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Chauvin's conviction is still far from justice

By Bette Lee

In a rare moment in U.S. history, a racist white cop, Derek Chauvin, has been convicted of murdering an unarmed Black man, George Floyd. If this is a "turning point" for America, it was a long time coming. It took hundreds of years of resistance and resilience to get here.

It took 250 years of unrelenting systemic racism and white supremacy that enslaved and terrorized Black people, through the era of Jim Crow, and the rise of the KKK, who attacked Black people with impunity. The "freedom" they had been granted turned out to be a hollow promise and a cruel betrayal. Black people were forced to work as sharecroppers for their former slave owners, their towns were burned, and hundreds of them were lynched at "picnics" where white folks took photos, laughing in front of the "strange fruit" hanging from trees, as described by Billie Holliday in her haunting song.

It took the crushed lives of millions of Black, brown and people of color forced to live in chronic poverty and social despair, while they were "racially profiled," arrested, brutalized, jailed or killed by racist cops with for hundreds of years. When Black people organized and fought back, their leaders and organizers were spied on, infiltrated and hounded by the FBI. Law enforcement set out to destroy the Black Panthers; many were incarcerated, others, like Fred Hampton, were murdered.

It took the life of George Floyd, who was killed while he was in handcuffs, face down on a concrete street, by a racist cop, Chauvin, who had no regard for his humanity or his life

It took millions of viewers, who watched the video of Floyd's murder in horror on social networks and the media, and felt compelled to denounce racism and killer cops.

It took 26 million Americans who took to the streets in over 2,000 cities to support Black Lives Matter in the largest social justice movement in the U.S.

It took the profound grief, outrage and determination of Floyd's family, friends, community, and activists to speak out, protest and demand justice for almost a year after his death.

It took countless acts of civil disobedience and activism in cities like Minneapolis where Floyd was murdered, where police precincts and stores were set on fire, windows were smashed, banks and governemnt buildings were vandalized and covered with graffiti, bridges and roads were blocked, parks and civic spaces were occupied, statues of the founding fathers Washington and Jefferson, and Confederate generals like Robert E. Lee were toppled unceremoniously and spraypainted with "Slave owners" and "Racists."

It took over 100 consecutive nights of resistance and intense confrontations with the police, where thousands of protestors in Portland were beaten by police and the federal troops sent by Trump, night after night with massive amounts of teargas, pepper spray, flash grenades, rubber bullets and projectiles.

It took the courage of thousands of people, willing to risk injury and arrest to resist police violence, racism and inequality. Almost 1,000 protestors were arrested in Portland during the BLM protests last year, and 6,000 acts of police "force" were documented. But in the face of brutal police repression, many protestors did not back

down.

Chauvin's conviction meant that a racist cop was finally held accountable for killing a Black man, but accountability is not the same as justice. Systemic racism and white supremacy are entrenched in law enforcement and policing because America is still a deeply racist country which refuses to acknowledge its history and perpetration of white supremacy. Instead, liberals and politicians like Biden will celebrate Chauvin's conviction as a "step towards justice," as evidence that America is still the shining beacon of democracy and justice. They will use Chauvin's conviction as justification that incremental reforms, not systemic change, will end racism in America. But Chauvin's conviction will not stop police from killing more people of color. No African American believes that. One killer cop will be incarcerated, but many more are roaming free. The fight for justice is not a spectator sport where all the villains are defeated with one blow.

Police reforms, including defunding or the banning of qualified immunity, or the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act if passed by the Senate, are significant steps to ameliorate police abuse, but they will not end police killings. The reforms are aimed at dealing with the symptoms of a sick country, but they will not exorcize the root causes of systemic racism and corruption.

There is no justice as long as Black, brown and people of color are deprived of their humanity and access to decent jobs, housing, education and health care. There is no justice as long as the primary role of the police is to control and terrorize the poor, workers and people of color, while serving and protecting the rich and powerful. There can be no justice without social equality, where the rich get richer, while millions of people are forced to live in abject poverty and despair. There can be no justice when police continue to target and traumatize people of color who have to live with the daily threats of police and state violence, incarceration, or murder. The recent killings of Daunte Wright, 20 years old, and Adam Toledo, 13 years old, by the police during the trial of Derek Chauvin clearly demonstrates that police reform is not enough. Only an honest reckoning with its history of settler colonialism and its toxic legacy of systemic racism, white supremacy and social inequality will lead to real social change and the transformation of America to where justice can prevail. *Z*

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Daunte Wright's Killing Makes the Case for Shrinking Police Budgets

By Sonali Kolhatkar

Three weeks into the Minneapolis trial of Derek Chauvin for the killing of George Floyd, a white police officer in the neighboring suburb of Brooklyn Center killed a young Black man named Daunte Wright and illustrated in tragic terms just how law enforcement remains engaged in a racist war on Black America in spite of national scrutiny. Officer Kimberly Potter, a 26-year veteran of her department, allegedly mistook her gun for her taser and fired a single shot, kill-

ing the 20-year-old while he struggled in his car in view of his girlfriend, who had been riding as a passenger.

Like so many Black Americans, Wright justifiably feared police interactions. His mentor Jonathan Mason said, "He was afraid police would do something like this to him." Attorney Benjamin Crump, who has represented the families of countless police victims in civil lawsuits, said, "We don't see these sort of things happening to white young people that we see happen over and over and over again to young marginalized minorities."

The Black fear of police is grounded in provable police bias. The Stanford Open Policing Project studied nearly 100 million police stops and found that "officers generally stop black drivers at higher rates than white drivers," and that "black and Hispanic drivers are searched more often than white drivers." Moreover, "police require less suspicion to search black and Hispanic drivers than white drivers," which the researchers concluded "is evidence of discrimination."

According to Wright's mother, he was pulled over in part because there was an air freshener hanging from his rearview mirror—yet another ludicrous pretext to add to the list of remarkably mundane reasons for why Black Americans invoke suspicion from police. The ACLU of Minnesota released a statement saying it has "deep concerns that police here appear to have used dangling air fresheners as an excuse for making a pretextual stop, something police do all too often to target Black people."

Leave it to the *Wall Street Journal* to urge caution in rushing to judgment against the officer and instead accuse protesters of using the shooting as "an excuse for violence." The paper rarely if ever expresses outrage over the countless racially tinged police killings in America.

Independent Black journalists like KingDemetrius Pendleton have been covering the Chauvin trial and the protests against Floyd's killing for the past year and have a radically different view of the situation. In an interview, Pendleton explained to me that the killing of Floyd "was like a public lynching," and then "to see Daunte Wright being killed in a similar fashion" was gut-wrenching for local residents. Pendleton hails from the very community that is deeply impacted by police violence in Minneapolis and routinely provides a platform for anti-police-brutality activists and family members of police victims.

