

PHOTO LEGACY OF CIVIL RIGHTS FIGHT | GORDON PARKS
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JONATHAN COOK ON THE DOUBLE STANDARDS OF WESTERN MEDIA

*Executions.
Torture.
Babies left
to die. Sexual
abuse. These
are Israel's
war crimes*

SO WHY
IS THE
MEDIA SO
RELUCTANT
TO FOCUS
ON THEM?

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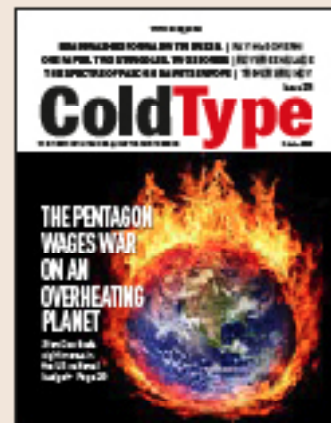
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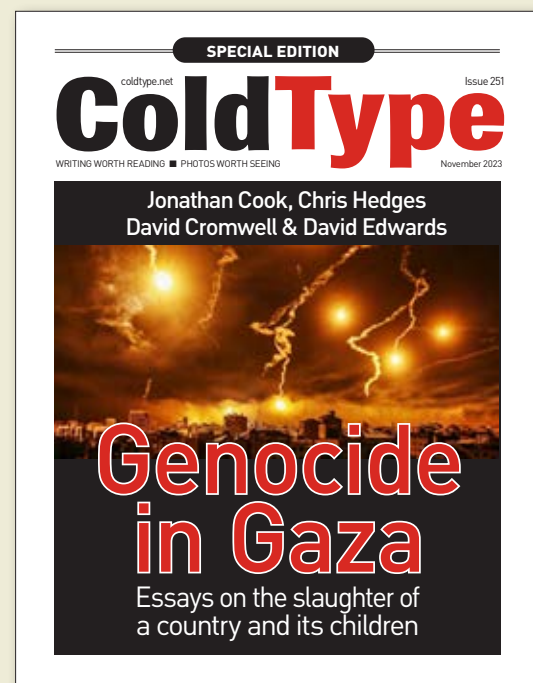
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VERGE OF STARVATION: Gaza Residents line up for bread outside a bombed-out Gaza bakery.

► VIJAY PRASHAD

A reminder from Gaza: Starvation is a war crime

Speaking in Rome, Italy, the head of the United Nations World Food Program Cindy McCain said recently, “If we do not exponentially increase the size of aid going into the northern areas” of Gaza, “famine is imminent. It’s imminent.”

More than 30,000 Palestinians

have been killed in Gaza by the genocidal Israeli war, and the Palestinians who live are on the verge of famine.

Riyad Mansour, Palestine’s Permanent Observer at the United Nations, said that over half a million people are “one step away from famine.”

“What it means for mothers and fathers to hear their babies and children cry of hunger day and night, no milk, no bread, nothing,” he added. Indeed, babies and children already have begun to die due to the famine-like conditions in Gaza. With Ramadan already begun, the situation is not only physically acute, but also mentally torturous.

There are currently 2,000 medical workers who are trying their best to operate basic medical care in northern Gaza. They are working without access to any hospital facilities and often with no power

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or water, including very limited supplies of medicines. Now, the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Gaza has said that these workers are themselves in a dire situation. The staff, said the Ministry, “will start Ramadan without Suhoor or Iftar meals.”

“Doctors will die. The nurses there will die. And the world will witness the largest number of victims of hunger in the coming days,” said Ashraf al-Qudra, the ministry’s spokesperson.

In June 1977, at a conference on humanitarian law in armed conflict, the member states of the United Nations extended the Geneva Conventions (1949) to add Protocol II. Article 14 of that protocol says that “[s]tarvation of civilians as a method of combat is prohibited.” The belligerent power is “prohibited to attack, destroy, remove, or render useless” any “objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as foodstuffs, agricultural areas for the production of foodstuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies and irrigation works.”

Two decades later, when the UN member states wrote up the Rome Statute (1998), they added in a section on starvation under the heading of war crimes (Article 8); “intentionally using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare by depriving them of objects indispensable to their survival, including wilfully impeding relief supplies” is a war crime.

The Rome Statute is the treaty that formed the International Criminal Court (ICC), which has thus far remained silent on its obligations to act on its own founding document.

On February 29th, trucks with humanitarian aid came into the northern part of Gaza. When desperate people rushed to these trucks, Israeli soldiers fired on them and killed at least 118 unarmed civilians. This is now known as the Flour Massacre. In its aftermath, 10 UN experts released a strong statement, which noted, “Israel has been intentionally starving the Palestinian people in Gaza since 8 October. Now it is targeting civilians seeking humanitarian aid and humanitarian convoys.”

The UN special rapporteur for food, Michael Fakhri, who signed that statement, later expanded this accusation, saying “Israel,” he told the UN Human Rights Council, “has mounted a starvation campaign against the Palestinian people in Gaza.” These statements are very pointed. Words such as “intentionally” and phrases such as “starvation campaign” directly accuse Israel of war crimes based on Protocol II and the Rome Statute.

Fakhri focused on Gaza’s fishing industry, which had provided important food security for the 2.3 million Palestinians who live there. “Israeli forces,” he said, have “decimated the Port of Gaza, destroying every single fishing boat and shack. In Rafah, only two out of 40 boats are left.

In Khan Younis, Israel destroyed 75 small-scale fishing vessels.” This destruction, Fakhri said, has pushed Gaza “into hunger and starvation. In fact,” he added, “Israel has been strangling Gaza for 17 years through a blockade, which included denying and restricting small-scale fishers access to their territorial waters.”

At the UN General Assembly, Palestine’s Riyad Mansour said that Israel has bombed “every bakery and farm, destroying livestock and all

means of food production.” In the first month of the bombardment, Israel bombed the major bakeries of Gaza City.

In November 2023, Abdelnasser al-Jarmi of the Bakery Owners Association in the Gaza Strip said bakeries have not been able to function for lack of fuel and flour. As a consequence of the absence of bread, families have begun to gather a weed called khubaiza (or Malva parviflora) and to boil this as the main meal. “We are dying for a piece of bread,” said Fatima Shaheen as she built a meal for her two sons and their children in northern Gaza.

Israel has refused to fully open the crossings into Gaza at Beit Hanoun and Karem Abu Salem and has refused to allow complete opening of the Rafah crossing that links Gaza to Egypt. Since these crossings are closed, and since Israel destroyed the Yasser Arafat International Airport in 2001, there are no easy solutions to bring food aid into Gaza.

Delivery of food and supplies through the air is not sufficient – it is a drop in the ocean (which is where some of the aid packages landed). There is now talk of building maritime corridors, but since Israel has bombed the Port of Gaza this is not an easy option.

That the US has said that it would build a temporary pier off the coast of Gaza’s southern half is ridiculous. It would be so much easier to open the Rafah crossing to allow at least 500 trucks a day into Gaza. But Israel will not permit this option. International law is clear as daylight on the point of starvation as a war crime. There are no loopholes in Protocol II (1977) or in the Rome Statute (1998). Friends in Gaza

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are finding this Ramadan month to be more difficult than any previously. Starvation is their general condition. But, unlike with other Ramadans, there is no early morning meal (Suhoor) and no late-night meal (Iftar). There is only the perennial noise of Israeli fighter jets mirrored by the groans of hunger in their bellies. **CT**

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better – with more consistent payments and a smoother transition from the old system.

Sunak leads a government that has introduced the most draconian anti-protest laws in our democratic history. These laws are deployed exclusively against official enemies: environmental campaigners, republicans, feminists, Muslims. If you belong to one of these groups and you block a road, you might go to prison. If you are a farmer and you block a road, the prime minister might join you.

The protest the prime minister attended displayed the banners of No Farmers, No Food, a group convened by a notorious conspiracy theorist, James Melville. He has promoted many of the usual rightwing fictions: claiming that 15-minute cities create urban prisons; falsely downplaying the impacts of Covid-19; pushing anti-vax messages to the point of absurdity; and even appearing to fall for a deliberately planted falsehood, designed to trap thoughtless conspiracy theorists.

He inveighs against the measures required to prevent climate breakdown – with one exception. Last December he argued that instead of changing anyone’s lives, we should plant “billions” of trees. As if to show how cynical his new campaign is, No Farmers, No Food promotes attacks on the Welsh government’s efforts to plant more trees.

No Farmers, No Food has also been pushing standard conspiracy fictions. It has become catnip for the global far right, some of whose leading figures have lent their support. Do farmers really want to be represented by this organisation?

Farmers in the UK have genu-



Welsh farmers protest against the government’s attempts to meet its environmental obligations.

► GEORGE MONBIOT

Why did the PM protest against his own policies?

Step back a pace to see how weird this is. Last month, the prime minister of the United Kingdom joined a protest against one of the UK’s four governments. Farmers had obstructed a road in Llandudno with their tractors to demonstrate against the

Welsh government’s attempts to meet its environmental obligations under UK law. The policies the protesters were attacking are similar to the policies Rishi Sunak’s government has introduced for England. The main difference is that in Wales, the offer for farmers is

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ine grievances. In many cases they receive a tiny share, or none at all, of the profits from the sale of food, which tend to be captured by supermarkets and processors such as flour mills. These buyers also impose absurdly tight standards, which have nothing to do with food quality and everything to do with their own convenience. Farmers are also right to contest the one-sided trade deals with Australia and New Zealand that Liz Truss rushed through at breakneck speed, so she could have something to boast about at the G7 summit in 2021.

