires and the severe bleaching of the coral reefs and it is clear that we no longer need to linger over clichés about one thing or another being a canary in the coal mine of climate catastrophe; the danger is not in the future, but in the present. It is essential for major powers—who utterly fail to shift from fossil fuels—to commit to the "common but differentiated responsibilities" approach established at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro. It is telling that countries such as Jamaica and Mongolia updated their climate plans to the UN before the end of 2020—as mandated by the Paris Agreement—even though these countries produce a tiny fraction of global carbon emissions. The funds that were committed to developing countries for their participation in the process

have virtually dried up while external debt has ballooned. This shows a lack of basic seriousness from the "international community."

Neoliberal Destruction of the Social Contract

Countries in North America and Europe have eviscerated their public function as the state has been turned over to the profiteers and civil society has been commodified by private foundations. This means that the avenues for social transformation in these parts of the world have been grotesquely hampered. Terrible social inequality is the result of the relative political weakness of the working class. It is this weakness that enables the billionaires to set policies that cause hunger rates to rise. Countries should not be judged by the words written in their constitutions but by their annual budgets; the U.S., for example, spends almost \$1 trillion (if you add the estimated intelligence budget) on its war machine, while it spends a fraction of this on the public good (such as on health care, something evident during the pandemic). The foreign policies of Western countries seem to be well lubricated by arms deals:





the United Arab Emirates and Morocco agreed to recognize Israel on the condition that they could purchase \$23 billion and \$1 billion worth of U.S.-made weapons, respectively. The rights of the Palestinians, the Sahrawi, and the Yemeni people did not factor into these deals. The use of illegal sanctions by the United States against 30 countries including Cuba, Iran, and Venezuela has become a normal part of life, even during the COVID-19 public health crisis. It is a failure of the political system when the populations in the capitalist bloc are unable to force their governments—which are in many ways democratic in name only—to take a global perspective regarding this emergency. Rising rates of hunger reveal that the struggle for survival is the horizon for billions of people on the planet (all this while China is able to eradicate absolute poverty and largely eliminate hunger).

Nuclear annihilation and extinction by climate catastrophe are twin threats to the planet. Meanwhile, for victims of the neoliberal assault that has plagued the past generation, the short-term problems of sustaining their mere existence displace fundamental questions about the fate of our children and grandchildren.

Global problems of this scale require global cooperation. Pressured by the Third World states in the 1960s, the major powers agreed to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons of 1968, although they rejected the deeply important Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order of 1974. The balance of forces available to drive such a class agenda on the international stage is no longer there; political dynamics in the countries of the West, in particular, but also in the larger states of the developing world (such as Brazil, India, Indonesia, and South Africa) are necessary to change the character of the governments. A robust internationalism is necessary to pay adequate and immediate attention to the perils of extinction: extinction by nuclear war, by climate catastrophe, and by social collapse. The tasks ahead are daunting, and they cannot be deferred.

This article was produced by Globetrotter.

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White Supremacy? It Goes To The Very Top Of The NRA

By Martha Rosenberg

This month, many are cheering the news that the NRA is now as financially bankrupt as it is morally. Last year, New York Attorney General Letitia James sued four current or former NRA executives for “illegal financial conduct,” leading to the gun group’s recent declaration of bankruptcy. Among James’s charges were that Wayne LaPierre, CEO and executive vice president of the NRA, received “hundreds of thousands of dollars” of complimentary safaris in Africa.

The group said it would reincorporate in Texas after a

century in New York.

In the book *Lethal Logic: Exploding the Myths That Paralyze American Gun Policy*, author Dennis A. Henigan reprints shockingly antigovernment ads that the “patriotic” NRA published. In fact, the NRA’s anti-government rhetoric became so inflammatory that former President George H. W. Bush actually resigned the gun organization in 1995.

“I was outraged when, even in the wake of the Oklahoma City tragedy, Mr. Wayne LaPierre, executive vice president of NRA, defended his attack on federal agents as ‘jack-booted thugs,’” he wrote in a letter to the NRA: “To attack Secret Service agents or ATF [Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives] people or any government law enforcement people as ‘wearing Nazi bucket helmets and black storm trooper uniforms’ wanting to ‘attack law abiding citizens’ is a vicious slander on good people.”

It is no surprise that white supremacists and hate groups have embraced the NRA’s violent, anti-government rhetoric that preaches insurrection and stockpiling weapons against “tyranny.” In fact some of the nation’s most chilling crimes have been committed by such white supremacists starting with the

Oklahoma City bomber:

- Timothy McVeigh, a sometime NRA member bombed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995, killing 168. Why that building? Because the Murrah Federal Building housed offices of the ATF which McVeigh hated so much he sold ATF hats with bullet holes and a flare gun that could shoot down an “ATF helicopter.”
- In 1999, white supremacist Benjamin Nathaniel Smith went on a racist shooting rampage in the Chicago area, killing Northwestern University Men’s Basketball Coach Ricky Byrdsong and Won-Joon Yoon, a computer science doctoral student. He also wounded nine Orthodox Jews and an African-American minister, literally driving around looking for minorities to shoot and kill. After a three-day, two-state shooting rampage, Smith killed himself as police approached. Despite an order of protection filed by an ex-girlfriend, Smith was issued a firearm owner’s iden-

tification card and was a legal gun owner at one time.

- In 2012, Wade Michael Page fatally shot six people and wounded four at a Sikh temple in Wisconsin before taking his own life. Page was a member of the white power music establishment and had ties to white supremacist and neo-Nazi groups. According to Wikipedia, he founded the band End Apathy and played in the bands Definite Hate and Blue Eyed Devils which are considered by the Southern Poverty Law Center to be racist, white-power bands.
- In 2014, white supremacist and Ku Klux Klan leader Frazier Glenn Miller was charged with killing three outside two Jewish community centers in Kansas City. The same year, Jerad and Amanda Miller fatally shot two Las Vegas policemen, attaching a swastika to one officer’s lifeless body. Also that year, Chicago suburban police arrested John White for criminal damage to a Lombard synagogue. His home



FUNNY HOW
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IS MORE STRICT
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Photo by
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contained thousands of rounds of ammunition and a shotgun, rifle and four handguns.

Hate rhetoric and white supremacy go to the very top of the NRA. In 2014, musician, hunting enthusiast and NRA board member Ted Nugent, called President Obama a

“sub-human mongrel.” The remark was almost identical to the Kansas City Klan shooter Frazier Glenn Miller’s claim that the white race is “drowning literally in seas of colored mongrels.” Yet Nugent, who has been known to wear a confederate flag while performing music, has been an NRA board member

for over 20 years.

In January we saw the logical conclusion of the arm-yourself-against-government-tyranny rhetoric that the NRA promotes. Many are happy to see the NRA run out of town with its rifle stock between its legs. **Z**



The Great Divider: Covid-19 Reflects Global Racism, Not Equality

By Ramzy Baroud

The notion that the COVID-19 pandemic was “the great equalizer” should be dead and buried by now. If anything, the lethal disease is another terrible re-

minder of the deep divisions and inequalities in our societies. That said, the treatment of the disease should not be a repeat of the same shameful scenario.