Pendleton explained that it was ridiculous for us to expect young people to "calm down" in the face of state violence. After Wright's killing, mass protests in Minneapolis and Brooklyn Center resulted in dozens of arrests as angry residents confronted police. "They're tired of watching their young friends getting killed by police officers, and they know nothing is going to happen because nothing ever happens," said Pendleton. It's a familiar script that when protesters denounce police killings, there is a greater focus on their righteous rage than on the state violence they are decrying. Pendleton invoked Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s words, saying, "A riot is the language of the unheard." "African American people don't have therapists and all that. They just have to deal with the trauma," said Pendleton.

Just as the *Wall Street Journal*'s comments focusing on protesters rather than the police killing were tone-deaf, so were Joe Biden's calls for "peace and calm." After Wright was killed, the president said, "There is absolutely no justification—none—for looting, no justification for violence." He was not talking about actual violence by police, rather about potential violence from protesters.

If the calls for calm are

louder than the calls for justice, then America's message to Black people is to shut up and be killed. Congressperson Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) was more forthright, tweeting that Wright's killing was "government funded murder," and that "Policing in our country is inherently & intentionally racist."

More importantly, Tlaib articulated the solution to this state violence against Black people: "No more policing, incarceration, and militarization. It can't be reformed," she wrote. She was alluding to calls by Black Lives Matter activists to "Defund the Police," based on the idea that the massive city budget expenditures on law enforcement are better served being spent directly on community services. Conservative and even liberal answers to the problem of police violence have been to throw more money at police, not less. Even after last year's Black Lives Matter protests demanded that police budgets be slashed, most were still awarded increases relative to city services that directly help communities. Among the slew of police reforms that have promised an end to violence but delivered only more of the same were body cameras for officers.

In Wright's case, Officer Potter's body camera did nothing to deter her brutal reaction. What it did was showcase just how she ratcheted up the violence as police often do. Upon seeing the footage, Pendleton said it was clear to him that the African American officer who was in the process of arresting Wright was "handling him at first, and then you see this white woman come in and just grab him… and she basically escalated the whole situation."

In the hours after Wright's shooting, Brooklyn Center Police Chief Tim Gannon gave Officer Potter the benefit of the doubt, saying, "It is my belief that the officer had the intention to deploy their taser but instead shot Mr. Wright with a single bullet." Law enforcement and their allies routinely justify police misconduct as understandable mistakes arising from the pressures of the job. Yet they blame the victims of police killings for not behaving calmly during the volatile circumstances of terrifying arrests by armed trigger-happy forces.

Both Potter and Gannon resigned two days after Wright's killing, and in her terse resignation letter, Potter said it was "in the best interest of the community, the department, and my fellow officers if I resign immediately." While immediate resignations in the wake of a police killing offer a modicum of progress compared to the inaction that most police killings are marked by, it is not enough. Wright's aunt, Nyesha Wright, said at a press conference, "Prosecute them, like they would prosecute us." Potter has now been charged with second-degree manslaughter.

So far only one Minneapolis-area police officer in recent memory has been prosecuted, convicted, and sentenced to more than a decade for a fatal shooting: Mohamed Noor, a Black, Somali American officer who accidentally shot a white Australian woman named Justine Ruszczyk, killing her. During Noor's trial, his victim was deeply humanized, and the loss of her life was painted as the tragedy it deservedly was. Former officer Noor expressed deep remorse for what he did, saying, "I've thought and prayed about this for two years, since the time I took the life of Justine Ruszczyk."

Contrast this to the lack of remorse shown by Chauvin and Potter for the lives of their Black victims. It remains to be seen if these two white officers will be held accountable for their actions. In the meantime, police will continue to kill, and politicians will continue to urge calm in the face of the carnage while rewarding police departments with more money under the

guise of "reforms." Z

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The Supreme Court Is Also to Blame for Daunte Wright's Death

By Marjorie Cohn

When veteran Minnesota police officer Kimberly Potter, who is white, stopped Daunte Wright, a 20-year-old Black man, for an expired registration tag, she committed an act of racial profiling. As a result, Wright's blood is on the hands not only of Potter but also of the U.S. Supreme Court, which has legally sanctioned this type of racial profiling.

Like Derek Chauvin, who is on trial for killing George Floyd, Potter is not an exception to the rule. Both are typical representatives of a system of racist, violent law enforcement against Black people. When Potter shot and killed Wright, her act—whether intentional or accidental—was also grounded in the same sort of racism manifested by officers throughout the United States.

Potter killed Wright quickly, unlike Chauvin, who tortured Floyd to death over a period of nine minutes and 29 seconds. After she stopped Wright, Potter found he had a warrant out for his arrest for a misdemeanor. When the officers tried to arrest him, Wright pulled away to get back in the car. Potter pointed her gun at Wright, threatened to taser him and then shot him. The overreaction of both Potter and Chauvin to relatively minor offenses led to the murders of two unarmed Black men. "Why, when you stop people of color, [do] you automatically draw a weapon?" asked Pastor Ezra Fagge'Tt, an eyewitness to Wright's death.

Pretext Traffic Stops Enable Racial Profiling

Although Potter may have had probable cause to believe that Wright committed a minor traffic infraction, her decision to stop him was also the result of racial profiling.

In 1996, Antonin Scalia wrote an opinion for a unanimous Supreme Court that legalized racial profiling during traffic stops. The Court authorized pretext stops in *Whren v. United States*. That means officers can stop cars and temporarily detain motorists on the pretext of enforcing traffic laws, even if a reasonable officer would not have stopped the driver absent some additional law enforcement objective.

Even if they are subjectively motivated by racism, officers can stop a car as long as they have probable cause to believe the driver committed a traffic infraction. *Whren* permits "reasonable" law enforcement objectives to serve as a pretextual justification for subjective suspicion on the basis of race. Pretext stops foster racial profiling, and ultimately, the use of violence against Black people.

Living in a society steeped in white supremacy, non-Black people in the U.S. often associate Blackness with

criminality and violence. The participants in a 2017 study conducted by the American Psychological Association "believed that the black men were more capable of causing harm in a hypothetical altercation and, troublingly, that police would be more justified in using force to subdue them, even if the men were unarmed," lead author John Paul Wilson said. Non-Black participants were more likely to view the Black men as more harmful.

More than a quarter of police killings in 2018 occurred during traffic stops, according to a study conducted by National Public Radio. Officers' use of force is not proportionate to the level of risk they're faced with during these traffic stops.

Legal scholar Jordan Blair Woods found that "the rate for a felonious killing of an officer during a routine traffic stop was only 1 in every 6.5 million stops." Likewise, the rate for an assault resulting in serious injury to an officer was just 1 in every 361,111 stops. Yet Black men were killed at a rate of 31.17 per every 1 million stops, a report by ProPublica concluded.

Tasers Can Also Kill People

Potter is claiming that she intended to reach for her Taser but accidentally grabbed her gun instead. Before shooting Wright, Potter screamed, "Taser!" Even if Potter did intend to taser Wright, that still would have amounted to the use of excessive force.

Tasers are electrical weapons that "deliver pulses of electrical charge that cause the subject's muscles to contract in an uncoordinated way, thereby preventing purposeful movement. This effect has been termed 'neuromuscular incapacitation,'" according to the 2020 UN Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement. "The charge is delivered through metal probes that are fired towards the subject but which remain electrically connected to the device by fine wires."