But these were not the main focus of Friday's protest in Llandudno and the much bigger one in Cardiff today. These demonstrations are aimed at the Welsh government's attempts to green farming. Or, to be more precise, at a fictitious story about its efforts to do so.

Perhaps the most extraordinary aspect of this campaign is that the Welsh government's consultation paper already proposes to meet all but one of the protesting farmers' demands. The single exception is the protesters' insistence that the badger cull is resumed, to stop bovine TB: a policy that has repeatedly been shown to make the problem worse.

The consultation, at great length and with unprecedented care, was co-designed with farmers. It has been shaped around the sector's demands. Even before the current paper, which has responded to yet more feedback, the government's proposals enjoyed widespread support among farmers.

The only gap in the plans is the exact amount of money farmers will receive. But this is out of the Welsh government's hands. It's waiting on the Westminster spending review. Who controls the spending review?

Ah yes, Rishi Sunak, who told the protesters on Friday: "It's absolutely not right, the impact it will have on your jobs, your livelihoods, your incomes and food production around the country."

Neither Sunak nor the other protesters show any sign of having read the proposals they're complaining about. The current protests are uninformed, reactive, misleading and a waste of farmers' energy and attention. But for culture war entrepreneurs and the far right, they're paydirt. Real farmers are being played by outrage farmers.

Those of us who have read the consultation can see that the Welsh government isn't forcing farmers to do anything. It is simply proposing changes to the subsidy system. Instead of subsidising ongoing destruction, as the EU's terrible policies did (escaping the Common Agricultural Policy is the one genuine benefit of Brexit), it applies a basic principle, also endorsed by the Westminster government: public money should deliver public goods. None of the conditions it proposes to attach to farm subsidies are unreasonable; all can help to improve the viability and resilience of farm businesses.

In fact, the proposed measures have the opposite problem: they are woefully unmatched to the scale of the environmental challenge we face. No Farmers, No Food might deny it, but we are in the midst of a climate emergency. The most prominent figures in the current protest movements are Welsh sheep farmers. I don't blame them for it but, with the possible exception of scallop dredging, sheep farming in the

UK has the highest ratio of destruction to production of any food business in Europe. It produces a very small amount of lamb and mutton, yet, because sheep selectively browse out tree seedlings, it keeps some 4-million hectares of our hills deforested. That's similar to the total area used to grow crops here. In the uplands, the situation could be summarised as "Lots of Farming, Little Food".

Sheep farmers I've met who have joined these protests talk a lot about "the treeline". But there is nowhere in Wales too high for trees to grow. Britain's western hills would, in the absence of sheep, be largely clothed with temperate rainforest, one of the richest and rarest habitats in Europe. This environmental disaster has been created by subsidies: sheep farming otherwise makes a loss. It is taxpayer-funded destruction on an industrial scale. The Welsh government's proposals do little to address this catastrophe.

We all have a right to be heard on this issue: there should be no taxation without representation. But in setting farm policy, all four governments of the United Kingdom tend to listen almost exclusively to farmers. Even this, the protesters insist, is not enough. Their message to us is, in effect, "give us your money, with no strings attached".

Joining these protests, Rishi Sunak is yet another opportunist seizing his chance, using fake grievances to distract attention from real injustices. But this one, God help us, is our prime minister. **CT**

George Monbiot is a columnist for the Guardian where this was first published, His website is www.monbiot.com.

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► BINOY KAMPMARK

US Congress tosses TikTok overboard

How delicious is political hypocrisy. Abundant and rich, it manifests in the corridors of power with regularity. Of late, there is much of it in the US Congress, evident over debates on whether the platform TikTok should be banned in the United States.

Much of this seems based on an assumption that foreign companies are not entitled to Hoover up, commodify and use the personal data of users, mocking, if not obliterating privacy altogether. US companies, however, are. While it is true that aspects of Silicon Valley have drawn the ire of those on The Hill in spouts of select rage, giants such as Meta and Google continue to use the business model of surveillance capitalism with reassurance and impunity.

In May 2023, the disparity of treatment between the companies was laid bare in a Congressional hearing that smacked the hands of Mark Zuckerberg and Sundar Pichai with little result, while lacerating TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew. "Your platform should be banned," blustered Chair Cathy McMorris-Rodgers (R-WA) of the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

The ongoing concern, and one with some basis, is TikTok's link with parent company ByteDance. Being based in China, the nexus with the authoritarian state that wields influence on its operations is a legitimate concern, given national

security laws requiring the company to share data with officials. But the line of questioning proved obtuse and confused, revealing an obsession with themes resonant with McCarthyite hysteria. On several occasions, the word "communists" issued from the lips of the irate politicians, including regular references to the Chinese Community Party.

Alex Cranz, writing for *The Verge*, summarised the hectoring session well: "Between their obses-



sion with communism, their often obnoxious and condescending tone, and the occasional assumption that Chew was Chinese, despite his repeated reminders that he is Singaporean, the hearing was a weird, brutal, xenophobic mess."

TikTok, for its part, continues to tell regulators that it has taken adequate steps to wall off the data of its 150-million users in the US from ByteDance's operations, expending US\$1.5-billion in its efforts to do so. A January investigation by the *Wall Street Journal*, however, found that "managers sometimes instruct

workers to share data with colleagues in other parts of the company and with ByteDance workers without going through official channels". How shocking.

Cranz might have also mentioned something else: that the entire show was vaudevillian in its ignorance of US government practices that involved doing exactly what ByteDance and TikTok are accused of: demanding that companies share user data with officials. If he is to be forgotten for everything else, Edward Snowden's 2013 disclosures on the National Security Agency's collaboration with US telecom and internet companies on that point should be enshrined in posterity's halls.

The PRISM program, as it was called, involved the participation of such Big Tech firms as Google, Facebook, YouTube and Apple in sharing the personal data of users with the NSA. Largely because of Snowden's revelations, end-to-end encryption became both urgent and modish. "An enormous fraction of global internet traffic travelled electronically naked," Snowden remarked in an interview with *The Atlantic* last year. "Now it is a rare sight."

The US House of Representatives has now made good its threats against TikTok in passing a bill that paves the way for the possible imposition of a ban of the app. It gives ByteDance a six-month period of grace to sell its stake in the company, lest it face a nationwide block. Whether it passes the Senate is an open question, given opposition to it by certain Republicans, including presidential hopeful Donald Trump. Other politicians fear losing an invaluable bridge in communicating with youthful voters.

On March 13, however, the right-

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eous were shining in confidence. The House's top Democrat, Hakeem Jeffries, claimed that the bill would lessen "the likelihood that TikTok user data is exploited and privacy undermined by a hostile foreign adversary" while Wisconsin Republican Mike Gallagher declared that the US could no longer "take the risk of having a dominant news platform in America controlled by a company that is beholden to the Chinese Communist Party."

The subtext: best leave the despoiling and abuse to US companies.

The blotted copybooks of such giants as Meta and Google have tended to only feature in morally circumscribed ways, sparing the model of their business operations from severe scrutiny.

On January 31, the Senate Judiciary Committee gave a farcical display of rant and displeasure over the issue of what it called "the Online Child Exploitation Crisis." Pet terrors long nursed were on show: the mania about paedophiles using social media platforms to stalk their quarry; financial extortion of youth; sexploitation; drug dealing.

Senator Josh Hawley (R-MO) made much of Zuckerberg on that occasion, but only as a prop to apologise to victims of Meta's approach to child users.

The Meta CEO has long known that such palliative displays only serve as false catharsis; the substance and rationale of how his company operations gather data never changes. And the show was also all the more sinister in providing a backdrop for Congressional paranoia, exemplified in such proposed measures as the Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA).

The Electronic Frontier Founda-

tion has rightly called KOSA a censorship bill which smuggles in such concepts as "duty of care" as a pretext to monitor information and conduct on the Internet. The attack on TikTok is ostensibly similar in protecting users in the US from the prying eyes of Beijing's officials while waving through the egre-

gious assaults on privacy by the Silicon Valley behemoths. How wonderfully patriotic. **CT**

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► CHRIS MILLS RODRIGO

We need a Marshall Plan for public media

America's media institutions have had a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad start to 2024.

The Messenger, a well-funded, high-profile news site, dissolved after less than a year. Big newspapers from the *Los Angeles Times* to the *Indianapolis Star* saw major layoffs. And *Sports Illustrated* fell into licensing limbo while sites like BuzzFeed, Vice News, or Complex found themselves at best on life support.

The over 500 media jobs elim-

inated so far this year reflect a broader, worrying trend. By this year's end, according to one recent estimate, America will have lost one third of all its newspapers – and two-thirds of all its newspaper staff – since 2005.

The losses have been particularly acute in poor and rural communities, leaving ever expanding news deserts all across the nation.