For an entire year, wealthy celebrities and government officials have been reminding us that “we are in this together,” that “we are on the

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Lives
Matter**





same boat,” with the likes of Madonna speaking from her mansion while submerged in a “milky bath sprinkled with rose petals,” telling us that the pandemic has proved to be the “great equalizer.”

“Like I used to say at the end of ‘Human Nature’ every night, we are all in the same boat,” she said. “And if the ship goes down, we’re all going down together,” CNN reported at the time.

Such statements, like that of Madonna, and Ellen DeGeneres as well, have generated much media attention not just because they are both famous people with a massive social media following but also because of the obvious hypocrisy in their empty rhetoric. In truth, however, they were only repeating the standard procedure followed by governments, celebrities and wealthy “influencers” worldwide.

But are we really “all in this together”? With unemployment rates skyrocketing across the globe, hundreds of millions scraping by to feed their children, multitudes of nameless and hapless families chugging along without access to proper healthcare, subsisting on hope and a prayer so that they may survive the scourges of poverty—let alone the pandemic—one cannot, with a clear conscience, make such outra-

geous claims.

Not only are we not “on the same boat” but, certainly, we have never been. According to World Bank data, nearly half of the world lives on less than \$5.50 a day. This dismal statistic is part of a remarkable trajectory of inequality that has afflicted humanity for a long time.

The plight of many of the world’s poor is compounded in the case of war refugees, the double victims of state terrorism and violence and the unwillingness of those with the resources to step forward and pay back some of their largely undeserved wealth.

The boat metaphor is particularly interesting in the case of refugees; millions of them have desperately tried to escape the infernos of war and poverty in rickety boats and dinghies, hoping to get across from their stricken regions to safer places. This sight has sadly grown familiar in recent years not only throughout the Mediterranean Sea but also in other bodies of water around the world, especially in Burma, where hundreds of thousands of Rohingya have tried to escape their ongoing genocide. Thousands of them have drowned in the Bay of Bengal.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accentuated and, in fact, accelerated the sharp inequal-

ities that exist in every society individually, and the world at large. According to a June 2020 study conducted in the United States by the Brookings Institute, the number of deaths as a result of the disease reflects a clear racial logic. Many indicators included in the study leave no doubt that racism is a central factor in the life cycle of COVID.

For example, among those aged between 45 and 54 years, “Black and Hispanic/Latino death rates are at least six times higher than for whites”. Although whites make up 62 percent of the U.S. population of that specific age group, only 22 percent of the total deaths were white. Black and Latino communities were the most devastated.

According to this and other studies, the main assumption behind the discrepancy of infection and death rates resulting from COVID among various racial groups in the U.S. is poverty which is, itself, an expression of racial inequality. The poor have no, or limited, access to proper healthcare. For the rich, this factor is of little relevance.

Moreover, poor communities tend to work in low-paying jobs in the service sector, where social distancing is nearly impossible. With little government support to help them survive the lockdowns, they do everything within

their power to provide for their children, only to be infected by the virus or, worse, die.

This iniquity is expected to continue even in the way that the vaccines are made available. While several Western nations have either launched or scheduled their vaccination campaigns, the poorest nations on earth are expected to wait for a long time before life-saving vaccines are made available.

In 67 poor or developing countries located mostly in Africa and the Southern hemisphere, only one out of ten individuals will likely receive the vaccine by the end of 2020, the *Fortune* magazine website reported.

The disturbing report cited a study conducted by a humanitarian and rights coalition, the People's Vaccine Alliance (PVA), which includes Oxfam and Amnesty International.

If there is such a thing as a strategy at this point, it is the deplorable "hoarding" of the vaccine by rich nations. Dr. Mohga Kamal-Yanni of the PVA put this realization into perspective when she said that "rich countries have enough doses to vaccinate everyone nearly three times over, whilst poor countries don't even have enough to reach health workers and people at risk." So much for

the numerous conferences touting the need for a "global response" to the disease.

But it does not have to be this way.

While it is likely that class, race and gender inequalities will continue to ravage human societies after the pandemic, as they did before, it is also possible for governments to use this collective tragedy as an opportunity to bridge the inequality gap, even if just a little, as a starting point to imagine a more equitable future for all of us.

Poor, dark-skinned people should not be made to die when their lives can be saved by a simple vaccine, which is available in abundance. **Z**

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Dear Republicans, Was Your Deal With Trump Worth It?

By Sonali Kolhatkar

When Donald Trump ran for the Republican Party's presidential nomination in 2016, many top Republicans shunned him. Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY) confidently explained how Trump was "not going to change the platform of the Republican Party, the views of the Republican Party... we're much more likely to change him." He even admitted, "it's pretty obvious he doesn't know a lot about the issues." McConnell alluded to Trump's racism in vague terms, saying, "I object to a whole series of things that he's said—vehemently object to them. I think all of that needs to stop... these attacks on various ethnic groups in the country."

But as soon as Trump won the Electoral College and was declared the winner of the 2016 race, McConnell set to work to ensure he could make full use of the newly





elected president regardless of Trump's continued spouting off of dangerous lies and hateful claims. The Senate majority leader was happy to see the seating of ultra-conservative Supreme Court justices Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh, and most recently Amy Coney Barrett. He went on an unprecedented spree to remake the federal judiciary into one that is dominated by white conservative men, young enough to reshape legal decisions for a generation. He pushed through a massive tax reform bill that disproportionately benefits the wealthy, allowing almost no room for debate over it. He ensured the Senate turned into a "legislative graveyard," refusing to even consider hundreds of bills passed by the House of Representatives, thereby ensuring that most policy changes during the past four years were shaped by the president's executive action.

Three years into Trump's term, McConnell still had not had enough, relishing the power that his position in the Senate gave him to enact his conservative agenda. When the House impeached Trump in late 2019 over a clear case of corruption and abuse of power, McConnell led the 2020 Senate acquittal of Donald Trump. It matters little whether McConnell admits Trump is unfit for of-

fice a mere handful of days before the president's term ends. He used Trump for four years, subjecting the nation to a mad, would-be-dictator, unhinged and unrepentant in his relentless abuses. Senator McConnell owes the nation an explanation. Was it worth it?

Although he is the highest-ranking elected official to enable Trump, McConnell is hardly alone among his Republican colleagues to have engaged in a deal with the devil. The transformation of Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX) from Trump critic to sycophant is even more dramatic.

In 2016 Cruz criticized Trump more than any of his fellow lawmakers, calling Trump "a narcissist at a level I don't think this country's ever seen" and accurately saying Trump is "a pathological liar." He adeptly explained, "he doesn't know the difference between truth and lies... in a pattern that is straight out of a psychology textbook, he accuses everyone of lying." It was a stunning piece of foresight into the next four years of Trumpism. Cruz went further, saying, "Whatever lie he's telling, at that minute he believes it... the man is utterly amoral... Donald is a bully... bullies don't come from strength; they come from weakness."