Officers regularly use Tasers despite their lethal nature. While police ostensibly seek compliance from victims by utilizing Tasers, they render victims unable to respond to commands due to neuromuscular incapacitation. There is a pattern of disproportionate use of deadly force by tasering Black people. A Reuters survey on Taser-related deaths through 2018 concluded that of the 1,081 people who have died in the U.S. from the use of Tasers, at least 32 percent were Black, even though Black people comprise only 14 percent of the population. But although 29 percent of people killed by Tasers were white, 60 percent of the U.S. population is white.

Officers Are Rarely Convicted of Killing Black People

Officers are rarely held accountable for killing Black people. Mapping Police Violence reported in 2020, "Officers were charged with a crime in only one percent of all killings by police." Most officers who are charged are not convicted. And in the few cases they are convicted, it is frequently for lesser charges, not murder.

The timing of her killing of Wright made Potter's prosecution more likely. Tensions in Minneapolis and indeed, throughout the nation, are high as video clips of Chauvin crushing the life out of Floyd are broadcast repeatedly throughout Chauvin's trial. The justifiable public outrage at Potter's shooting of Wright led to quick resignations of Potter and the Brooklyn Center police chief. Prosecutors charged Potter with second-degree manslaughter,

which carries a maximum of 10 years in prison.

In Minnesota, second-degree manslaughter is defined as causing the death of another by "culpable negligence whereby the person creates an unreasonable risk, and consciously takes chances of causing death or great bodily harm to another."

But Ben Crump, attorney for the Wright family, stated "This was no accident. This was an intentional, deliberate and unlawful use of force." He said, "You would think that you know what side your gun is on and what side your Taser is on. There was no need to even Tase him."

Crump cited "implicit bias" that "goes beyond policy."

Wright's aunt, Nyesha Wright, wants Potter charged with murder. "Prosecute them, like they would prosecute us," she said at a news conference. "We want the highest justice."

Prosecutors are likely doubtful they could get a jury to convict Potter of murder. Second-degree murder, which can result in a 40-year prison sentence, is defined as causing the death of another, without intent to kill, but while committing a felony. Third-degree murder carries a maximum sentence of 25 years. In order to be convicted, the perpetrator must have caused the death of another by "an act eminently dangerous to others and evincing a depraved mind, without regard for human life."

Potter is a former president of her police union. These unions often assist members in covering up their misconduct. Police union representatives frequently provide officers with false narratives to conceal their culpability. Officers routinely meet with union representatives and lawyers before they officially submit a statement.

On April 27, the International Commission of Inquiry on Systemic Racist Police Violence Against People of African Descent in the United States, for which I am serving as a rapporteur, will release its report with findings of fact and recommendations addressed to national and international policy makers. The commission is examining whether police violence against Black people in the U.S. constitutes a gross violation of international human rights and fundamental freedoms. Testimony was presented to the commission by family members and attorneys about police killings of 43 Black people and the paralyzing of another, all of whom were unarmed or were not threatening the officers or others.

Racism drove each of the steps that led to Wright's murder—from Potter's stop of Wright, to her pulling out her gun, to her threatening to fire a Taser at him, to finally shooting Wright dead. Systemic racism is the fuel that drives police violence against Black people, and we must cast aside any talk of "accidents" when it comes to matters of racially motivated violence. ***Z***

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Better for Whom? Biden's Test for the Climate Movement

By Nick Rabb and Alex Trimm

As Biden moves to push his American Jobs Plan and American Families Plan, the signs of the times are all too familiar: some shock sends the economy into a state of uncertainty, lack of foresight and hollowing out of public programs has led to an inept response, millions unemployed with no prospects of recovery. Meanwhile, billionaires have been making off with unprecedented increases in wealth. These spending packages, while unprecedented in modern times, may not be the end of the story if the Biden administration makes good on its promises to combat the climate crisis with more sweeping changes.

During the presidential campaign, Biden's team released his Build Back Better plan as a path forward to reenergize the working class backbone of the economy while transitioning off of fossil fuels to avert climate catastrophe. His latest legislative pushes are derived from this plan. These days, it has become almost common sense on the left to push for a green recovery. Mobilizations akin to a Green New Deal were necessary before the pandemic. But now, there seems to be broadening consensus even from establishment voices that green recovery is the way to move forward.

Even though Biden's plan does not mention the words "Green New Deal" (in fact, he is a staunch opponent of the "socialist" plan), the climate movement has begun letting out sighs of relief as his administration seems to be embracing the ideas of ambitious transition despite different rhetoric. But we should be on high alert. Signs are increasingly pointing to a future filled with green rhetoric, but perpetuation of the system that truly fuels the crisis. A careful reading of the Build Back Better plan, and the flocking of large financial entities and wealthy individuals to "climate savior" mentalities, reveals what is actually happening.

In a repeat of capitalist crises of the past, the powers-that-be have waited long enough that a desperate populous is ready to take the crumbs of "progress." All the while, the power structures that caused decay do not shift an inch. In the case of climate crisis, the system itself is what perpetuates the crisis—addressing only one piece cannot avert devastation. We thus stand at a crucial inflection point in the path towards progress. Will the climate movement be able to recognize history repeating itself, and counter accordingly?

Rejuvenating American Capitalism

Perhaps one of the greatest assets of the powerful in the U.S. is a shallow understanding of our nation's history. Through no fault of our own, propagandized textbooks and media ecosystem have done us no favors in giving us the ability to place current events in historical cycles of power struggle. For these reasons, we often fail to see what is happening until it is too late.

A brief dive back to a similar era in U.S. history can provide insight into what appears to be unfolding in our present day. In the time of the original New Deal, the U.S. economy was similarly struggling from the Great Depression. Popular struggle forced President Roosevelt to enact New Deal legislation. Though the New Deal did lay out significant reforms, it did not fully combat the Depression. The real economic boost came from the World War II mobilization, which decreased unemployment from 8.1% in 1940 to 1.1% in 1945. In Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the U.S.*, he writes that, "war brought higher prices for farmers, higher wages, enough prosperity for enough of the population to assume against the

rebellions that so threatened the thirties." Zinn then quotes historian Lawrence Wittner, who writes that the "biggest gains were in corporate profits, which rose from $6.4 billion in 1940 to $10.8 billion in 1944. But enough went to workers and farmers to make them feel the system was doing well for them."

This is a story that has echoed throughout the history of our country: the system adjusts to calls for structural reform so the powerful do not have to give up power. We have seen it with the creation of Jim Crow laws during Reconstruction, after the Great Depression as mentioned above, in the aftermath of uprisings in the 1960s and 1970s with the coordinated rise of neoliberalism, and in the bailout of Wall Street after the 2008-09 financial crisis. Each of these adjustments kept in place the underlying issues, and we continue to deal with them today. The present moment stands to be no exception to the pattern.