The collapse of news outlets, especially local papers, is robbing our communities of indispensable watch dogs. The disappearance of

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reporters from city council meetings and public safety hearings is creating oversight vacuums that leave citizens in the dark and enable shady dealings that let the wealthy exercise undue – and undetected – influence.

How did a country once chock-full of influential newspapers morph into a land of news deserts?

One major factor, says University of Pennsylvania media studies scholar Victor Pickard, has been the disintegration of the advertising model. In short, search engines and social media sites are eating up revenue that once went to local papers.

Hence the rise of paywalls everywhere as more outlets resort to subscriptions. That works well for some, but subscriptions haven't been enough to replace ad funding in most cases – especially for larger publications or those that serve less wealthy audiences.

Other outlets have counted on the benevolence of billionaire buyers. But that creates real concerns about the influence of exorbitantly wealthy owners – who have been increasingly unwilling to foot the bill for quality journalism.

The *Washington Post* – owned by Jeff Bezos, who recently became the richest man alive again – offered buyouts to 240 employees this past fall. And *Los Angeles Times* owner Patrick Soon-Shiong's net worth of nearly \$6-billion didn't save the jobs of the 115 workers the paper laid off this January.

Is there an alternative to for-profit journalism? To be sure, we've seen some exciting developments in nonprofit and worker-owned journalism. But these proposals remain limited in scope.

Given all this, some experts are calling for a fundamental rethink-

ing of how we value journalism.

"The information produced by journalism should always be – and should have always been – treated as a public good," Victor Pickard told me. "And that, by its very nature, is not something that's easily monetised."

Good reporting takes more resources to produce than it can easily recoup in digital ad dollars or fundraising. The answer? A commitment to public media funding.

The United States does, of course, invest some money in public media.

Last year Congress allocated \$535-million to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the private nonprofit corporation tasked with investing in public radio and television. And some promising experiments are taking place at the state level, with California, New Mexico, and Washington devoting public tax dollars for local news coverage.

But that funding is a drop in the bucket compared to what's needed.

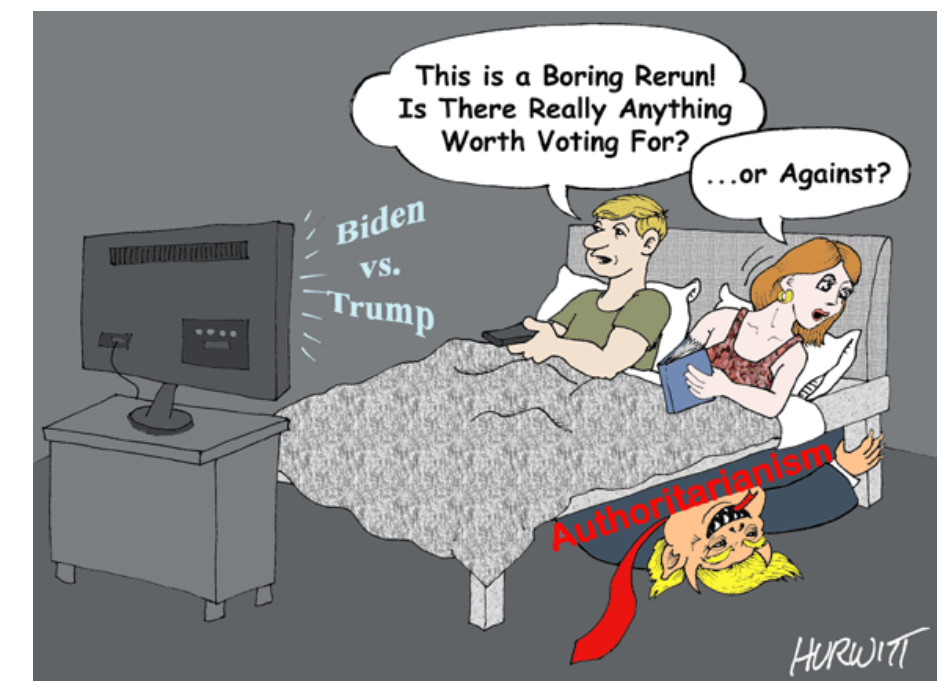
A 2022 study comparing funding globally found the US spends just \$3.16 per capita on public media, compared to \$142.42 per person in Germany and \$110.73 in Norway. Spending as much on journalism as the United Kingdom does on the BBC would mean \$35-billion a year going to sustaining coverage.

We need, as *The Nation's* John Nichols recently argued, a "Marshall Plan" for journalism – a robust new era of public funding. Our democracy deserves better than to rely on ad dollars that are rapidly drying up. **CT**

Chris Mills Rodrigo is the managing editor of Inequality.org at the Institute for Policy Studies. This op-ed was adapted from Inequality.org and distributed for syndication by OtherWords.org.

HURWITT'S EYE

MARK HURWITT



INSIGHTS

► JUAN COLE

Biden owes apology to Mavi Marmara victims

President Joe Biden owes an apology to fellow American Furkan Doğan, whom Israeli commandos murdered on May 31, 2010, as he videoed their illegal attack in international waters on the aid ship Mavi Marmara. At the time, Biden justified the massacre.

Doğan and other volunteers were trying to bring food and medical aid to Gaza. After their cargo was seized by the Israelis, the latter actually delivered it to the UN for distribution in Gaza. This act served as an admission that the cargo was inoffensive, and there had been no reason to kill all those volunteers.

Doğan's impulse has been vindicated by President Biden's decision to send a US Navy flotilla to Gaza to succour the starving Palestinians. Biden's action has the same legality as that of the crew of Mavi Marmara.

Since Biden seems now to agree that someone should do something to stop Israel's government from starving the Palestinians, he should give Doğan a medal for having thought of it first and having tried to do something about the food insecurity imposed by Israel on Gaza from 2006. Doğan gave his life at the age of 19 for a cause that Biden is now implicitly admit-

ting was just.

On May 31, 2010, Israeli commandos boarded five humanitarian aid ships in international waters, whose crews and aid workers had expressed the intention of sailing to Gaza to break the Israeli embargo on aid to its occupied territory.

The occupation of four of the five ships went smoothly, but it may be that some aid workers put up a fight on the fifth, the Mavi Marmara, finding anything to hand to fend off

One was Doğan, the American citizen, and the nine were Turkish nationals. The American was a journalist. No weapons were found aboard the ship, despite complaints by the Israeli military that a ship had some iron bars on it, which were wielded as bats.

The world's most whiny army initially tried to depict the ship as having had arms (it didn't) and charged that the volunteers were terrorists (they weren't, except insofar as having sympathies for oppressed Palestinians makes you a terrorist.)

A UN Human Rights Council report found the attack on the aid ships "clearly unlawful." The report said that "there is clear evidence to support prosecutions of crimes such as wilful killing, torture or inhuman treatment, and wilfully causing great suffering or serious injury to body or health."

The UN concluded, "Furkan Doğan, a 19-year-old with dual Turkish and United States citizenship, was on the central area of the top deck filming with a small video camera when he was first hit with live fire. It appears that he was lying on the deck in a conscious, or semi-conscious, state for some time.

In total Furkan received five bullet wounds, to the face, head, back thorax, left leg and foot. All of the entry wounds were on the back of his body, except for the face wound which entered to the right of his nose.

According to forensic analysis, tattooing around the wound in his face indicates that the shot was delivered at point blank range. Fur-



Download Coldtype's special report featuring Kevin Neish's eyewitness photographs of the 2010 Israeli attack on the Mavi Marmara – www.coldtype.net/Assets23/PDFs/MaviRevise.pdf

the Israeli parachutists. They had no firearms or formal weaponry.

Since the ship was in international waters, they were within their rights to attempt to prevent the boarding of their ship. Encountering opposition, the Israeli commander ordered his troops to open fire on these unarmed civilians, killing ten noncombatants.

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thermore, the trajectory of the wound, from bottom to top, together with a vital abrasion to the left shoulder that could be consistent with the bullet exit point, is compatible with the shot being received while he was lying on the ground on his back.

The other wounds were not the result of firing in contact, near contact or close range, but it is not otherwise possible to determine the exact firing range. The wounds to the leg and foot were most likely received in a standing position."

The ships were attacked to maintain illegal Israeli control over the Palestinians of Gaza.

Israel had withdrawn troops and settlers from Gaza in 2005, but retained control of its land borders, its air space, and its seacoast.

After Hamas won the 2006 elections, Dov Weisglas, spokesman for the prime minister, explained of the Israeli blockade on the Gaza Strip, "The idea is to put the Palestinians on a diet, but not to make them die of hunger."

As a result of this policy of limiting aid into the Gaza Strip, a majority of the population was reduced to food insecurity.

The BBC reported that after a few years of this blockade, an Israeli report on it was released by court order: "The report cites a number of ailments suffered by Palestinian children in Gaza.

Ten percent of children under five have stunted growth due to prolonged exposure to malnutrition. Anaemia, caused by an iron deficiency, affects 58.6 percent of schoolchildren, 68.1 percent of children nine to 12 months old and 36.8 percent of pregnant mothers." That was in 2012.

Since the Israelis were allowed

to get away all those years with half-starving the Palestinians, the Netanyahu government appears to have decided that it has carte blanche to up the ante from putting them on a diet to actually starving them to death. Biden has been forced by public outcry to at least try to put a band-aid on this problem by sending in the US navy with food aid. It is too little too late.