Similar words were uttered

often during the past four years—by Democrats, liberals, progressives, and the tiny handful of Trump's Republican critics. But once Trump held office, like McConnell, Senator Cruz saw fit to make use of the "amoral" president to suit his agenda, transforming himself into one of Trump's most ardent Senate loyalists. Seemingly forgetting his scathing and accurate critiques of Trump, Cruz became a MAGA-cheerleader, saying, "President Trump is doing what he was elected to do: disrupt the status quo... That scares the heck out of those who have controlled Washington for decades, but for millions of Americans, their confusion is great fun to watch." In return for his allegiance, Trump campaigned for Cruz in Texas during a tenuous Senate reelection battle, and Cruz returned the favor by defending him vehemently during Trump's first Senate impeachment trial.

Most recently, Cruz led the push to object to the 2020 election results. He repeatedly echoed Trump's demand to "stop the steal," a slogan that became a rallying cry at the Capitol riot in Washington, D.C., on January 6 that left at least five people dead. Now Cruz faces accusations alongside Trump of fomenting an attempted coup and encouraging the violent rioters. His





aides are abandoning him, and the chair of the House Committee on Homeland Security has recommended that he be placed on the FBI's "no-fly" list. Like McConnell, Cruz owes the nation an explanation for his backing of a destructive demagogue who has left the nation and its democratic institutions bat-

tered and reeling. Has it all been worth it for the Texas senator?

Over the past two decades, Republicans have developed a well-deserved reputation for fighting by any means necessary in order to advance their agenda. They have abandoned norms, traditions and ethical standards. They have

successfully retained power by rigging the rules governing elections and laid the groundwork of baseless assertions of "voter fraud" that Trump then built upon to claim he won the 2020 race. They have led a cultural shift convincing many Americans that popular progressive policies are the dangerous ideas of the "rad-



ical left,” and spawned media outlets that deliver lies and propaganda to an unsuspecting base of voters.

After the Capitol riot, an unnamed senior Trump official appeared shell-shocked, saying to a reporter, “This is confirmation of so much that everyone has said for years now—things that a lot

of us thought were hyperbolic. We’d say, ‘Trump’s not a fascist,’ or ‘He’s not a wannabe dictator.’ Now, it’s like, ‘Well, what do you even say in response to that now?’”

But this late-breaking realization that many Republicans are expressing publicly or feeling privately is not enough to absolve the dirty deal that

they made with Trump to further their agenda. The GOP and Trump deserve one another and have maintained a symbiotic relationship that has devastated the nation. Whether leading GOP figures like McConnell try to distance themselves from Trump at this late-breaking hour, or like Cruz, remain loyal to him

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until the very end, is irrelevant. The party has lost credibility and is lying in a bed of its own making. They have edged us far too close to the abyss of Hitlerism, and like political parties in other nations that have flirted with or enabled fascism, Republicans need to answer for what they have done. **Z**

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This article was produced by Economy for All, a project of the Independent Media Institute.

In 2021, the Best Way to Fight Neofascist Republicans Is to Fight Neoliberal Democrats

By Norman Solomon

The threat of fascism will hardly disappear when Donald Trump moves out of the White House. On Capitol Hill, the Republicans who’ve made clear their utter contempt for democracy will retain powerful leverage over the U.S. government. And they’re securely entrenched because Trumpism continues to thrive in much of the country.

Yet, in 2021, progressives should mostly concentrate on challenging the neoliberalism of Democratic Party leaders. Why? Because the neoliberal governing model runs directly counter to the overarching responsibilities of the left—to defeat right-wing forces and to effectively fight for a decent, life-affirming society.

Neoliberalism can be defined as a political approach that “seeks to transfer the control of economic factors from the public sector to the private sector”—and strives to “place limits on government spending, government regulation, and public ownership.” Neoliberalism can be described more candidly as vast, systemic, nonstop plunder.

The plunder is enmeshed in politics. In the real world, economic power is political power. And privatizing political power amounts to under-

mining democracy.

After four decades of neoliberal momentum, we can see the wreckage all around us: the cumulative effects, destroying uncounted human lives deprived of adequate healthcare, education, housing, economic security and existence free of predatory monetizing. While Republican politicians usually led the wrecking crews, their Democratic counterparts often served as enablers or initiated their own razing projects.

As its policies gradually degrade the standard of living and quality of life for most people, neoliberalism provides a poisonous fuel for right-wing propaganda and demagoguery. Although corporate media outlets routinely assert that “moderate” Democrats are best positioned to block the right’s advances, the corporate-oriented policies of those Democrats—including trade deals, deregulation and privatization—have aided rather than impeded far-right faux populism.

In the long run, the realities of rampant income inequalities cannot be papered over—and neither can the despair and rage they engender. Phony and unhinged as it is, Trumpist extremism offers such rage a populist avenue, paved with a range of vile bigotries and cruelties. When Democrats fail to offer





a competing populist avenue, their party is seen as aligned with the status quo. And in this era, the status quo is a political loser.

A myth of U.S. mainstream politics and corporate media is that the most effective way to counteract the political right is to compromise by ideologically moving rightward. When progressives internalize this myth, they defer to the kind of Democratic Party leadership that frequently ends up assisting instead of undermining the Republican Party.

That's what happened when, as incoming presidents, Bill Clinton and Barack Obama filled their administrations' top-tier positions with Wall Street movers and shakers, elite big-business consultants and the like. Those appointments foreshadowed major pro-corporate policies—such as Clinton's NAFTA trade pact, and Obama's lavish bailout for huge banks while millions of homeowners saw their houses sink under foreclosure water—policies that were economically unjust. And politically disastrous. Two years after Clinton and Obama entered the White House, Democrats lost control of Congress in the 1994 and 2010 midterm elections.

Now, there's scant evidence Joe Biden is looking toward significant structural changes

that would disrupt the ongoing trends of soaring wealth for the very few and deepening financial distress or outright desperation for the many. Without massive pressure from progressives, it's foreseeable that Biden—like Clinton and Obama—will run his presidency as a corporate-friendly enterprise without seriously challenging the extreme disparities of economic injustice.

“The stock market is ending 2020 at record highs, even as the virus surges and millions go hungry,” the *Washington Post* reported. Wall Street succeeded at “enriching the wealthy...despite a deadly pandemic that has killed more than 340,000 Americans.”

The reporting came from a newspaper owned by the richest person on earth, Jeff Bezos (who currently has an estimated wealth of \$190 billion that he can't take with him). In a world of so much suffering, the accumulation of such wealth is beyond pathology.

What's imperative for progressives is not to “speak truth to power” but to speak truth about power—and to drastically change an economic system that provides humongous wealth to a very few and worsening misery to the countless many. **Z**

Norman Solomon is the national director of RootsAction.org and the author of many books including *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death*. He was a Bernie Sanders delegate from California to the 2016 and 2020 Democratic National Conventions. Solomon is the founder and executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy.







Coup Attempt Hit Closer to Centers of Power Than Hitler's 1923 Putsch

C.J. Polychroniou interviews Naom Chomsky

C.J. Polychroniou: *Noam, you had been warning all along of a potential coup in the event that Trump would lose the 2020 election. In this context, are you surprised at all by what took place on Capitol Hill on the Electoral College vote count?*

Noam Chomsky: Surprised, yes. I'd expected a strong reaction from Trump's voting base, raised to a fever pitch by his latest antics. But hadn't expected the attempted coup to reach this level of violence, and I suspect most of the participants didn't either. Many seemed to have been caught up in the excitement of the moment when the leaders of the crowd surged into the hated Capitol to drive out the demons who were not just "stealing the election" but "stealing" their country from them: their white Christian country.