The signs of the next revitalization of capitalism are all around us. Elites and other powerful entities are scrambling to be next in line to suddenly realize the imminent danger of the climate crisis, offering their sober analyses and solutions. Whether it's the International Monetary Fund, the OECD, or Davos billionaires, the main arms of monopoly capitalism are green-washing the crisis in hopes of profiting. Even resident philanthropist in chief Bill Gates is trying to get in on the action.

Some may argue that there is nothing wrong with making money off of a necessary transition to a green economy, but they miss the point that the climate crisis is not just a result of emissions. Solutions proposed by those who are attempting to profit ignore this point, and fail to realize that the climate crisis is a multidimensional symptom of the very runaway, extractive capitalist system that props them up.

Better for Whom?

Biden's Build Back Better (BBB) plan is no exception to this framework. While it has shifted its goals and rhetoric due to pressure from climate organizers, a deeper read reveals it to be only rhetoric. As part of an effort to demystify Biden's plan for the greater movement and see what may be coming next, we scoured it, along with a true Green New Deal (GND) proposal from Bernie Sanders' campaign, to compare and contrast the solutions. To illustrate how the BBB plan aims to revitalize capitalism, we compare two key sections: renewable energy, and agriculture (though, these are not the only that could be contrasted in both plans).

What was revealed is that Biden's plan, despite a progressive veneer, aims to give just enough to struggling people so that they can get by, but keeps the entire system comfortably intact. On the other hand, GND proposals advocate to get to the root of these destructive systems, and equalize the distribution of power in society.

Renewable Energy

It may be tempting to imagine that the BBB plan has been moved to the standards of a GND in at least the area of renewable energy, clearly the new focus of the business sector. However, the plan still only goes so far. It promises clean electricity, and a carbon-free power sector by 2035, with net-zero emissions for the entire country by 2050. The ambition for carbon-free power is a step forward from his original plan. The methods by which he aims to reach these goals are listed as wind, solar, nuclear, hydrogen, and carbon capture. He commits a $400 billion investment, in his first term, for clean energy

and innovation.

The Sanders/Inslee GND pursues a much more aggressive goal. They call for 100% renewable energy for electricity and transportation by 2030, and complete decarbonization by 2050. Their methods are listed as wind, solar, geothermal, and explicitly not nuclear or carbon capture—which are called "false solutions." They commit to spend $1.52 trillion on renewable energy and $852 billion on energy storage capacity. Moreover, they call for the creation of another federal Power Marketing Administration (PMA), and expansion of existing PMAs to build renewable energy. In this plan, energy would be publicly owned, managed by federal PMAs, the Bureau of Reclamation, and the Tennessee Valley Authority—with energy distribution preferences given to public or cooperatively-owned utilities.

Differences between these two visions are both obvious and nuanced. Immediately, it is clear that the GND plan aims to spend more money, and build renewables at a faster pace. The GND plan's call for 100% renewable energy for electricity (27% of U.S. 2018 GHG emissions) and transportation (28% of U.S. 2018 GHG emissions) by 2030 also puts it at over 50% renewable energy by 2030 over just the 27% from transportation by 2035 in the BBB plan. However, hidden in the language itself is the difference between "net-zero" emissions by 2050 (BBB) and "complete decarbonization" by 2050 (GND). "Net-zero" allows for emissions to continue, but relies on carbon sinks to offset them (the plan's methods included "carbon capture"). "Complete decarbonization" would go further and disallow any emissions. Finally, the GND call for energy to be publicly owned with distribution preferences for public and cooperatively-owned utilities is significant. It frames a major difference between the plans as allowing private power to continue domination, yet now through renewables (BBB), versus giving power back to communities through public accountability (GND). Even the "net-zero" language allows fossil fuels companies to continue making profit, and more time to transition, while "decarbonization" would entirely stop the flow of money to fossil fuel corporations.

Agriculture

Again, as a stark rebuttal to the notion that emissions and renewables are the only necessary focus of climate crisis mitigation, differences between the plans regarding agriculture stand to make a tremendous difference. Biden's BBB plan rightfully calls for 250,000 jobs plugging abandoned oil and natural gas wells, and reclaiming abandoned coal, hardrock, and uranium mines. It calls for decarbonizing the food and agricultural sector. It aims to leverage research in soil management, plant biologies, and agricultural techniques to store carbon dioxide from the air in the ground. Notably, it also calls for funding for the first biofuel plants and jobs in the country.

The Sanders/Inslee GND calls for funding for regenerative agricultural practices—including transitioning animal feeding operations, and prioritizing socially disadvantaged and beginning farmers. It also advocates for farmers to be paid to sequester carbon, and for funding to allow farmers to transition off of fossil fuel dependence on their farms. Again, this plan goes further. It explicitly strives to break up big agribusiness, and instate supply management programs to prevent shortages and surpluses (so that farmers can make a living wage without overproducing). The GND plan prioritizes investment in Tribal land access and extension programs, USDA training for socially disad-

vantaged farmers, and a pathway to citizenship for migrant farm workers. It envisions investment into cooperatively or community-owned grocery stores, incentives for schools who source food from local sources, money for local food processing, and funding to solve hunger and food waste.

The differences are clear, if not startling. At their face, the plans again differ in the level of community-investment versus technocratic research to "innovate" solutions to the agricultural problem. The GND plan is clear about the need to break up agribusiness monopolies and transform the way we think about food and agriculture to center the community—something that food justice organizations consistently call for. The BBB plan's call to fund the first biofuel plants and jobs is a dead giveaway of the prioritization of existing agribusiness. What would these biofuels be made of? The overly monocropped corn and soy that span the country, and are the backbone of existing agricultural giants.

The Climate Movement's Next Test

While the Biden plan aims to "Build Back Better," the bulk of the benefits are going to the private powers that already exist and dominate our economy today. To answer the question, "Better for whom?" we can unambiguously say that the administration wants to satisfy corporations over people. The Sanders/Inslee GND would build back better for ordinary people. But that would mean deconstructing the systems that already exist, and truly building back from the ground up, rather than from the top-down.

Environmental groups may get lost in the rhetoric of the Biden plan, and to do so would ensure a repetition of the historical cycle of rebuilding after capitalist crises. The BBB plan is undoubtedly a plan to rejuvenate American capitalism. The climate movement has arguably won the fight to center the climate crisis as an immediate existential threat, but the narrative sits snugly with stopping emissions. This narrow view allows the powers-that-be to simultaneously appear helpful and profit from transition.

The crisis is about much more than emissions, and focusing on them misses the deeper reasons we are in crisis. Unequal power structures, just one of many intersectional causes, are contributing just as much as emissions. They have allowed the profit-seeking interests of a tiny minority to control the vast majority, who want sweeping change to avert catastrophe. These intersections must be understood as not just "nice to haves," but crucial to solving the problem. Without addressing them, we are in for a revitalization of capitalism, and perpetuation of the crisis.

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Biden's Early Agenda Gives Hope, But Activist Pressure Must Not Cease

Noam Chomsky interviewed by C.J. Polychroniou

C.J. Polychroniou: President Joe Biden has been in office for approximately two months now, in the course of which he has signed scores of executive orders meant to reverse the policies of Donald Trump. But he has also managed to pass a huge and ambitious stimulus bill unlike anything seen during peacetime. What's your assessment of Biden's actions so far to deal with the most pressing issues facing U.S. society: namely, the coronavirus pandemic and the pain caused to millions of Americans on account of the pandemic?