If Biden had had Furkan Doğan's

empathy and decisiveness, we would not be in this mess. **CT**

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► PEOPLE'S DISPATCH

Real estate agents try to sell stolen Palestinian land

The Great Israeli Real Estate Event toured the United States and Canada, exhibiting property for sale on stolen Palestinian land. Each event has been met with mass protests by Palestine solidarity activists.

The events featured the real estate company My Home in Israel and were hosted in: Montreal; Toronto; Teaneck, New Jersey; Lawrence, New York; and Brooklyn, New York.

These showcases of illegal settlement properties are not uncommon in US Jewish communities, but due to the genocide in Gaza, Palestine has received increased scrutiny in North America.

The Palestine solidarity movement sprang into action, protesting outside of all five events across the US and Canada.

The final event, in Brooklyn, scheduled for March 13, was cancelled in response to a scheduled protest and after the four prior

events were met with demonstrations. Each of these events was held at a synagogue, which made any protests susceptible to accusations of antisemitism.

Grant Miner, a Jewish graduate student at Columbia, spoke at a protest in front of the Brooklyn Public Library, a rally that was originally going to be right in front of the real estate event in Flatbush, Brooklyn.

However, due to successful protest and public pressure, this last iteration of the "Great Israeli Real Estate Event" was cancelled.

"As people of conscience, we would be opposed to this, no matter where it took place," Miner said. "But why did they put it in a synagogue? It's because they want to be able to cry antisemitism when we as a multinational movement of people, which includes Jews like myself... come together to confront this illegal act." **CT**

– from the Peoples Dispatch / Globetrotter News Service.

► MATT KENNARD

Julian Assange's great American nightmare

Whistleblower may soon be on his way to the US to face trial for revealing war crimes. What he faces there is terrifying beyond words

Babar Ahmad was extradited from Britain to the United States in 2012 on charges of providing material support to terrorism because of two articles published on his website backing the Taliban government in Afghanistan.

He spent eight years fighting the extradition, but when it eventually happened he flew across the Atlantic on an executive jet from RAF Mildenhall in Suffolk. He had no idea what was coming next.

"I think it was, like, a 12-seater plane," Ahmad tells me. "Three sections of four seats. So there's two big seats facing each other. Big, square, comfortable leather seats."

Outside it was pitch black.

"They kept asking, 'do you need anything? Do you want a glass of water?' I said, 'can I have something to read?'"

The US official gave him a newsletter for public workers. "I'm just looking at the baseball result from Connecticut or something."

Sitting on the plane, there was no chit chat, but at some point they asked him if he was hungry. Ahmad said he was.

"So they came and they gave me this MRE pack: meals ready to eat. A big pack. They undid one of the cuffs on my right hand just so that

DEADLINE NEWS

JULIAN Assange's appeal against extradition to the US was put on hold on March 26 when two UK High Court judges delayed their decision until April 16 to give US prosecutors time to give various written "assurances" including that Assange would not face the death sentence if he is extradited for trial.

I could eat."

While he was eating, a homeland security official came and he sat down opposite him. "His job is to do the small talk, to try and get information out of you, and to get you to give some sort of confession, which then later he files as a statement to use against you," Ahmad says.

"I did all the small talk and whenever anything would come up related to the case, I'd just say 'look, I'm sorry, I can't talk about that'."

Ahmad said the official was using the 'good cop' technique. "He was trying to make a connection, talking about childhood, which is just normal conversation, like two strangers just having a normal chat," he says. "They do that to make you comfortable. But the underlying reason is obviously not to chit-chat,

it's to build a connection so that you will open up and you'll be able to answer their questions."

The US official told Ahmad he had been investigating him for 11 years and made 30 trips to the UK for that purpose.

"Then he told me he had been in Britain for five days waiting for my court case to finish. 'I even missed the new episode of Homeland,' he said, 'because I was going through that. You made me miss it.' Half joke, half serious."

Ahmad says at some point he grew tired and said he wanted to lie down.

"They let me lie down on the floor, but it was hard," he says. "I don't think I slept. It was really hard to get comfortable because you can't stretch out and you're in these shackles. So whichever way I tried, it wasn't possible."



Someone who may soon be in Ahmad's shoes, shackled and on a plane to the US, is Australian journalist Julian Assange.

In January 2021, district judge Vanessa Baraitser blocked the extradition from the UK saying that such a move would be "oppressive" because of the WikiLeaks founder's mental health.

The US was given a chance to appeal and Baraitser's decision was then overturned by Chief Justice Ian Burnett, who accepted US assurances about Assange's treatment. That judge was a 40-year "good friend" of the British minister who orchestrat-



BABAR AHMAD: Sent to US maximum security prison in Connecticut.



JOHN KIRIAKOU: Former CIA officer, now an advocate for Julian Assange.

ed Assange's seizure in April 2019.

Jennifer Robinson, Assange's lawyer in Britain since his legal troubles began, told me: "The US did not dispute the medical findings, so the medical conclusion and evidence still remains the same, which is, if he's extradited to isolating conditions, he will be caused to commit suicide."

The US, however, offered "assurances" that they would not place him under those kinds of prison conditions.

"It's a conditional assurance," Robinson says, "which means at any point, once he's in US prison, the intelligence services could decide that he's done something that justifies the application of those prison conditions."

This is hugely worrying, she adds.

"You've got agencies which tried to kidnap and kill him that would have the power to put him under those kinds of isolating conditions without any real ability of us to judicially review it. And he would be stuck in those conditions."

The US assurances came after the close of proceedings, but the court in London accepted them and waved them through.

"It's basically extradition by diplomacy without proper oversight at the courts," Robinson says.

Ahmad touched down in the US early in the morning of 6 October 2012. At the time he had no idea where he had landed.

"I went into some sort of car and we drove. After about 20 minutes we stopped and got out," he says.

"I could hear, like, clanging and I realised I'm in some sort of warehouse or prison-type place. At that point, I realised how painful it was to walk with shackles. It was chafing the back of my achilles, so I really slowed down. Obviously later on you learn how to do it, but that was my first time, and I didn't know. I really slowly, slowly, slowly shuffled."

Ahmad then went up in a lift and

came to a cell. They took off his handcuffs and the shackles, and then removed the ski mask and ear defenders which they had put on him upon landing. Ahmad was in New Haven federal courthouse. It was about three in the morning.

“They took us for photographs and fingerprints, and then put us back in that cell. They said, ‘you have a court hearing at 8am’”, he says.

Ahmad couldn’t sleep for the second night in a row. “Around 7.30am my lawyers came to see me in a closed visit, so there’s a glass screen, and my lawyers are there. I spoke to my lawyers, then there was a hearing that took place.”

After that hearing, now around 10am, he was put in an SUV.

“We set off in this convoy of maybe eight SUVs,” he says. “And these guys, you know how Americans are, when they do something, it’s always extra. The guys have, like, submachine guns. These all look like special forces.”

After an hour they reached a prison. Ahmad’s lawyer told him he was going to the state supermax in Connecticut.

Once inside the reception area of the prison, he was taken for a medical examination. The officers were made to wait outside.

“I go into this room and there’s three nurses there,” Ahmad says.

“Normal, friendly conversation, going through my medical history, check my eyes, ears, mouth, whatever. Then as the officer came to get me, he looked at the head nurse and he sort of, like, winked or nodded at her, and she nodded back. She goes, ‘yeah, status’.

“I didn’t know what that meant, but later I understood that she was telling him to put me on the suicide watch, which is basically a punishment cell. Healthcare has to make

“I’m in this cell, and then the first thing I remember is one thing that Nelson Mandela said: Years pass like minutes in prison, but the minutes, they pass like years”

that decision. So that was a scam because there was no reason for me to go there, I was completely compliant. She looked at the guy and said, ‘status’.

Ahmad continues: “Then I’m taken into this cell. As soon as I got in there, one person was filming and eight guys were shouting commands and orders in unison. ‘Okay, left. Okay, restraint’. They’re shouting these military orders and they put me against this wall and they literally stripped me naked, completely. And this is all on video.”

Ahmad, who had not slept, was in complete shock.

“In the UK, you’re never stripped fully naked,” he says. “They’ll either do the bottom half or the top half, and they don’t actually do it forcibly unless it’s a security thing. So I’m like, ‘what the hell?’”

Then they put paper slippers on Ahmad and an anti-suicide smock which covered his torso down to his knees. “And that’s it. That’s all I have, apart from the shackles.”

They walked him down a long corridor bent over under restraint so his head was below his waist.

“They dumped me in this cell, and the first thing I noticed was the smell, it was like a faeces-infested smell, it was also absolutely freezing,” he says. “I remember the first thing I asked the status guy, ‘can I get something to eat?’ He just chuckled and said ‘you’ll be fed’. And that’s it. They shut the door and that’s it. They were gone.”

There was nothing in the cell except two strips of toilet paper. The water was 60 seconds on, five minutes off, Ahmad remembers.

“If I looked outside the small 3x6 inch strip window, on the back wall, I can just see concrete. There’s no view, there’s nothing there. Then there’s another strip window, 3x6 inches on the door facing the inside of the prison unit. And there’s just all these mirrors there and there’s a little clock that I can make out.”