That it was an attempted coup is not in question. It was openly and proudly proclaimed as just that. It was an attempt to overturn an elected government. That's a coup. True, what was attempted was not the kind of coup regularly backed by Washington in its dependencies, a military takeover with ample bloodshed, torture, "disappearance." But, nevertheless,

it was an attempted coup. True, the perpetrators regarded themselves as defending the legitimate government, but that's the norm, even for the most vicious and murderous coups, like the U.S.-backed coup in Chile on the first 9/11—which was actually much worse in virtually every dimension than the second one, the one that we remember and commemorate. The first one is best forgotten on the principle of "wrong agents": us, not some radical Islamic fundamentalists.

The emotions of those attempting the [Capitol] coup were apparent. Belief that the election was stolen was plainly held with real fervor. And it is understandable among people who live in passionately pro-Trump areas where he is revered as their savior, and for some, even chosen by God, as he once declared. Many may scarcely have seen a Biden sign, or heard anything from Fox News or Rush Limbaugh to suggest some possible flaw in their beliefs.

In some respects, these beliefs are not as bizarre as they may look at first. A shift of tens of thousands of votes in a few counties might have swung the election the other way in a deeply undemocratic system such as ours, where 7 million votes can be swept aside along with an unknown number of others eliminated

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Photo by Julian Leshay/Shutterstock.com





by purging, gerrymandering, and the many other devices that have been devised to steal the election from the “wrong people,” effectively authorized by the Supreme Court in its shameful 2013 decision nullifying the Voting Rights Act (*Shelby County v. Holder*).

As we’ve discussed before, the malevolent figure in charge deserves credit for his talent in tapping the poisonous streams that run not far below the surface of American society, with sources that are deep in U.S. history and culture.

I have to say that I was also surprised by the quick reaction of those who own the country and have a large share of responsibility for the malaise that broke forth on January 6. In no small part, it is a consequence of the neoliberal assault since Reagan, amplified by his successors, that has devastated the rural areas that are the homes of many who stormed the Capitol. Those who hold the levers of the private power that dominates the society and political system never liked Trump’s behavior, which harmed the image they project as humanists dedicated to the common good. But they were willing to tolerate the vulgar performance as long as Trump and his accomplices delivered the goods, lining their pockets by

robbing the public.

And that they did. The “transfer of wealth” from the lower 90 percent to the ultra-rich since Reagan opened the doors for highway robbery reaches almost \$50 trillion, according to a recent Rand corporation study. No one can place numbers on the vastly greater cost of environmental destruction that was a high priority of the Trump-McConnell years of service to the very rich and corporate sector.

But January 6 was apparently too much, and the marching orders were delivered swiftly by the Big Guns.

One has to have some sympathy for the legislators caught between powerful contending forces. On the one hand, they see the angry hordes whipped to a frenzy by Trump’s performances, and still in his pocket, poised to wreak vengeance on those who betray their leader. And on the other hand, looking down on them from above, are the captains of finance and industry who fund their elections and dangle before them many other privileges to keep them in line. (How many members of Congress leave office to become truck drivers or secretaries?)

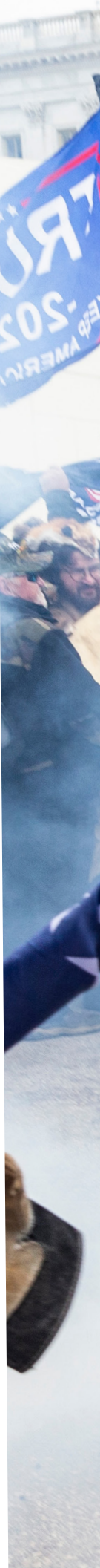
The dilemma is particularly harsh for senators, who are more reliant on the large donors. And their defection

from the ranks of obsequious Trump loyalists has been somewhat greater.

Apparently, D.C. Council members had been briefed by the U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia that Donald Trump might invoke the Insurrection Act to seize control of the city police, but did not expect an attack on the Capitol itself. In your own view, what explains the enormous security failures that led to the Capitol siege, and do the events of January 6, 2021, qualify as a putsch?

An attempted putsch, though the connotations of the term putsch may be too strong. The events reminded many, including historians of fascism, of Hitler’s failed Beer Hall Putsch of 1923, which actually did not so easily penetrate the centers of power as the attempted coup of January 6.

The reasons for the security failures are being debated. I have no special insight. Black members of the Capitol police, who showed great courage along with many of their white colleagues, have charged for years that the force has been infiltrated with white supremacists. There may have been some collusion, and possibly serious corruption higher up the chain of command.





If Trump incited an insurrection against elected officials of the U.S. government, is it enough that he has been impeached again? Shouldn't he be facing sedition charges since inciting an insurrection against the government is a criminal act under Title 18 of the U.S. Code?

I presume the Joint Chiefs of Staff chose their words carefully in their message on the “violent riot” on January 6, “a direct assault on the U.S. Congress, the Capitol building, and our Constitutional process,” an act of “violence, sedition and insurrection.” They surely considered the fact that incitement to sedition and insurrection carries a heavy prison sentence. I presume that they also weighed the evidence that such incitement took place from the Oval Office.

Many questions arise about how to pursue such barely concealed charges, but we should be careful to avoid the Watergate trap. The Nixon impeachment procedures were initiated by [Massachusetts] Rep. Robert Drinan, S.J., charging him with the bombing of Cambodia, a truly monstrous crime, of Nuremberg Trial caliber. That charge was struck down by Congress. The prime charge against Nixon was that he or-

ganized thugs to invade one of two seats of political power in the country, the Democratic Party headquarters. This attack on the foundations of the Republic was overcome in a “stunning vindication of our constitutional system” (famed liberal historian Henry Steele Commager).

In short, the powerful can rise to their own defense. The victims of truly monstrous crimes can look elsewhere for recourse. Maybe history, with luck.

Incitement of an attempted coup is no laughing matter, but it scarcely weighs in the balance against a dedicated effort to destroy the environment that sustains life on earth or demolition of the arms control regime that mitigates the threat of nuclear war.

Do you believe that Trump is finished as a political figure? Or, to put the question slightly differently, was the Washington putsch of January 6, 2021, the beginning of the end of the rise of Trumpism?

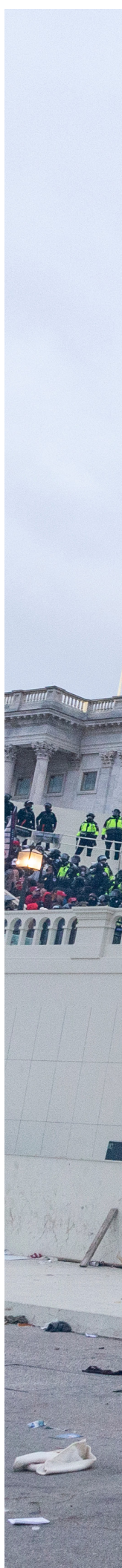
Far from it. Whether Trump will survive the error of judgment that turned major power centers against him is unclear. He may well do so. The voting base of the Party seems to remain loyal, maybe with even greater fervor after this attack on their hero

by the “deep state.” Local officials too. He was cheered on his visit to the Republican National Committee the day after the Capitol riot. He has other resources.