Noam Chomsky: Better than I'd anticipated. Considerably so.

The stimulus bill has its flaws, but considering the circumstances, it's an impressive achievement. The circumstances are a highly disciplined opposition party dedicated to the principle announced years ago by its maximal leader, Mitch McConnell: If we are not in power, we must render the country ungovernable and block government legislative efforts, however beneficial they might be. Then

the consequences can be blamed on the party in power, and we can take over. It worked well for Republicans in 2009—with plenty of help from Obama. By 2010, the Democrats lost Congress, and the way was cleared to the 2016 debacle.

There's every reason to suppose that the strategy will be renewed—this time under more complex circumstances. The voting base in the hands of Trump, who shares the objective but differs from McConnell on who will pick up the pieces: McConnell and the donor class, or Trump and the voting base he mobilized, almost half of whom worship him as the messenger God sent to save the country from … we can fill in our favorite fantasies, but should not overlook the fact that what may sound [ridiculous] has roots in the lives of the victims of the neoliberal globalization of the past 40 years—extended by Trump, apart from some rhetorical flourishes.

In those circumstances, passing a stimulus bill was a major accomplishment. Republicans who favor it, and know that their constituents do, nevertheless voted against it, in lockstep obedience to what the Central Committee determines. Some Democrats insisted on watering it down. But what finally passed has valuable elements, which could be a basis for moving on.

There are huge gaps. The bill surely should have contained an increase in the miserable minimum wage, an utter scandal. But that would have been very difficult in the face of total Republican opposition, along with a few Democrats. And there are other crucial features that are missing. Nevertheless, if the short-term measures on child poverty, income support, medical insurance and other basic needs can be extended, it would be a substantial step toward fulfilling the promise envisioned by such careful observers as Roosevelt Institute President Felicia Wong, who reflected that, "As I see it, both the scale and the direction of the American Rescue Plan break the neoliberal, deficits-and-inflation-come-first mold that has hollowed out our economy for a generation." We haven't seen anything that could elicit such hopes for a long time.

There is also hope in appointments on economic issues. Who would have imagined that a regular contributor to radical economics journals would be appointed to the Council of Economic Advisers (Heather Boushey), joined by the senior economic adviser of the labor-oriented Economic Policy Institute, (Jared Bernstein)?

Biden's strong support for Amazon workers, and unions generally, is a welcome shift. Nothing like it has been heard from the chambers of power in many years. In a sharp reversal of Trump legislation, the tax changes raise incomes mostly for the poor, not the rich. Economic Policy Institute President Thea Lee summarizes the package by saying that it "will provide crucial support to millions of working families; dramatically reduce the race, gender, and income inequalities that were exacerbated by the crisis; and create the conditions for a truly robust recovery once the virus is under control and people are able to resume normal economic activity." Optimistic, but within reach.

House Democrats have passed other important legislation. H.R. 1 protects voting rights, a critical matter now, with Republicans working overtime to try to block the votes of [people of color] and the poor, recognizing that this is the only way a minority party dedicated to wealth and corporate power can remain viable.

On the labor front, the House passed the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act, "a critical step toward restoring workers' right to organize and bargain collectively," the Eco-

nomic Policy Institute reports, a fundamental right that "has been eroded for decades as employers exploited weaknesses in the current law." It'll probably be killed by the Senate. Even apart from party loyalty, there is little sympathy for working people in Republican ranks.

But even so, it's a basis for organizing and education. It can be a step toward revitalizing the labor movement, a prime target of the neoliberal project since Reagan and Thatcher, who understood well that working people must be deprived of means to defend themselves from the assault.

Decline of union membership is by now recognized, even in the mainstream, to be a major factor in rising inequality—a phrase that translates to "robbery of the general public by a tiny fraction of super-rich." The Economic Policy Institute has reviewed the facts regularly, most recently in a chart that graphically demonstrates the remarkable correlation between rising/falling union membership and falling/rising inequality.

More generally, there is a good opportunity to overcome the baleful legacy of Trump's bitterly anti-labor Labor Department, headed by corporate lawyer Eugene Scalia, who used his term in office to eviscerate worker rights, notoriously during the pandemic. Scalia was perfectly chosen for the transformation of the Republicans to a "working-class party," as hailed by Marco Rubio and Josh Hawley in a triumph of propaganda, or maybe sheer chutzpah.

Michael Regan's appointment as Environmental Protection Agency administrator should replace corporate greed by science and human welfare in this essential agency, a move toward human decency that in this case is a prerequisite for survival.

It's easy to find serious omissions and deficiencies in Biden's programs on the domestic front, but there are signs of hope for emerging from the Trump nightmare and moving on to what really should, what really must be done. The hopes are, however, conditional. The temporary measures of the stimulus on child poverty and many other issues must be made permanent, and improved. Crucially, activist pressure must not cease. The masters of the universe pursue their class war relentlessly, and can only be countered by an aroused public opposition that is no less dedicated to the common good.

What do you think of Biden's refusal to cancel $50,000 in student loans?

A bad decision. What the realistic options were, I don't frankly know. Higher education at a high level should be recognized to be a basic right, freely available, as it is elsewhere: in our Mexican neighbor, in rich developed countries like Germany, France, the Nordic countries, and a great many others, with at most nominal fees. As it substantially was in the U.S. when it was a much poorer country than it is today. The postwar GI Bill of Rights provided free education for great numbers of white males who would never have gone to college otherwise. There is no reason why young people of any race should be denied the privilege today.

In light of the January 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol, Biden has vowed to fight domestic terrorism by passing a new law "that respects free speech and civil liberties." Does the U.S. need a new domestic terrorism agenda?

A prior question is whether we should retain the current domestic terrorism agenda. There are strong reasons to question that. And any expansion should be a matter of serious concern. That aside, white supremacist violence is no laughing matter. Through the Trump years, the FBI and other monitors report

steadily increasing white supremacist terror, by now covering almost all recorded terror. Armed militias are rampant—Trump's "tough guys" as he's admiringly called them. The problems can't be overlooked, but have to be handled with great caution and a close eye on the temptations for abuse.

Biden has proposed a plan to strengthen the middle class by encouraging unionization and collective bargaining, and his recent affirmation of the rights of workers to unionize, which was widely interpreted as support for Amazon workers' rights to organize in Alabama, has spread considerable enthusiasm among progressives. Indeed, Biden's support for unions is in pace with the highly favorable ratings that unions have been receiving in the last couple of years. What's behind the support for unions in the present era?