Ahmad was tired now and there was a bed with a plastic mattress. “I curl up like a foetus because it’s absolutely freezing,” Ahmad says. “I slept a bit and got up. At some point it was food time, and they came and they gave me a paper bag of food. The food was in, like, a coffee cup, and I asked the guy, ‘can I get a spoon?’”

The officer told him it was not allowed.

“I had to eat with my hand like an animal. And that’s all because of the status thing, it’s the punishment thing. You have to eat like that. I didn’t know what the food was. I just ate it. Part of me was thinking, is this meat or not? I don’t eat meat that’s not halal. But I just ate it. I didn’t even know they might have spat in it or whatever, but I was just too hungry. And the cell stank like faeces, and I’m barefoot and, of course, there’s no soap.”

Ahmad at this point had no idea how long he would be in this cell. It could be 10 days. It could be 10 years. “I had no idea about anything,” he says.

“I’m in this cell, and then the first thing I remember is one thing that Nelson Mandela said: that years pass like minutes in prison, but the minutes, they pass like years. And I remember I kept going to the door and looking at that digital clock. And I’m thinking that it’s been, like, several hours, but it’s been like 10 minutes.”

At some point a mental health nurse passed by his cell.

“She stood for a moment reading something outside my cell and looking at me with disgust as she did it,” Ahmad says. “I later realised that there was a sheet of paper outside my door which listed all the accusations against me. Then I asked her how I could cope, given I had nothing in my cell, nothing to do or read, nothing to see and nobody to talk to. ‘You could try visualisation,’ she chuckled then went on her way. That was what they meant by mental health support.”

The next morning a new prison official came to his cell.

“He was a racist and hostile officer,” Ahmad tells me. “He was shouting, ‘you’re the terrorist,’ and he’s shouting really loudly to the other prisoners ‘he tried to blow us up, he tried to kill Americans.’ Then he goes, ‘I’m going to teach him a lesson, why did you try to blow us up?’”

Ahmad tried to explain to him that that was a different person, not him. “He’s like ‘yeah, yeah, whatever, speak English.’ He was openly racist. In the UK, they tend to hide their racism, but in America you know where you stand, which I actually prefer.”

A day after arriving in the prison, Ahmad had a panic attack.

“That’s the only time in my life that I’ve had one,” he says. “That was the first and last time that I’ve had it happen to me. I was just standing there and all of a sudden it’s like my chest started caving in on me. I’m standing up and then I start hyperventilating and my muscles tense up, and I go into this state, it’s sort of like I’m drowning, but I’m not.”

He says the only reason he is able to talk about it now is because he’s had eye movement desensitisation

“I’m standing up and then I start hyperventilating and my muscles tense up, and I go into this state, it’s sort of like I’m drowning, but I’m not”

and reprocessing (EMDR) therapy to resolve it.

“I can talk to you now without any physiological response,” Ahmad says. “But it was terrifying. I think it was the realisation dawning on me that, ‘oh, my God, this is it’.”

He continues: “All these assurances, I’m going to be treated humanely, and the US prisons are equal to UK prisons and he’ll be treated fairly and justly. All of it was complete rubbish. It was all a scam, it was all lies. I was just thinking to myself ‘this is it’. I’m going to stay in this cell for the rest of my life.”

Ahmad had no idea how to deal with the panic attack.

“There was no one there. I couldn’t speak to anyone. I didn’t even know about how to deal with the breathing. Breathing can get you out of it. So I just started reciting verses from the Quran that I’d memorised and then eventually that sort of just got me out there, calmed me down.”

John Kiriakou was a CIA officer from 1990 to 2004 before leaving and blowing the whistle on the agency’s torture programme during the so-called War on Terror. Kiriakou has since become an outspoken advocate for Julian Assange’s battle for his life in the face of persecution by his former employer.

“One of the things that many people don’t understand is, in the American system, even if the prosecution

wants to drop the case, what they do first is they consult the ‘victim’ to see if it’s okay with the victim if the case is dropped. In this case, the victim would be the CIA,” he tells me.

“I can’t help but to think that had the Vault 7 release not taken place, and with [former CIA director Mike] Pompeo out of the picture, I don’t think anybody would have really cared if the case against Julian were to be dropped, but he embarrassed them, and there’s such a deep desire for revenge that it’s as though they can’t control themselves.”

Vault 7 is a series of documents that WikiLeaks began to publish in March 2017, detailing the capabilities of the CIA to perform electronic surveillance and cyber warfare. Kiriakou says that senior levels of the CIA will be guiding executive policy on the Assange persecution as a result.

“In a case like this, that conversation would only happen at the very top,” he says. “So we’re talking about the director, the deputy director, the deputy director for operations, the general counsel, maybe the deputy director for counter-intelligence. It’s a very small group of people that would be having that conversation.”

The CIA is incredibly powerful, Kiriakou adds. “It’s especially powerful within the federal bureaucracy. I don’t think that these decisions are made in a vacuum at the Justice Department. These decisions are made around a conference room table at the National Security Council. And we cannot pretend that [Attorney General] Merrick Garland is independent and the Justice Department is independent of outside influence. We know that that’s just simply not true.”

When President Joe Biden appointed Bill Burns his CIA director, Kiriakou had allowed himself some hope for Assange.

“I was optimistic about Bill Burns

because he's a career diplomat and a peacemaker, and with the exception of the time that he spent as the deputy secretary of state, he was not a regular consumer of intelligence, so there was no bond between Bill Burns and the intelligence community," Kiriakou tells me.

"I thought, well, you know, for the first time, really, since Admiral Stansfield Turner was the director under Jimmy Carter, this is a guy who's independent of the CIA, who's able to make his own judgments and come to his own conclusions. You know, I fear that, at least in the Assange case, that just turned out to not be true because if Bill Burns were to go to Merrick Garland and say, look, there was no damage to national security, I think Garland would have no problem dropping the case."

Kiriakou says he cannot believe Biden wants to take on the press establishment.

"It just seems to me that there are very powerful people, probably at both the CIA and the Justice Department, who say, you know, fuck the constitution's first amendment."

Kiriakou is also not optimistic about Assange's chances in the US legal system.

"Initially, what's going to happen is he'll be taken to what's called the federal lockup at Alexandria, Virginia," he says. "It's used to house prisoners awaiting trial in the eastern district of Virginia in the federal court there. There are people awaiting trial for crimes as minor as trying to give a blowjob to an undercover police officer at a national monument, someone I shared a cell with briefly had done that, but that goes to El Chapo and everybody in between."

While he's awaiting trial, he's likely going to be treated like everybody else, Kiriakou says.

"One important thing here is that

"American prosecutors have promised the British government that they will not put Julian in solitary confinement. That is complete and total bullshit"

American prosecutors have repeatedly promised the British government that they will not put Julian in solitary confinement. That is complete and total bullshit, because it is not up to the Justice Department's prosecutors to decide who goes to solitary confinement. That is the sole realm of the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The prosecutors promising not to put Julian in solitary are like you or I promising not to put Julian in solitary. That's about how much weight those promises carry."

Assange will not get justice in the US either, Kiriakou says.

"I don't think he has a chance at a fair trial for a couple of reasons," he says. "Number one is the fact that this is the eastern district of Virginia. It's called the espionage court because no national security defendant has ever won a case there. I was charged there. [CIA whistleblower] Jeffrey Sterling was charged there. Edward Snowden has been charged there. They charge everybody in the eastern district of Virginia, almost everybody, because it's the home district of the CIA."

He continues: "The jury is going to be made up of people who work for or who have relatives who work for the CIA, the Pentagon, the Department of Homeland Security, the FBI, and dozens of intelligence community contractors. So it's impossible to get a jury that's not biased."

The second reason is what is called "charge stacking," Kiriakou says. "Let's say maybe you

have committed a crime. Instead of charging you for that crime, they'll charge you for 20 crimes, and then they'll come back to you after you've been suitably softened up and say, okay, we'll drop all the charges but one or two, if you take a guilty plea."

Babar Ahmad stayed in the punishment cell for three days after his panic attack. Then a doctor came to examine him. "It was an African American doctor, and he just kept shaking his head," Ahmad says. "He said to me, 'I don't know why they put you in here', and he said he was going to get me out. He just kept shaking his head. He knew the tricks that they play."

The doctor did get Ahmad out into another cell with a few more things, including a few jumpsuits and t-shirts, some towels and a blanket. But it was still solitary confinement.

"But this one prisoner, who was actually a decent guy, reached out to me," Ahmad says. "I didn't know what he looked like, but he just shouted out my cell number. He goes, 'hey, 109, how are you doing, brother? What's your name, where do you come from?'"

He gave Ahmad some information about the routine at the prison and eventually managed to send him some reading material, which was against the rules.

"He sent me some books. I think I got a Bible from the chaplain as well. I read the Bible cover to cover. Most of it was in those initial weeks."

Ahmad stayed in that prison for two years.

"I was held alongside Connecticut's death row," he says. "The regime there was very tough. Complete solitary confinement for the whole day and night. No association with any other prisoner for two years. A full humiliating strip search, including body cavities, eve-

ry time you leave your cell, even if it's to the shower two metres away."

He got to do one hour of exercise three times a week.