Whatever the fate of the individual, Trumpism will not be so easily contained. Its roots are deep. The anger and resentment raised to a frenzy by this talented con man is not limited to the U.S. The \$50 trillion robbery is only the icing on the cake of the neoliberal disaster, which itself is built on foundations of deep injustice and repression. We are not out of the woods, by far.

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Gamestop—And the Game That Never Stops

By Jack Rasmus

**NO MAN
MAY
POISON
THE PEOPLE
FOR HIS
PRIVATE
PROFIT.**

Theodore Roosevelt





This past week a video game company in trouble, Gamestop, became the center of media attention. Day traders had driven up the company's stock price by thousands of percent in just one day. The mainstream media narrative was the "small guy" investor challenged the big boys of finance who had bet Gamestop stock price would contract, not rise sharply. The little investor, so the story goes, initially won big but Gamestop's stock price escalation was stopped in its tracks by coordinated forces of Wall Street, as trading was abruptly halted later in the day in the middle of the run-up. But that narrative, that media spin, has it wrong. The real meaning of what has happened is quite different.

The Facts

Earlier in the week, stock day traders gathered on the platform called Reddit in what's called a crowdsourcing event. They communicated among themselves in a forum called "WallStBets" and as a group began betting up the stock price of Gamestop, using the no-cost stock trading platform called Robinhood. Similar moves were made against the movie theater chain, AMC, also in big financial trouble, with little revenue coming in

but loaded up with mountains of junk debt. A couple of other companies in similar condition were targeted by the day traders as well. Stock prices of these companies—all losers or about to be losers—were, in a matter of hours, driven to record heights in some cases—as if these companies were raking in profits like a Tesla or Google. But there were no fundamental reasons for the price acceleration; in fact just the opposite. Betting so, hedge funds and other financial market speculators were short selling their stock, betting their price would fall; and by "short selling," they were actually manipulating the stock to force a price decline.

Short selling has a time limit on the bet. If the stock price doesn't fall by a certain time, then all the money "bet" by the short selling hedge fund is lost. As Gamestop's price kept rising, some of them found themselves short of liquidity (money) to cover their short sale bets. They had to sell other assets to pay for them. Or they had to borrow money from other speculators and lenders (and pay interest) to cover their failed bets.

This had never happened before. That's not how the system is supposed to run, the hedgies cried. The day traders weren't playing by the rules of the game, they shouted. But of course they were. It was the hedge funds' very own rules. It was all quite capitalist legal.

It was kind of like a poker hand at a casino. If you bet your opponent isn't holding a winning hand, you can raise the stakes and hope he drops out. You win the pot. But if some other player puts money on the table and raises you back, i.e. in this case raising the price of the stock like the day traders did with Gamestop, then they in effect call the hedge funds bluff; the hedge funds lose. The hedgies didn't like that, of course. They are used to short selling without interference and then taking home the entire pot. But this time they didn't. The day traders were winning—at least for the first

hand played.

But then the hedge funds, the big finance capitalist price speculators—as opposed to the crowdsourcing small day trader speculators—immediately changed the rules of the game, i.e. their rules, in order to teach the upstarts a lesson.

Robinhood of Capitalist Finance

The small speculator capitalists used a trading system called Robinhood in order to place their disruptive bets to drive up Gamestop's stock price. What's Robinhood? It's a finance trading competitor to the Schwabs, Interactive Brokers, and other low-cost stock trading platforms. In recent years there's been a "race to the bottom" in charges for stock trades across the trading industry. Who can charge the least per trade can steal trading market share from the others. Robinhood broke into the sector by introducing no fee trades. It appealed to the day trader by peddling the message that Robinhood was about enabling the small trader to compete with the big boys. Robinhood promised to enable the small speculator day trader to make more money at the expense of the big boys like the hedgies.

Except Robinhood kept it a secret from its day trader clientele that it was funded in large part by those same big hedge funds. In fact, one of its biggest, Citadel Securities, reportedly had a \$2.7 billion stake in Robinhood.

So Robinhood halted the day traders' speculation in Gamestop—almost certainly at the behest of Citadel and other Wall St. finance capitalists. By stopping the day traders driving up the price of Gamestop stock, it saved the

hedge funds and other short sellers billions of dollars of potential additional losses. The next day, January 28, Gamestop and other targets' stock prices began to retreat once again. While Robinhood has since indicated day trading of Gamestop could resume, it would have certain limits on trading and Robinhood made it clear it would halt trading again, if necessary.

The CEO of Robinhood was interviewed on CNN shortly after these events by host Chris Cuomo, who asked outright: "How do you make sure Robinhood isn't rigging it for the Sheriff of Nottingham?"—the Sheriff of course being Citadel, other hedge funds, and other short-selling institutional speculators. Robinhood's CEO hemmed and hawed during the interview and hid behind the claim that it wasn't Citadel or others that made him halt the buying of Gamestop stock and its price escalation. No, Robinhood was just following regulatory requirements by the SEC and other government regulatory bodies, its CEO argued.

Left unanswered, however, was why did Robinhood stop the buying of Gamestop stock when the SEC and other real regulatory bodies did not actually intervene to stop the trading in the stock? When asked what regulatory agency asked Robinhood to do so, the CEO had no answer for Cuomo. And why did Robinhood halt only the buying of the stock that was driving up the price, but not the selling of the stock? Why did Robinhood act as regulator, when the regulators saw no need to intervene? After all, the buying of Gamestop stock was no less legal than the short selling of Gamestop stock, according to capitalist regulatory rules. Government regulators didn't actually tell Robinhood it had to shut down Gamestop trades. A smoking gun anyone?



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A Finance Speculator Food Fight

What happened with Gamestop, Robinhood, Citadel and who knows what other big boys behind the scene, is best understood as a feud between two wings of finance capital. This isn't about the small mom and pop day trader David vs. the Hedge Fund Goliath. It isn't about Goliath telling David to put down his sling because it's not allowed to fight that way.

Both the hedge funds and the day traders are financial asset market speculators, investing (betting) that the price of some stock or bond or derivative or currency will rise (or fall). The speculator then bets on the rise or fall by buying or short selling the stock. The objective is to then flip the stock purchased in a relatively short time and thereby make a quick capital gain. It isn't investing in a normal sense. It's just the mere buying or selling of a piece of paper (or now electronic entry) claiming temporary ownership of the paper. An actual investment is buying and holding a stock longer term in expectation of the company realizing future profits that will eventually drive up its stock value—in a company that actually makes things or provides an actual service, that requires hiring workers who in turn earn wages or revenue that would benefit the real economy.

In contrast, financial speculators are interested only in boosting demand for a stock in order to artificially drive up its price, then to flip it, and realize a financial profit—i.e. a capital gain. Speculative investing is about making a purchase and then a quick sale to realize a capital gain. That may also take the form of a short sale—i.e. a contract to buy a stock after its price has fallen and sell it at its higher price at the time of the contract. In both cases,

it's about selling after a price appreciation.