One reason is objective reality. The sharp rise in inequality is a growing curse, with extremely harmful effects across the society. As mentioned earlier, it closely tracks decline of unions, for reasons that are well understood. Historically, labor unions have been in the forefront of struggles for justice and rights. They also pioneered the environmental movement, as we've discussed before. Workers' organizations are changing in character with the growth of service and knowledge-based economies. They have shared interests, and foster the values of solidarity and mutual aid on which the hope for a decent future rest. Many unions retain the world "international" in their names. It should not just be a symbol or a dream. The dire challenges we face have no borders. Global heating, pandemics, disarmament will be dealt with internationally, if at all. The same is true of labor rights and human rights more generally. At every level, associations of working people should once again be prominent, if not leading the way, toward a better world. ***Z***

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Excessive Wealth Disorder is Destroying Our Societies

By Rod Driver

David Rothkopf wrote a book about the world's richest people called *Superclass*. In it he noted that 161 people control $23 trillion, and that the incomes of the top 25 hedge fund managers are approximately $800 million per year each.(1) Other writers discuss the richest 0.1% of the population, who have incomes of over $2 million per year in the U.S.(2) They have coined the term Excessive Wealth Disorder to explain that when some people are too rich, this creates big downsides for many other people, and for society in general.

Excessive wealth is a symptom of an economic system that drains wealth from everybody else, because the biggest companies have enough power to exploit employees, suppliers, customers, governments and the environment. These people have not "earned" their wealth. They became rich because they understand how the system is rigged.

Property and Land

The buying power of rich people can drive prices upwards so that poor people cannot afford things. This is most noticeable with property. If we allow rich people to buy as many properties as they wish in any country, then property prices in certain areas, like London, New York, and other major cities, go up.

Historically, houses in the UK cost approximately four times average earnings. Now, in London and other expensive locations, homes cost ten times average earnings.(3) Many people now spend over half their income on rent or mortgage payments.(4)

New construction is geared towards maximizing profits for any given plot of land, so affordable housing is replaced with expensive housing that is mostly bought by people with excess wealth from around the world.(5) In London, 70% of new properties are sold to foreign investors, whilst poor people are forced out of their homes in what is known as "social cleansing."

Wasted Energy, Wasted Time, More Costs, Lower Standard of Living

Building a property requires large amounts of energy and resources. If we want to minimize global warming and the depletion of resources, then we will have to stop wasting energy on buildings that we do not need. Additionally, if people own multiple properties in different countries, they are much more likely to fly back and forth, again wasting large amounts of energy.

Lots of properties sit empty much of the time, because they are bought primarily as an investment rather than a home. This has been described as a "desert of wealth."(6) Ordinary people cannot afford them, so people who want to work in these cities have to commute further and further, increasing congestion, increasing costs for transport, and increasing energy consumption. When people spend more time travelling, they have less time to do other things, or to spend with their families, and many of them experience more stress.

Silicon Valley

Silicon Valley in the U.S., where many technology companies are based, is an excellent example. One commentator explained that billionaires there buy surrounding properties as a "privacy buffer." They "play real-life monopoly, buying up houses on their blocks and down the street for family, staff, art collections, or to hold political and philanthropic events."

Homes in Silicon Valley are too expensive for teachers, firefighters and other public servants, who end up commuting up to 2 hours each way.(7) Alternatively, people on low pay share rooms, with one commentator saying that they had come across extreme cases of 6 people sharing a room. Many students at local schools are homeless, living in trailers and shelters.

Property is the biggest item of expenditure for many people. Expensive homes (and higher spending on transport) leave poorer people with much less to spend on everything else. This means that they have a significantly lower standard of living. This has additional knock-on consequences for the rest of the economy. They spend less at other businesses, so it becomes more difficult for businesses to survive.

High Land Rents Are Too Expensive for Local Companies

The value of land for building expensive homes means that other activities that cannot generate high revenues are no longer viable. Councils sell city hospitals so that the land can be used by property developers.(8) The hospitals are relocated out-of-town on cheaper land, which is much less convenient

for many patients, but profitable for the council, and very profitable for the property developers.

Higher land values tend to increase business rents. This is fine for big international companies, such as McDonalds, but smaller or local businesses are unable to afford the rents, so more towns become clones with the same big chains. The general pattern is for small or local businesses to be priced out of the area. It becomes difficult for new, small businesses to get started. High business rents generally get passed on to customers in higher prices. This creates a general increase in the cost of living. Businesses selling high-priced coffee are of more relevance to the middle class than to the poor, who cannot afford it. In developing countries, large swathes of major cities contain only businesses that serve wealthier people. Many of the dominant businesses are international, so profits go overseas, leaving less to circulate locally.

Some local businesses, with strong ties to their communities, have benefits that go beyond economic, and are considered culturally important, but they cannot survive.(9) Local cultures are destroyed, and it becomes difficult for people with the wrong skills to earn a living in the area. Poorer communities are no longer able to easily access the businesses and services that might be useful for them.

Distorting The Economy

There have been people serving the interests of big companies for many years. This includes management consultants, corporate lawyers and lobbyists. In 2005, a report by Citigroup explained that there were going to be big profits to be made from servicing the needs of individuals with excessive wealth.(10) This has led to the creation of another layer of very well-paid jobs, such as wealth managers, tax specialists, offshore account experts, private bankers, and personal lawyers, whose main role is to serve the rich. Britain has actively changed its policies to attract excessively wealthy people. It has become the tax-dodging capital of the world, as hundreds of accountants, often from the Inland Revenue, are recruited to manipulate the tax system.(11)

Many well-educated people go to work for financial companies (particularly before the 2008 financial crisis) where their work is of no benefit to society in general. In fact their work ends up making society worse off, as it involves re-structuring the economy to enable shareholders and executives to extract more wealth from everybody else.

People with excessive wealth have so much money that they spend large amounts on status symbols. As with houses, the bigger luxury items, such as yachts, private jets, helicopters and cars like Rolls-Royces (many luxury car owners own many vehicles) use many resources to build, and use lots of energy to move because they are heavy. Pollution by the rich is on an altogether higher scale than pollution by everyone else, particularly in relation to the use of private jets, even for an occasional flight by their pets.(12)

Rich people are more likely to spend money in ways that do not benefit the majority of people. They buy imported luxury goods, such as jewellery, watches, expensive clothes, wine and cigars, and they participate in exclusive activities such as polo.(13) In some areas, such as expensive paintings, their wealth circulates in a parallel economic system, moving only between the bank accounts of the rich.

The System That Creates Excessive Wealth Causes Poverty

Advanced nations have not grown very much for the last two decades. This means that if some people are receiving more, others are receiving less. This is known as a zero-sum game. Most people in Britain are made poorer by a small amount over and over again because they pay more than they should for loans, credit card borrowing and hire–purchase agreements; for water, sewerage, electricity, gas, energy, food; for computers, phones, TVs and other electronic devices. Excessive wealth for a few people comes from the pockets of the majority. Similarly, if executives can negotiate lower pay for their employees or their suppliers, then the executives and shareholders get richer because others receive less.

The world's richest person, Jeff Bezos (CEO of Amazon) makes himself wealthier by exploiting garment workers in Bangladesh, and other staff all over the world. He also uses a business-model that is excessively-damaging to the environment, using huge amounts of packaging and energy, creating large amounts of waste and contributing to climate change. (14)

Similarly, more and more people are employed with little job-security, on zero-hours contracts.(15) This has far more impact than most people realize. Uncertainty of income makes it difficult to make long-term plans. It is difficult to buy a house, or even to agree a rental contract. Borrowing money becomes more difficult, so more people are forced to use high-interest payday lenders.