"It was in an underground dog cage, which is about four steps by two steps, and there's three cages side by side," he says. "So you can talk to prisoners who are either the other two prisoners that are there with you, you can talk to them without restriction. But that was it."

I ask Ahmad how he didn't lose his mind.

"Well, it is unbearable. And a lot of people have lost their minds, and there are a lot of people with severe mental health problems, people that talk to themselves, people that shout and bang all day, all night long. People self harm. There are suicide attempts all the time. One week I witnessed three suicide attempts in one day."

He continues: "Then there are prisoners there who had killed their cellmates, battered them to death

"People self harm. There are suicide attempts all the time. One week I witnessed three suicide attempts in one day"

inside the actual cell. In my case, I think it was partly my religion, my faith. I don't know, they have these buzzwords, resilience and all of that, but you just try your best to survive, isn't it?"

Ahmad was released from US prison in July 2015 after being sentenced to 12-and-a-half years for providing material support, via two articles published on his website, to the Taliban government at a time

when they were harbouring Osama bin Laden. The US government had asked for twice this sentence, but the surprisingly lenient sentence meant Ahmad was freed within months because of time served.

Julian Assange is unlikely to get such leniency from the US justice system, and his prison experience will likely be even more punitive than Ahmad's.

"I think Assange is going to get worse than me in American prison," Ahmad says. "The assurances they give about access to health care, it's all a scam. None of it applies once you're there." He pauses. "Of course, suicide is a very real risk." **CT**

Matt Kennard is the chief investigator at Declassified UK – www.declassifieduk.org – where this article was first published. He was a fellow and then director at the Centre for Investigative Journalism in London. Follow him on Twitter @kennardmatt.

► THE HIGH COURT DECISION

Stella Assange: "The United States has plotted to assassinate Julian, to kidnap him"

Stella Assange, Julian Assange's wife, told reporters outside the Royal Courts of Justice on March 26 after judges delayed Assange's plea for a new appeal: "Today's decision was astounding. The courts recognised that Julian has been exposed to flagrant denial of his freedom of expression rights, that he is being discriminated against on the basis of his nationality and that he remains exposed to the death penalty.

But, she added, "the US has been invited to "send a letter saying it is all okay. I find it astounding that five years into this case the United States has to show that

their case remains an attack on press freedom.

"What the courts haven't agreed to look at is the evidence that the United States has plotted to assassinate Julian, to kidnap him. Because if it acknowledges this, then of course how can he be sent to the United States?"

"Julian is a political prisoner. He is a journalist. And he is being persecuted because he exposed the true cost of war in human lives. This case is a retribution. It is a signal to all of you that if you expose the interests that are driving war, they will come after you. They will put you in prison, they will try to kill you." – *Consortium News* **CT**



Martin Luther King, Jr. at the March on Washington, DC, August 28, 1963

► GORDON PARKS

A lasting legacy of the struggle for civil rights

Expanded re-issue of classic book adds to powerful documentary vision

Originally published in 1971, Gordon Parks' *Born Black* was the first book to unite his writing and his photography. It was also the first to provide a focused survey of Parks' documentation of a crucial time for the civil rights and Black Power movements.

Today, more than 50 years later,

this expanded edition of *Born Black* – co-published by Steidl with the Gordon Parks Foundation and the Minneapolis Institute of Art – illuminates Parks' vision for the book and offers deeper insight into the series within it.

The original publication featured nine articles commissioned by *Life* magazine from 1963

to 1970 – some never-before published – supplemented with later commentary by Parks and presented as his personal account of these important historical moments.

Born Black includes the original text and images, as well as additional photographs from each series, spreads from the



Malcolm X at a rally, Chicago, Illinois, 1963



Black Panther chapter headquarters (from left): unidentified, June Hilliard, David Hilliard, Donald L. Cox, unidentified, San Francisco, California, 1970

1971 book, early correspondence, reproductions of related *Life* articles, and new scholarly essays.

The nine series selected by Parks for *Born Black* – a rare glimpse inside San Quentin State Prison; extensive documentation of the Black Muslim movement and the Black Panthers; his commentaries on the deaths of civil rights leaders

Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr.; intimate portrait studies of Stokely Carmichael, Muhammad Ali and Eldridge Cleaver; and a narrative of the daily life of the impoverished Fontenelle family in Harlem – have come to define his legendary career as a photographer and activist.

This reimagined, comprehensive edition of *Born Black* highlights

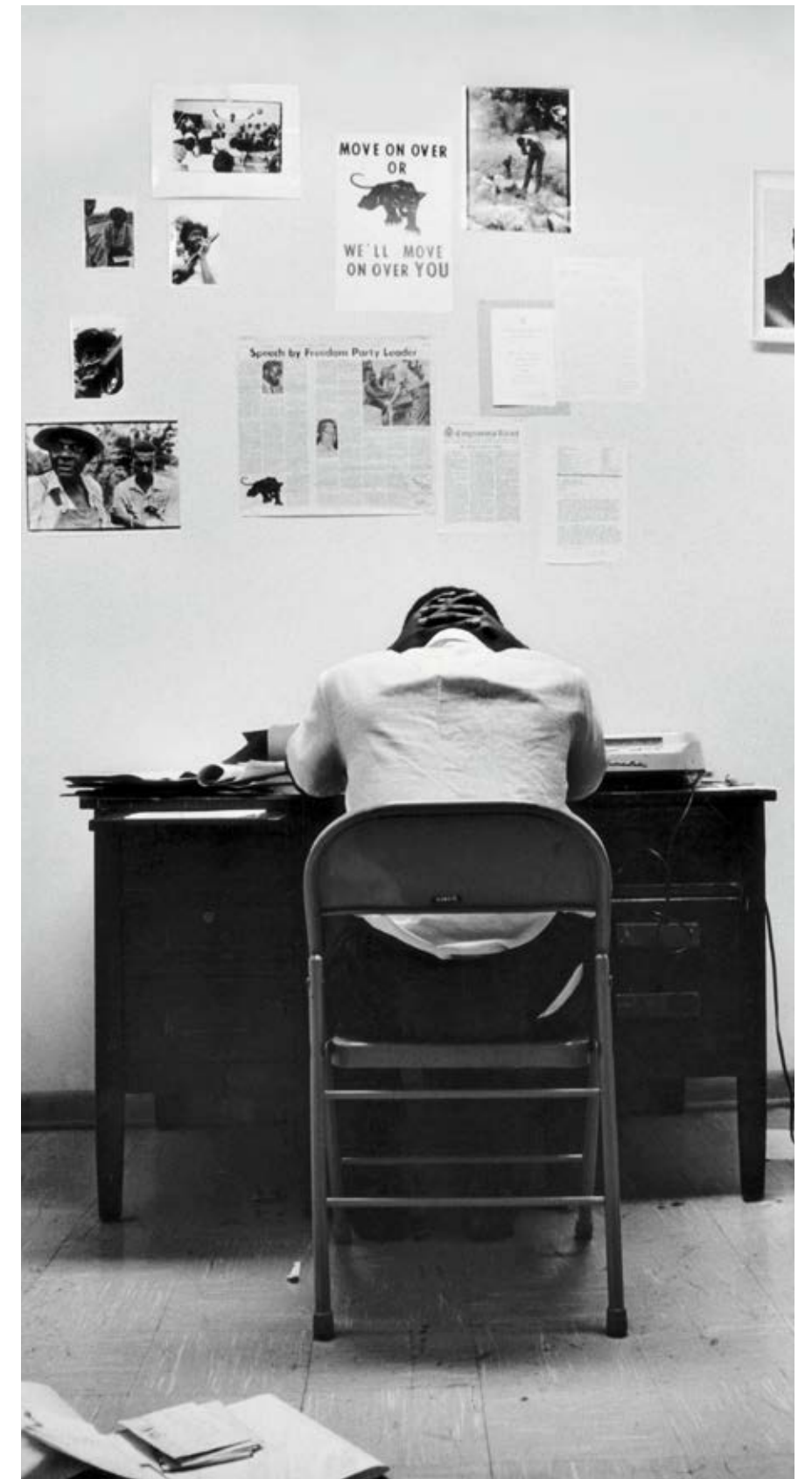
the lasting legacy of these projects and their importance to our understanding of critical years in American history.

We know, in short, where we went from there. Yet the question of how we got here is no less pressing, no less urgent to us 52 years after the first publication of this collection than it was on the morning Gene Young mailed her dispatch to

Gordon Parks.

To the extent that our current circumstances give us cause to ask it, *Born Black* remains vital as a map of the route we took from there to the complicated, ambivalent, and difficult place where we find ourselves today.