Make no mistake: the day traders driving up the price of Gamestop stock price weren't doing it for the pleasure of tweaking the nose of short selling hedge funds. They were doing it to accelerate the stock price in order to later quickly sell it—just as the hedge funds were “short” selling it for an expected profit as well. Only the method of the selling is different.

So both sides were planning on “selling” Gamestop stock—just in different ways. The day traders by driving up the price by buying it first, the hedgies by reserving the right to sell the stock at yesterday's price, after they “buy” it when the price collapses tomorrow.

In other words, they're both financial stock speculators. They're both committing money capital that could—and should—be invested in the real economy, not in paper claims of temporary ownership. Real investment is about longer-term money capital commitment in order to make real things or services that require hiring and paying wages.

Both forms of stock price speculators are thus vultures preying on the real economy and undermining its recovery. They divert much-needed money capital from the real economy into the financial sector that produces no actual economic growth, no jobs, no wage incomes, no consumption. The day traders aren't the “poor little guy” being exploited by big Wall St. hedge funds. They're part of the problem.

Day Trading Is Also Casino Capitalism

Crowdsourcing day trading stock speculation is just the latest form of casino capitalism, clashing with traditional financial



A S A
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speculators dominated by hedge funds, private equity companies, investment banks, and the other forms of shadow bank institutions that have risen in recent decades to prominence and power in 21st century capitalism. The newcomers are just fighting for a piece of the finance asset speculation pie, previously eaten whole by the hedge funds and the other shadow banks and professional investors.

It's therefore absolute nonsense to make the latest species of financial speculators—the crowdsourcing day traders—appear as if they are the little guy being crushed by big guy Wall St. players. This isn't about small financial speculator good, large financial speculator bad. This is a family food fight between sectors of capitalist finance.

The real question is what has given rise to the family food fight? What has enabled it in the first place? And how does it reflect a deeper social crisis in the country?

Technology the Great System Destabilizer

Technology in general, and social media in particular, has contributed significantly to the growing political instability in America. It has enabled conspiracy theories and lies to displace debate over facts. Without technology and social media there would have been no Trump, Trumpism, Breitbart, Parler, Proud Boys-Oath Takers, political institutional collapse, and now the accelerating decline of democracy in the U.S. Technology may not be the fundamental cause of the above, but it certainly has been a major enabler of the deepening of the more fundamental causes.

Think of Reddit, the day trader's WallStBets app, Robinhood, etc., as the financial markets analog to the Breitbarts, Parlers, etc. in the

sphere of political markets. Technology is disrupting 21st century capitalism in myriad ways. The Moloch has begun to devour itself!

Technology has enabled the day trader speculator gang to challenge the hedge funds and other shadow banks' ability to manipulate the capitalist speculator show as they will. It has enabled the "small" investor to aggregate his bets into a big enough play to compete with the traditional finance capitalists; it has enabled the "small" investor to intercommunicate and coordinate those bets; and it has enabled the concentration of financial bets to move a stock or even perhaps a market—contrary to the bets of the hedgies and other traditional speculators. And that's what has really pissed off the latter.

So the old speculators quickly struck back. And their political allies will now hold meetings and deliver yet another slap on the wrist of the newcomers. Congress has already called committee hearings to figure out how to deal with it should it happen again.

The Real Origins of the Conflict

The "small guy" crowdsourcing financial speculators aren't really so small. Virtually all the stock trading by day traders is done by players who are easily within the wealthiest 5% of households in the U.S., and probably even fewer. So where have they gotten their money capital to make such bets sufficient to challenge the established rules of the game? The same place that the hedge funds and others ultimately get their money capital.

Since at least the past quarter century the central bank of the U.S., the Federal Reserve, has pumped tens of trillions of dollars into the banking system. The big commercial banks

affiliated with the Fed—i.e. Chase, Wells, Citi, Bank of America—in turn have loaned the tens of trillions of dollars to the shadow banks—i.e. investment banks, private equity, VCs, hedge funds, etc. They, in turn, redirect much of it into financial asset markets—stocks, bonds, derivatives, etc. They reap record financial profits for themselves and their owners and members, who then redirect it back into the same markets as well.

At the same time, the U.S. tax system has been turned on its head: more than \$15 trillion in tax cuts has flowed to the investor class since 2001. That too gets largely redirected into financial markets.

Then there's the corporate conduit itself. U.S. corporations have redistributed more than a trillion dollars a year, on average, every year since 2010 to their shareholders in the form of stock buybacks and dividend payouts. Under Trump, the average for 2017-19 was \$1.3 trillion a year. The deep tax cuts on capital gains since 2001 means the shareholders then get to keep more of the buybacks and dividend payouts, and that in turn means even more funneled into financial asset markets.

So the Fed's monetary policy, the U.S. government's tax policy, and corporations' buybacks-dividend practices have all converged the past two decades to keep the U.S. and global stock markets ever rising. But the hedge funds haven't been the only investors grown fat on the redirecting of massive money capital to investors. Nearly all within the top 5% of the income scale—and that means the day trader crowd—have benefited as well.

The crowdsourcing 'small guy' has had excess money capital with which to risk in speculative trades like Gamestop no less than the hedge funds—thanks to the Fed, government, and corporate America. Add the new technologies to the dry powder of excess speculative capital and the mix is explosive. It's a witches brew of financial speculation.

The Realization Behind the Appearance

What appeals in this story of Gamestop is the appearance of "small guys" getting screwed by the big guys even after they figure out how to win one. The Gamestop affair is just another confirmation for John Q. Public that the system is rigged. Gamestop is an example of how those with wealth and power are able to change the rules of the game in the middle of the game to ensure they will always come out on top. And they not only do it to "us," they do it to each other. The big fish always eat the smaller, even the smaller of their own species.

But one should be less concerned about day traders getting burned, and more about the tens of millions of Americans families going hungry, jobless, being evicted from their rents, and dying in the hundreds of thousands due to a failed health care system and gross government mismanagement. The day trading stock speculators will survive. Many who have no idea what a stock trade is may not. **Z**

Readers interested in a further explanation of finance capital in the 21st century, the role of shadow banks, financial asset speculation, and the rise of the new global finance capital elite, read Dr. Rasmus's 2017 book, *Systemic Fragility in the Global Economy*, Clarity Press, 2017.

COVID-19 and T

By Thom F



Trump's Racism

Hartmann

A Black man is sitting on a ledge in the foreground, looking upwards. He is wearing a dark long-sleeved shirt and dark pants. The background is a blurred night scene of a crowd of people, with warm yellow and orange lights from street lamps or buildings. The overall atmosphere is one of a protest or a large gathering at night.

More than 12,000 Americans had died from coronavirus by April 7, but once we knew that most of the non-elderly victims were Black, things were suddenly very, very different. Now it was time to quit talking about people dying and start talking about getting people back to work

How is it that in Australia, it's 3 out of every 100,000 people, and in New Zealand it's 1 out of every 200,000 people, but here in America we're dropping like flies?

Chalk it up to Republican racism and a libertarian indifference to the notion of society.

Trump's official national emergency declaration came on March 13, and most of the country shut down or at least went partway toward that outcome. The Dow collapsed and millions of Americans were laid off, but saving lives was, after all, the number one consideration.

Trump put medical doctors on TV daily, the media was freaking out about refrigerated trucks carrying bodies away from New York hospitals, and doctors and nurses were our new national heroes.