The existing economic system is built around the poorest people receiving less income, and having to pay more for everything, including basic necessities. In other words, the system that creates excessive wealth is a direct cause of poverty. Some readers might be shocked by this idea, as the mainstream media, and mainstream economists, never link the wealth of billionaires with the causes of poverty. But if you want to understand poverty, you have to study the role played by the rich in structuring the economy to benefit themselves.

It is much easier to see with examples in developing countries. These countries still have groups of people with immense wealth. They run the country, and rig the system, so that they can extract wealth from everyone else, and put it into their pockets. Some of them are literally stealing the wealth of the nation. (16) Millions of people are struggling to survive, because their rich politicians have consciously chosen not to provide food, water, sanitation, healthcare, education, and other essentials needed for development. The same is true in rich countries, but with less dramatic effects. We get more and more people queueing at food banks and in need of assistance, because the economy is structured to concentrate wealth into the hands of a few people.

The Psychology of Excessive Wealth

The psychological effects of excessive wealth have not been thoroughly studied. People tend to judge themselves relative to others. If we see people with immense wealth flying all over the world, and their lifestyles are presented as desirable, then many other people will aspire to those lifestyles. Even those who have substantial wealth by normal standards

still feel they want more. We begin to see owning multiple properties and having large numbers of foreign holidays as an automatic right, without questioning the downsides. The evidence shows clearly that beyond a certain level, more money does not make people happier. An important aspect of happiness involves being satisfied with what we have. This becomes more difficult when we are surrounded by propaganda celebrating excessive wealth. ***Z***

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Biden's Appeasement of Hawks and Neocons is Crippling His Diplomacy

Medea Benjamin and Nicolas J.S. Davies

President Biden took office promising a new era of American international leadership and diplomacy. But with a few exceptions, he has so far allowed self-serving foreign allies, hawkish U.S. interest groups and his own imperial delusions to undermine diplomacy and stoke the fires of war.

Biden's failure to quickly recommit to the Iran nuclear deal, or JCPOA, as Senator Sanders promised to do on his first day as president, provided a critical delay that has been used by opponents to undermine the difficult shuttle diplomacy taking place in Vienna to restore the agreement.

The attempts to derail talks range from the introduction of the Maximum Pressure Act on April 21 to codify the Trump administration's sanctions against Iran to Israel's cyberattack on Iran's Natanz nuclear facility. Biden's procrastination has only strengthened the influence of the hawkish Washington foreign policy "blob," Republicans and Democratic hawks in Congress and foreign allies like Netanyahu in Israel.

In Afghanistan, Biden has won praise for his decision to withdraw U.S. troops by September 11, but his refusal to abide by the May 1 deadline for withdrawal as negotiated under the Trump administration has led the Taliban to back out of the planned UN-led peace conference in Istanbul. A member of the Taliban military commission told the *Daily Beast* that "the U.S. has shattered the Taliban's trust."

Now active and retired Pentagon officials are regaling the *New York Times* with accounts of how they plan to prolong the U.S. war without "boots on the ground" after September, undoubtedly further infuriating the Taliban and making a ceasefire and peace talks all the more difficult.

In Ukraine, the government has launched a new offensive in its civil war against the ethnically Russian provinces in the eastern Donbass region, which declared unilateral independence after the U.S.-backed coup in 2014. On April 1, Ukraine's military chief of staff said publicly that "the participation of NATO allies is envisaged" in the government offensive, prompting warnings from Moscow that Russia could intervene to protect Russians in Donbass.

Sticking to their usual tired script, U.S. and NATO officials are pretending that Russia is the aggressor for conducting military exercises and troop movements within its own borders in response to Kiev's escalation. But even the BBC is challenging this false narrative, explaining that Russia is acting competently and effectively to deter an escalation of the Ukrainian offensive and U.S. and NATO threats. The U.S has turned around two U.S. guided-missile destroyers that were steaming toward the Black Sea, where they would only

have been sitting ducks for Russia's advanced missile defenses.

Tensions have escalated with China, as the U.S. Navy and Marines stalk Chinese ships in the South China Sea, well inside the island chains China uses for self defense. The Pentagon is hoping to drag NATO allies into participating in these operations, and the U.S. Air Force plans to shift more bombers to new bases in Asia and the Pacific, supported by existing larger bases in Guam, Japan, Australia and South Korea.

Meanwhile, despite a promising initial pause and policy review, Biden has decided to keep selling tens of billion dollars worth of weapons to authoritarian regimes in Saudi Arabia, the UAE and other Persian Gulf sheikdoms, even as they keep bombing and blockading famine-stricken Yemen. Biden's unconditional support for the most brutal authoritarian dictators on Earth lays bare the bankruptcy of the Democrats' attempts to frame America's regurgitated Cold War on Russia and China as a struggle between "democracy" and "authoritarianism."

In all these international crises (along with Cuba, Haiti, Iraq, North Korea, Palestine, Syria and Venezuela, which are bedevilled by the same U.S. unilateralism), President Biden and the hawks egging him on are pursuing unilateral policies that ignore solemn commitments in international agreements and treaties, riding roughshod over the good faith of America's allies and negotiating partners.

As the Russian foreign ministry bluntly put it when it announced its countermeasures to the latest round of U.S. sanctions, "Washington is unwilling to accept that there is no room for unilateral dictates in the new geopolitical reality."

Chinese President Xi Jinping echoed the same multipolar perspective on April 20 at the annual Boao Asian international business forum. "The destiny and future of the world should be decided by all nations, and rules set up just by one or several countries should not be imposed on others," Xi said. "The whole world should not be led by unilateralism of individual countries."

The near-universal failure of Biden's diplomacy in his first months in office reflects how badly he and those who have his ear are failing to accurately read the limits of American power and predict the consequences of his unilateral decisions.

Unilateral, irresponsible decision-making has been endemic in U.S. foreign policy for decades, but America's economic and military dominance created an international environment that was extraordinarily forgiving of American "mistakes," even as they ruined the lives of millions of people in the countries directly affected. Now America no longer dominates the world, and it is critical for U.S. officials to more accurately assess the relative power and positions of the United States and the countries and people it is confronting or negotiating with.

Under Trump, Defense Secretary Mattis launched negotiations to persuade Vietnam to host U.S. missiles aimed at China. The negotiations went on for three years, but they were based entirely on wishful thinking and misreadings of Vietnam's responses by U.S. officials and Rand Corp contractors. Experts agree that Vietnam would never violate a formal, declared policy of neutrality it has held and repeatedly reiterated since 1998.

As Gareth Porter summarized this silly saga: "The story of the Pentagon's pursuit of Vietnam as a potential military partner against China reveals an extraordinary degree of self-deception surrounding the entire endeavor. And it adds further detail to the already well-established picture of a muddled and desperate bureaucracy seizing on any vehicle possible to enable it to claim that U.S. power in the Pacific can still prevail in a war

with China."