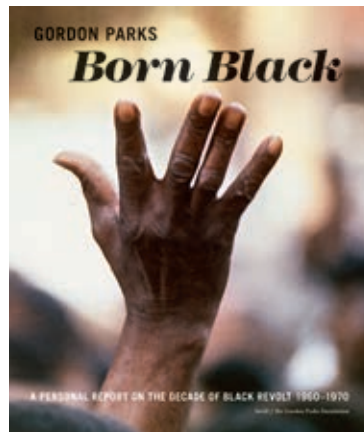
– Jelani Cobb, “*Gordon Parks’s Black America*,” in *Gordon Parks: Born Black*, 2024. **CT**



Stokely Carmichael at the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee headquarters, Atlanta, Georgia, 1967



Bessie and Little Richard the morning after she scalded her husband, Harlem, New York, 1967

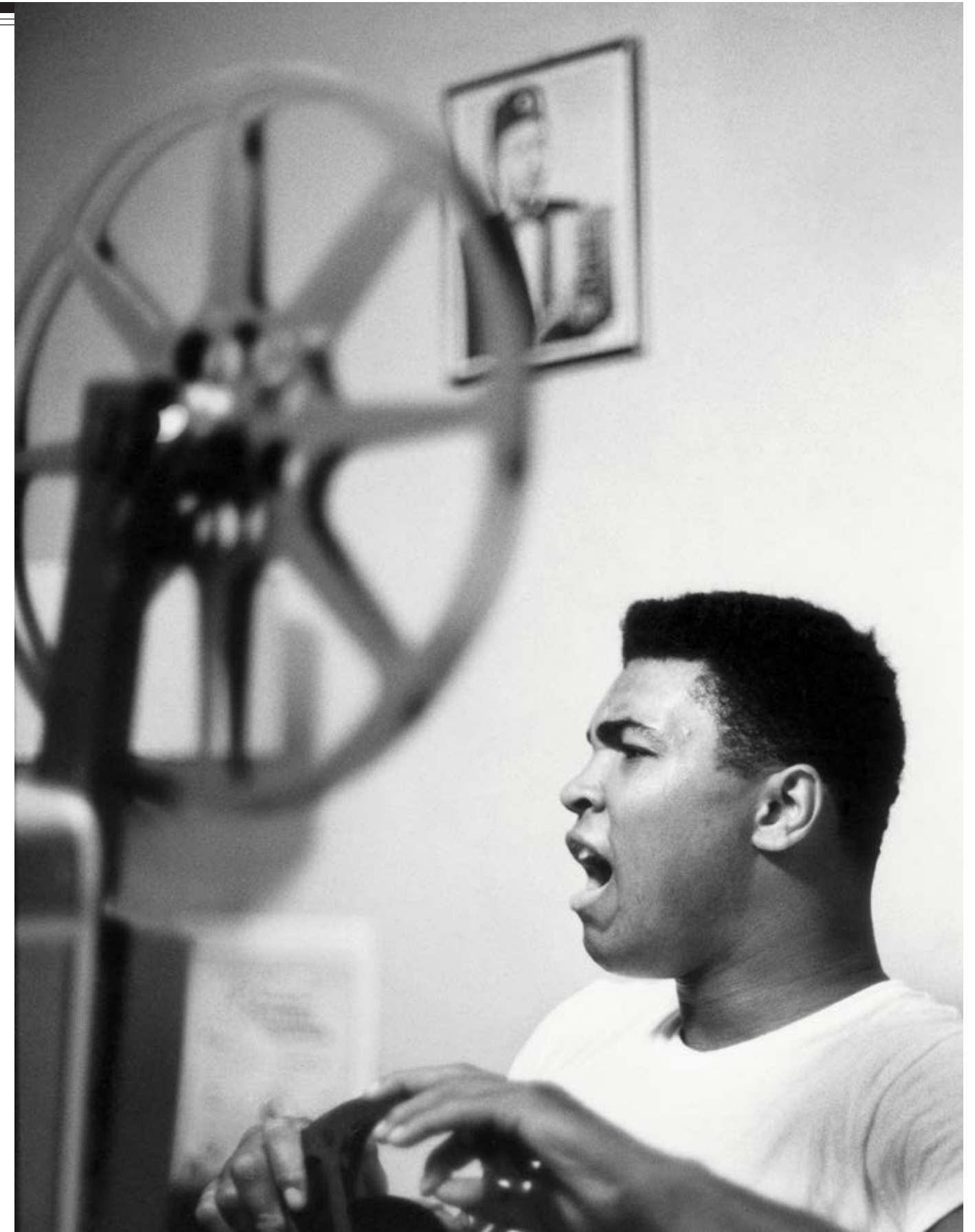


BORN BLACK: A Personal Report on the Decade of Black Revolt 1960-1970
By Gordon Parks

Co-published by Steidl with the Gordon Parks Foundation & Minneapolis Institute of Art
\$65.00 / £58



New York, New York, 1963



Muhammad Ali, Miami, Florida, 1966

► JONATHAN COOK

Executions. Torture. Babies left to die. Sexual abuse. These are Israel's war crimes

Why is the western media that is obsessively reheating five-month-old allegations against Hamas so reluctant to focus on Israel's current, horrifying atrocities?



Hostages tortured to death. Parents executed in front of their children. Doctors beaten. Babies murdered. Sexual assault weaponised.

No, not Hamas crimes. This is part of an ever-growing list of documented atrocities committed by Israel since the events of 7 October – quite separate from the carpet bombing of 2.3-million Palestinians in Gaza and a famine induced by Israel's obstruction of aid.

Last month, an investigation by the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* disclosed that 27 Palestinians seized off Gaza's streets over the past five months are known to have died during interrogations inside Israel. Some were denied medical treatment. But most are likely to have been tortured to death.

Three months ago, a *Haaretz* edi-

torial warned that Israeli jails “must not become execution facilities for Palestinians.”

Israeli TV channels have been excitedly taking viewers on tours of detention centres, showing the appalling conditions Palestinians are kept in, as well as the psychological and physical abuse they are subjected to.

An Israeli judge called the makeshift cages in which Palestinians are held “unsuitable for humans.”

Remember, a large proportion of the 4,000 or so Palestinians taken hostage by Israel since 7 October – probably the vast majority – are civilians, like the men and boys paraded through Gaza's streets or held in a stadium stripped of clothing before being dragged off to a dark cell in Israel.

According to Israeli media, many dozens of Palestinian women – including pregnant women –

Stripped, blindfolded, and bound Palestinian civilians are taken prisoner and ordered into a line by Israeli occupation forces in Gaza in December 2023. Photo: Social media post by Israeli soldier

have also been seized, but in their case off camera. Presumably, Israel has wished to avoid undermining its careful messaging that only Hamas weaponises violence against women.

But, according to United Nations legal experts, Palestinian women are suffering the most degrading forms of abuse at the hands of the Israeli military. The experts observed that Palestinian women and girls in detention were reportedly being subjected to “multiple forms of sexual assault, such as being stripped naked and searched by male Israeli army officers.

“At least two female Palestinian detainees were reportedly raped while others were reportedly threatened with rape and sexual violence.”

Soldiers are also believed to have taken photos of female detainees in degrading circumstances and then uploaded them online.

Palestinian women and girls in Gaza are also reported by their families to have gone missing after contact with the Israeli army.

“There are disturbing reports of at least one female infant forcibly transferred by the Israeli army into Israel, and of children being separated from their parents, whose whereabouts remain unknown,” they said.

Beatings, waterboarding

A separate report by the UN last month revealed that 21 of its staff – humanitarian aid workers – had

been snatched by Israel. They were tortured to extract confessions, most likely false, of involvement in Hamas's 7 October attack. Their torture included beatings, waterboarding and threats to family members.

Those confessions were cited by western allies as the grounds – in fact, the only known grounds – for cutting off funding to the UN relief agency UNRWA, the last lifeline for Gaza's starving population. It was these claims, extracted through torture, that helped Israel rationalise its imposing of a famine on Gaza.

Of the 1,000 detainees subsequently released, 29 were children, one as young as six, and 80 women. Some were reported to have cancer and chronic illnesses such as Alzheimer's.

According to the UN investigation, Palestinians reported severe punishment beatings, being caged

with attack dogs, and suffering sexual assault. Physical evidence – such as broken ribs, dislocated shoulders, bite marks, and burns – was still visible many weeks later.

Executions, human shields

These horrors, of course, are not just taking place in cells and interrogation rooms inside Israel. Gaza is being subjected to astonishing levels of brutality and sadism from Israeli troops – quite aside from the carpet bombing and enforced starvation of civilians.

Israeli snipers have fired into Gaza's hospitals, killing medical staff and patients there.

The Israeli military has used Palestinians as human shields, including one man sent into a hospital, his hands bound, to announce an Israeli order to evacuate the premises. Israeli forces executed him on his

return.

Those trying to follow such evacuation orders, waving white flags, have been shot at.

Medical facilities have been repeatedly invaded by the Israeli military in stark violation of international law. Those who could not be evacuated, such as premature babies, have been left to die unattended, even while Israeli soldiers were occupying the building.

The BBC recently interviewed medical staff who reported being tortured, savagely beaten and having attack dogs set on them inside the Nasser hospital in Khan Younis after Israeli soldiers stormed it.

One, Dr Ahmed Abu Sabha, had his hands broken. He told the BBC: “They put me on a chair and it was like a gallows. I heard sounds of ropes, so I thought I was going to be executed.”

At another stage, he and other detainees were beaten in the back of a truck, while only in their underwear. They were taken to a gravel pit, where they were made to kneel blindfolded. They believed they were about to be executed. During his eight days as hostage, Sabha was never questioned.

Dozens more medics are believed missing, presumed to still be in Israeli detention.