And then came April 7.

I remember that week vividly; it was as if a light switch had been flipped, and I commented on it on my radio show at the time (and many times since).

April 7 was the day that America learned that the majority of the people who were dying from COVID-19 were Black or Hispanic.

Exactly one month earlier, on March 7, Trump had played golf at his club in West Palm Beach, met with Brazilian strongman Jair Bolsonaro at Mar-a-Lago, and visited the CDC headquarters in Atlanta. Over the previous week, U.S. deaths had risen from single digits to more than 20.

In March, Jared Kushner even put together an all-volunteer task force of mostly preppie 20-something white men to coordinate getting PPE to hospitals.

Then came April 7, when the *New York*

Times ran a front-page story with the headline: "Black Americans Face Alarming Rates of Coronavirus Infection in Some States." Across the American media landscape, similar headlines appeared at other outlets, and the story was heavily reported on cable news and the network news that night.

As the *New York Times* noted that day: "In Illinois, 43 percent of people who have died from the disease and 28 percent of those who have tested positive are African-Americans, a group that makes up just 15 percent of the state's population. African-Americans, who account for a third of positive tests in Michigan, represent 40 percent of deaths in that state even though they make up 14 percent of the population. In Louisiana, about 70 percent of the people who have died are black, though only a third of that state's population is."

American conservatives responded with a collective, "What the hell!?"

Rush Limbaugh declared that afternoon that "with the coronavirus, I have been waiting for the racial component." And here it was. "The coronavirus now hits African Americans harder—harder than illegal aliens, harder than women. It hits African Americans harder than anybody, disproportionate representation."

Claiming that he knew this was coming as if he were some sort of a medical savant, Limbaugh said, "But now these—here's Fauxcahontas, Cory Booker, Kamala Harris demanding the federal government release daily race and ethnicity data on coronavirus testing, patients, and their health outcomes. So they want a database to prove we are not caring enough about African Americans..."

It didn't take a medical savant, of course. African Americans die disproportionately from everything, from heart disease to strokes to cancer to childbirth. It's a symptom of a racially rigged economy and a health care system that only responds to money, which America has conspired to keep from African



R1ACK
BLACK

MATTERS.





BREONNA TAYLOR
MURDERED

Americans for more than 400 years. Of course they're going to die more frequently from coronavirus.

But the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* simultaneously publishing front-page articles about that disparity with regard to COVID-19, both on April 7, echoed across the right-wing media landscape like a Fourth of July fireworks display.

Tucker Carlson, the only primetime Fox News host who'd previously expressed serious concerns about the death toll, changed his tune the same day, as documented by Media Matters for America.

Now, he said, "we can begin to consider how to improve the lives of the rest, the countless Americans who have been grievously hurt by this, by our response to this. How do we get 17 million of our most vulnerable citizens back to work? That's our task."

White people were out of work, and Black people were most of the casualties, outside of the extremely elderly. And those white people need their jobs back.

Brit Hume joined Tucker's show and, using his gravitas as a "real news guy," intoned, "The disease turned out not to be quite as dangerous as we thought."

Left unsaid was the issue of to whom it was not "quite as dangerous," but Limbaugh listeners and Fox viewers are anything but unsophisticated when it comes to hearing dog-whistles on behalf of white supremacy.

More than 12,000 Americans had died from coronavirus by April 7, but once we knew that most of the non-elderly victims were Black, things were suddenly very, very different. Now it was time to quit talking about people dying and start talking about getting people back to work.

It took less than a week for Trump to get the memo, presumably through Fox and Stephen Miller. On April 12, he retweeted a call to fire Dr. Anthony Fauci and declared, in an-

other tweet, that he had the sole authority to open the United States back up, and that he'd be announcing a specific plan to do just that "shortly."

On April 13, the ultra-right-wing, nearly-entirely-white-managed U.S. Chamber of Commerce published a policy paper titled "Implementing a National Return to Work Plan."

Unspoken but big on the agenda of corporate America was the desire to get the states to rescind their stay-home-from-work orders so that companies could cut their unemployment tax costs.

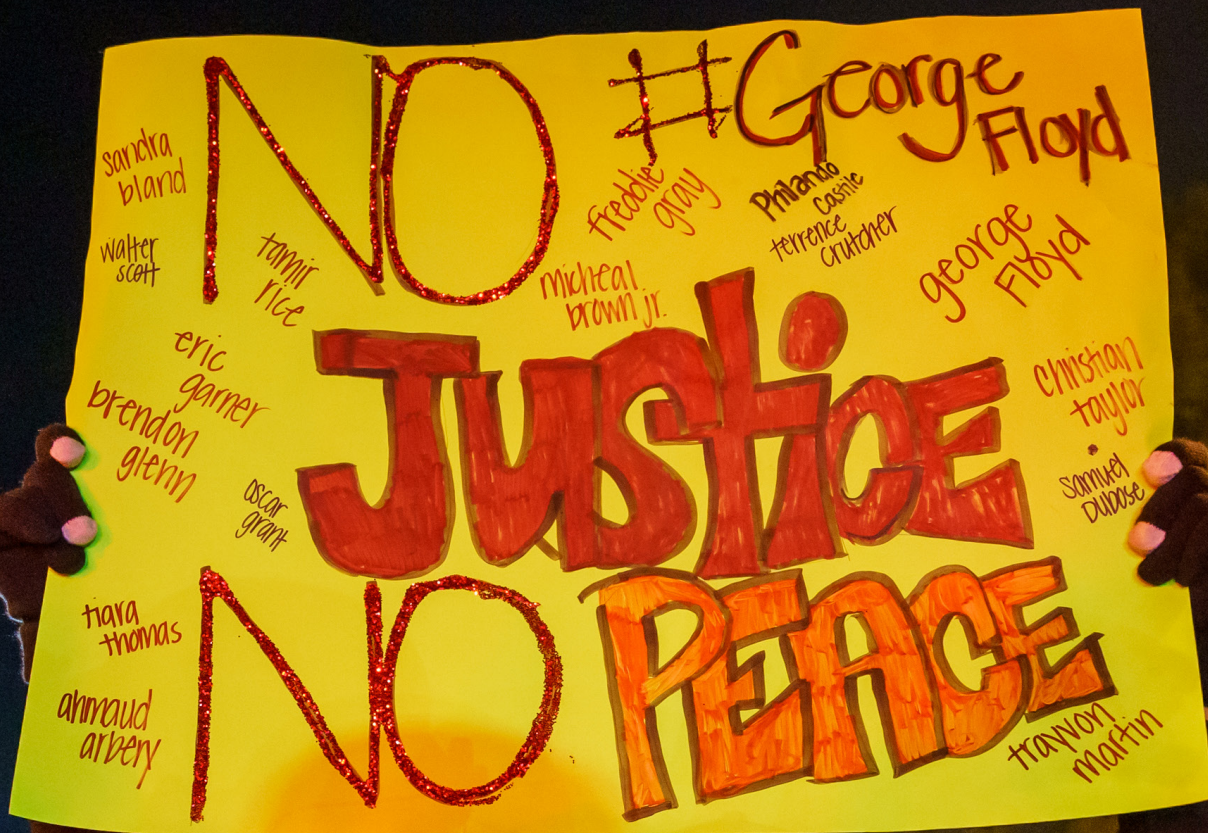
When people file unemployment claims, those claims are ultimately paid for by the companies themselves, and with a high number of claims, a company will see a substantial future increase in their unemployment insurance premiums/taxes. If the "stay home" orders were repealed, workers could no longer, in most states, file for or keep receiving unemployment compensation.