Unlike Trump, Biden has been at the heart of American politics and foreign policy since the 1970s. So the degree to which he too is out of touch with today's international reality is a measure of how much and how quickly that reality has changed and continues to change. But the habits of empire die hard. The tragic irony of Biden's ascent to power in 2020 is that his lifetime of service to a triumphalist American empire has left him ill-equipped to craft a more constructive and cooperative brand of American diplomacy for today's multipolar world

Amid the American triumphalism that followed the end of the Cold War, the neocons developed a simplistic ideology to persuade America's leaders that they need no longer be constrained in their use of military power by domestic opposition, peer competitors or international law. They claimed that America had virtually unlimited military freedom of action and a responsibility to use it aggressively, because, as Biden parroted them recently, "the world doesn't organize itself."

The international violence and chaos Biden has inherited in 2021 is a measure of the failure of the neocons' ambitions. But there is one place that they conquered, occupied and still rule to this day, and that is Washington DC.

The dangerous disconnect at the heart of Biden's foreign policy is the result of this dichotomy between the neocons' conquest of Washington and their abject failure to conquer the rest of the world.

For most of Biden's career, the politically safe path on foreign policy for corporate Democrats has been to talk a good game about human rights and diplomacy, but not to deviate too far from hawkish, neoconservative policies on war, military spending, and support for often repressive and corrupt allies throughout America's neocolonial empire.

The tragedy of such compromises by Democratic Party leaders is that they perpetuate the suffering of millions of people affected by the real-world problems they fail to fix. But the Democrats' subservience to simplistic neoconservative ideas also fails to satisfy the hawks they are trying to appease, who only smell more political blood in the water at every display of moral weakness by the Democrats.

In his first three months in office, Biden's weakness in resisting the bullying of hawks and neocons has led him to betray the most significant diplomatic achievements of each of his predecessors, Obama and Trump, in the JCPOA with Iran and the May 1 withdrawal agreement with the Taliban respectively, while perpetuating the violence and chaos the neocons unleashed on the world.

For a president who promised a new era of American diplomacy, this has been a dreadful start. We hope he and his advisers are not too blinded by anachronistic imperial thinking or too intimidated by the neocons to make a fresh start and engage with the world as it actually exists in 2021. ***Z***

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Transcending "The Religion of Whiteness"

By Robert C. Koehler

Basically, Derek Chauvin was convicted of enforcing the status quo. Because his behavior was caught on video—his knee on George Floyd's neck, oh my God, choking him to death—and looked so disturbing to most of the public, official American "justice" had to take some sort of action.

He became a scapegoat.

I'm not saying Chauvin was innocent. What he did was horrific: racism plus murder. What happened had to be addressed, because we're not the country we were, oh, 60, 70 or 100 years ago, when killing a black human being—lynching him or her—was not only no big deal, it was often a cause of celebration. Morally, we've moved forward half an inch since then. The police killing of an unarmed black person, if it's caught on video, sometimes leads to the officer's dismissal, if not an actual arrest and trial.

What a caring, fair and morally scrupulous country this is. But what if . . . what if . . . the words I just wrote were actually true?

I refuse to believe this is an impossible fantasy, though undoing the effects of American white supremacy—what Robert Baird, writing recently in *The Guardian*, called "the religion of whiteness"—is an undertaking almost too large to fathom. It involves digging well past the hypocrisy of the nation's founding fathers, back to the roots of, that is to say, the justification for, African slavery: the reduction of a segment of humanity to nothing more than chattel. "Whiteness" was invented by Europe-

ans in the Age of Discovery as a way of justifying their belief that they owned the planet.

The effects of this belief encompass and deeply warp everything that has happened since, from privileged individual cruelty to—far more significantly—the building of the modern world. I believe we actually are in the process of undoing this world, even if we don't know it.

Racism most obviously manifests as individual behavior, often triggered by fear—the fear of non-white people crossing a particular border. In the Jim Crow era, those borders were everywhere, from drinking fountains and bathrooms to the communities in which we lived. The borders may shift and wobble, but the idea of the border itself, whatever it is, remains sacrosanct. Stay on your own side!

For instance, when George Floyd was killed, he happened to be at a significant intersection in Minneapolis, which separated a white community from a black one. "Police departments don't exist as independent governmental agencies, but are extensions of the will of the communities and cities that they serve," Mark Karlin writes at *BuzzFlash*. That is to say, police departments were established to protect, not humanity in general, but white people in particular. They act as an occupying army. And armies have no purpose whatsoever unless there's an enemy—that is to say, a dehumanized segment of humanity.

I became familiar with life inside police world early in my career as a journalist, when my reporting duties included writing three police blotters a week, requiring that I visit and look through the crime reports at three different Chicago police stations. I got to know lots of officers, became friends with a number of them, but...when Harold Washington ran for mayor of Chicago, in 1983, the racism in the stations was visceral. It became uncontained. The officers, all white in those days, couldn't stop talking about how much they hated (and feared) him.

One unforgettable memory: A female neighborhood relations officer—she was a nice person, we got along wonderfully—asked me, out of the blue: "What do you call 20,000 dead (n-words) at the bottom of Lake Michigan?" I stared at her in jaw-dropping silence. She said: "A start."

The "joke" was uttered in a context of collective certainty. Everyone there knew who the enemy was. Not surprisingly, another agency created to protect white borders—a.k.a. ICE—has generated plenty of headlines in recent years about its treatment of asylum-seekers and their children at the Southern border, not to mention ICE officers' secret Facebook pages, where they post comments such as "It's a good day for a choke hold" and make fun of the deaths of migrants.

These are official government programs. It's not that they're populated with bad people. It's that they're populated with "white people"—a made-up concept that is likely to bring out the worst in anyone who identifies as such. We've tried to turn the concept into something neutral—a color or ethnicity you check on a questionnaire—but the entire concept is a lie with roots that go back to the dawn of African slavery and other forms of European genocide against "nonwhites."

And not all manifestations of racism are punch-in-the-eye obvious. Consider something as seemingly neutral and beneficial as building highways and other national infrastructure. Turns out, for instance, the interstate highway program, begun during the Eisenhower administration, was driven by racism, often slicing through, and destroying, vibrant communities of color even as it avoided doing harm to white communities.

Urban historian Eric Avila, quoted recently in the *New York Times*, noted: "These highways were essentially built as conduits for wealth. Primarily white wealth, jobs, people,

markets. The highways were built to promote the connectivity between suburbs and cities. The people that were left out were urban minorities. African-Americans, immigrants, Latinos."

Fascinatingly, the *Times* article points out that President Biden's $2 trillion infrastructure proposal includes allocating money to repair, to whatever extent possible, the racism-based damage of that old program. Exactly what will be done isn't clear, nor is it certain the infrastructure plan itself will survive Congress, but even still, it opens up a stunning question: Is the Biden administration under the influence of more than the interests of whiteness?

And the question beyond that one is: Are we really changing? Are we transcending the religion that gave us slavery? ***Z***

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