On April 14, Freedomworks, the billionaire-founded and -funded group that animated the Tea Party against Obamacare a decade earlier, published an op-ed on their website calling for an "economic recovery" program including an end to the capital gains tax and a new law to "shield" businesses from lawsuits.

Three days after that, Freedomworks and the House Freedom Caucus issued a joint statement declaring that "it's time to re-open the economy."

Freedomworks published their "#ReopenAmerica Rally Planning Guide" encouraging conservatives to show up "[i]n-person" at their state capitols and governors' mansions, and, for signage, to "Keep it short: 'I'm essential,' 'Let me work,' 'Let Me Feed My Family'" and to "Keep [the signs looking] homemade."

One of the first #ReopenAmerica rallies to get widespread national attention was April 18 in New Hampshire. Over the next sever-



al weeks, rallies had metastasized across the nation, from Oregon to Arizona, Delaware, North Carolina, Virginia, Illinois and elsewhere.

One that drew particularly high levels of media attention, complete with swastikas, Confederate flags and assault rifles, was directed against the governor of Michigan, rising Democratic star Gretchen Whitmer.

When Rachel Maddow reported on meatpacking plants that were epicenters of mass infection, the conservative Chief Justice of the Wisconsin Supreme Court pointed out that the virus flare wasn't coming from the "regular folks" of the surrounding community; they were mostly Hispanic and Black.

The conservative meme was now well established.

About a third of the people the virus killed were old folks in nursing homes. Which, right-wing commentators said, could be a good thing for the economy because they're just "useless eaters" who spend our Medicaid and Social Security money but are on death's door anyway.

For example, Texas's Republican Lt. Governor Dan Patrick told Fox News, "Let's get back to living... And those of us who are 70-plus, we'll take care of ourselves."

A conservative town commissioner in Antioch, California, noted that losing "many elderly [people]... would reduce burdens in our defunct Social Security System" and "free up housing." He added, "We would lose a large portion of the people with immune and other health complications. I know it would be loved ones as well. But that would once again reduce our impact on medical, jobs and housing."

It came to Trump's attention that the biggest outbreaks were happening in prisons and meatpacking plants, places with few white people (and the few whites in them were largely poor and thus seen as disposable). Trump's

response to this was to issue an executive order using the Defense Production Act (which he had hesitated to use to order the production of testing or PPE equipment) on April 28 to order the largely Hispanic and Black workforce back into the slaughterhouses and meat processing plants.

African Americans were dying in our cities, Hispanics were dying in meatpacking plants, the elderly were dying in nursing homes.

But the death toll among white people—particularly affluent white people in corporate management who were less likely to be obese, have hypertension or struggle with diabetes, and who were more likely to work from home—was relatively low. And those who came through the infection were presumed to



be immune to subsequent bouts, so we could issue them “COVID Passports” and give them hiring priority.

As a “public health expert in frequent contact with the White House’s official coronavirus task force”—Jared Kushner’s team of young, unqualified volunteers supervising the administration’s PPE response to the virus—noted to *Vanity Fair*’s Katherine Eban, “The political folks believed that because it was going to be relegated to Democratic states, that they could blame those governors, and that would be an effective political strategy.”

It was, after all, exclusively blue states that were then hit hard by the virus: Washington, New York, New Jersey and Connecticut.

Robert F. Kennedy’s grandson Max Ken-

nedy Jr., 26, was one of the volunteers on Kushner’s task force, and he blew the whistle to Congress on Kushner and Trump. As Jane Mayer wrote for the *New Yorker*, “Kennedy was disgusted to see that the political appointees who supervised him were hailing Trump as ‘a marketing genius,’ because, Kennedy said they’d told him, ‘he personally came up with the strategy of blaming the states.’”

So the answer to the question of why, at year’s end, the United States has about 20 percent of the world’s COVID-19 deaths, but only 4.5 percent of the world’s population, is pretty straightforward: Republicans were just fine with Black people dying back in April, particularly since they could blame it on Democratic blue-state governors.

And once they put that strategy into place in April, it became politically impossible to back away from it, even as more and more red-state white people became infected.

Everything since then—right down to Trump’s December 26 tweet (“The lockdowns in Democrat run states are absolutely ruining the lives of so many people – Far more than the damage that would be caused by the China Virus”)—has been a double-down on death and destruction, now regardless of race. **Z**

This article was produced by Economy for All, a project of the Independent Media Institute.

Thom Hartmann is America’s number one progressive talk-show host and the New York Times bestselling author of *The Hidden History of American Oligarchy* and more than 30 other books in print. His online writings are compiled at HartmannReport.com. He is a writing fellow at the Independent Media Institute.





Letters to the Editor

Kriminal Kapitalism Kills

By Nayvin Gordon

In the country that refuses to designate the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) as a terrorist organization, COVID-19 is killing black and brown people at more than three times the rate of whites. The pandemic is now the leading cause of death in the U.S., killing Americans at three per minute. This is the most intense period of mass death in the country's history. It is killing disproportionately the elderly the poor and the working class. Given the U.S. government's deliberate refusal to take massive emergency action, the catastrophic death toll will approach one half million in the next few months. Vaccines will have little effect on this impending death toll. Despite what the politicians say, this catastrophe is not inevitable, it is preventable. Only one way has been shown in other countries to crush the pandemic—immediate, massive emergency action carried out by the government to protect the people and save lives. In the words of President Elect Biden's advisor Dr. Osterholm: "We could pay for a package right now to cover all of the wages, lost wages for individual workers, for losses to small companies, to medium-sized companies or city, state, county governments. We could do all of that. If we did that, then we could lock down for four to six weeks." (<https://abc11.com/michael-osterholm-us-lockdown-nation-wide-is-under/7896126/>)

The government's refusal to sacrifice the

short term profits of Wall Street to prevent this mass slaughter is simply social murder. No clearer example in modern history demonstrates the malignant nature at the heart of the capitalist economic system than the homicidal policy of allowing the pandemic to spread throughout the country. The U.S. government has so far pumped up Wall Street to the tune of \$7 trillion dollars since March 2020. For every \$14 given to Wall Street, the 60 million unemployed workers got \$1 in unemployment benefits. There are millions now jobless, hungry, facing eviction and massive debt. Clearly working people are not a priority, but war is: Congress, Democrats and Republicans, recently voted almost unanimously for the largest military budget in history—\$741 billion.

The government of Wall Street will only respond to millions mobilizing to demand protection and trillions of dollars for testing, tracking, and support for those out of work. A popular movement of working people can take independent action to end this epidemic, and achieve health and life not profits and death. Let us build a society of equals, no rich and no poor, no rulers and ruled, an egalitarian society driven only by the needs of the people, economic, social and political equality for all.

Dr. Nayvin Gordon writes on health and politics. gordonnayvin@yahoo.com.