Photographs published by the BBC also show patients in the grounds of Nasser hospital in beds with their hands bound tightly above their heads. Those who died were left to decompose by Israeli soldiers. A doctor there, Dr Hatim Rabaa, told the BBC: “Patients were screaming, ‘Please remove them [the corpses] from here’. I was telling them, ‘It isn’t in my hands.’”

Other examples of murderous cruelty are documented daily. Unarmed Palestinians, including those waving white flags, have been shot dead by Israeli soldiers. Palestinian parents have been executed in

cold blood in front of their children. There have been repeated episodes of Israeli forces gunning down en masse desperate Palestinians trying to reach aid.

Even Israeli hostages trying to escape their captors have been killed by the very Israeli soldiers they were trying to surrender to.

These are just some of the cases of Israeli sadism and barbarity that have surfaced briefly in western media coverage, soon to be forgotten.

Wiping Gaza off the map

The stomach-turning double standards are impossible to ignore.

The western establishment media has been chock full of the most lurid allegations of savagery directed against Hamas, sometimes with

If Russian President Vladimir Putin was a madman and a barbarous war criminal for invading Ukraine, as every western media outlet agrees, what does that make Israeli officials?

little or no supporting evidence. Claims that Hamas beheaded babies or put them in ovens – emblazoned on front pages – were later found to be nonsense.

Accusations against Hamas have been endlessly reheated to paint a picture of a supremely dangerous and bestial militant group, in turn rationalising the carpet bombing and starvation of Gaza’s population to “eradicate” it as a terrorist organisation.

But equally barbarous atrocities committed by Israel – not in the heat of battle, but in cold blood – are treated as unfortunate, isolated incidents that cannot be connected, that paint no picture, that reveal

nothing of import about the military that carried them out.

If Hamas’s crimes were so savage and sadistic they still need to be reported months after they took place, why does the establishment media never feel the need to express equal horror and indignation at the acts of cruelty and sadism being inflicted by Israel on Gaza – not five months ago, but right now?

This is part of a pattern of behaviour by the western media that leads to only one possible deduction: Israel’s five-months-long attack on Gaza is not being reported. Rather, it is being selectively narrated – and for the most obscene of purposes.

Through consistent and glaring failures in their coverage, establishment media – including supposedly liberal outlets, from the BBC and CNN to the *Guardian* and *New York Times* – have smoothed the way for Israel to carry out mass slaughter in Gaza, what the World Court has assessed as plausibly a genocide.

The role of the media has not been to keep us, their audiences, informed about one of the greatest crimes in living memory. It has been to buy time for US President Joe Biden to keep arming his most useful of client states in the oil-rich Middle East, and to do so without damaging his prospects for re-election in November’s US presidential vote.

If Russian President Vladimir Putin was a madman and a barbarous war criminal for invading Ukraine, as every western media outlet agrees, what does that make Israeli officials, when every one of them supports far worse atrocities in Gaza, directed overwhelmingly at civilians?

And more to the point, what does that make Biden and the US political class for materially backing Israel to the hilt: sending bombs, vetoing demands for a ceasefire at the United Nations, and freezing desperately needed aid?

Worrying about the optics, the president expresses his discomfort, but he carries on helping Israel regardless.

While western politicians and commentators worry about some imaginary existential threat those brief events of five months ago pose to the nuclear-armed state of Israel, Israel is quite literally wiping Gaza off the map day by day, quite undisturbed.

Hamas ‘started it’

There have been two, largely implicit defences for this glaring imbalance in western priorities. Neither stands up to even the most cursory scrutiny.

One is the argument that Hamas “started it” – insinuated in the endless claim that, in destroying Gaza, Israel has been “responding” or “retaliating” to the violence of 7 October. This is a justification for killing tens of thousands of Palestinians and starving two-million more that should never have been let out of the playground. But worse, it is patent nonsense. Hamas did not initiate anything on 7 October, except for handing Israel a pretext to wreck Gaza.

The enclave has been under a crushing siege for 17 years, in which its land, sea and air were patrolled constantly by Israel. Its population was denied the essentials of life. They had no freedom of movement apart from inside their cage.

Long before the current Israeli-induced famine, Israel’s trade restrictions had ensured high levels of malnutrition among Gaza’s children. Most exhibited too the scars of deep psychological trauma from constant and massive attacks by Israel on Gaza.

Biden crows about building a “temporary pier” – weeks or months down the road – to bring aid into Gaza that is desperately needed now. But there is a reason the en-

clave lacks a seaport and airport. Israel bombed the only airport back in 2001, long before Hamas took charge of Gaza. It has been attacking and killing fishermen trawling just off Gaza’s coast for years.

Israel has refused to allow Gaza to connect to the world – and break free of Israeli control – ever since.

Hamas started nothing on 7 October. It was simply a new, and particularly gruesome phase in what has been decades of Palestinian resistance to Israel’s belligerent occupation of Gaza.

Bogus narrative

The other implicit defence of western establishments constantly stressing Hamas’s barbarism over Israel’s is that the nature of those atroci-

There is a reason Gaza lacks a seaport and airport. Israel bombed the only airport back in 2001, long before Hamas took charge of Gaza. It has been attacking fishermen for years

ties is said to be categorically different – in the apples and pears sense.

Hamas supposedly demonstrated a degree of sadism in its killing spree on 7 October inside Israel that marks it out from Israel’s far larger killing spree in Gaza. That has been the basis for every media interview that requires guests to “condemn” Hamas before they are allowed to express concern about the slaughter of Palestinians in Gaza. No one is asked to condemn Israel.

It is the basis, too, for permitting Israeli spokespeople to claim unchallenged that Israel targets only Hamas, not civilians, even while some three-quarters of Gaza’s dead are women and children.

On the BBC’s evening news at the beginning of March, presenter Clive Myrie made precisely this preposterous assertion as he intoned that since 7 October, “Israel launched a relentless bombing campaign targeting members of Hamas.”

But the latest revelations of the 27 reported deaths in Israeli torture centres and the testimonies of beaten medics from Nasser Hospital confirm how bogus this entire narrative framing by the western media is – one intended to mislead and misinform audiences.

Israel claims it is targeting Hamas, but its actions tell an entirely different story. Famine will kill off the sick and vulnerable long before it does Hamas fighters.

The truth is, Israel is not primarily eradicating Hamas. It is eradicating Gaza. Its crimes are at least as cruel and savage as anything Hamas did on 7 October – and its atrocities have been carried out on a far larger scale and for far longer.

Western establishments and their media have been waging a giant campaign of misdirection for the past five months, as they have against Palestinians over previous years and decades. Western publics have been encouraged to look in the wrong direction

Until that changes, the men, women and children of Gaza will continue to pay the heaviest of prices at the hands of a vengeful, sadistic Israeli military. **CT**

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► NORMAN SOLOMON

Israel apologists stick to antisemitism claims

There's a word for seeing – and saying – that Israel is engaged in large-scale crimes against humanity. And that word isn't "anti-semitism." It's realism

If we condemn Hamas for its October 7 attacks in Israel, we're not accused of anti-Arab bigotry. Nor should we be. Nothing could possibly justify the atrocities that Hamas committed against hundreds of civilians, who were the majority of the 1,200 people killed as a result of the attacks by Hamas forces. And nothing can justify the taking of civilian hostages.

But if we condemn Israel for its actions since then, we might be accused of antisemitism. Meanwhile, nothing could possibly justify the atrocities by Israel in Gaza, where

the death toll is now estimated at 32,000, while uncounted thousands of other Palestinian people are buried under rubble. Seventy percent of the victims have been children and women.

The US government continues to make the atrocities possible. As retired Israeli Major General Yitzhak Brick said midway through the second month of the war: "All of our missiles, the ammunition, the precision-guided bombs, all the airplanes and bombs, it's all from the US." He added: "Everyone understands that we can't fight this war without the

United States. Period."

Because of federal laws and minimal decency, the US should have cut off all military aid to Israel long ago. A single standard of human rights should apply. But adhering to that simple, basic precept can provoke the virulent epithet of "antisemitism."

The gist of the trick is to equate Israel with the Jewish religion – and then to equate opposition to Israel with antisemitism.

And so, writing in the *New York Daily News* last November, an official at the American Jewish Committee declared that a "virus of antisemitism has spread to the US, where college campuses and city streets have been taken over by anti-Israel protesters raging, 'From the river to the sea!' – a call for the mass murder of Israelis, and 'Globalize the Intifada!' – an appeal to kill Jews worldwide."

As Peter Beinart pointed out in a 2022 essay, "Under the definition of antisemitism promoted by the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee and the State Department, Palestinians become antisemites if they call for replacing a state that favours Jews with one that does not discriminate based on ethnicity or religion."

While Israel continues to slaughter children, women and men – no more guilty of anything than a crowd you might see at a local supermarket – the extreme misuse of the "antisemitism" charge often boils down to: Be quiet. Don't protest. Don't even speak up.

Of course antisemitism does exist in the United States and the rest of the world, and it should be condemned. At the same time, to cry wolf – to misuse the term to try to intimidate people into silence while Israel's atrocities continue in Gaza – is an abuse of the word antisemitism and a disservice to everyone who wants a single standard of human rights.

Last month, 17 rabbis and rabbinical students went to Capitol Hill urging a ceasefire and an end to the unconditional US military aid to Israel. Rabbi May Ye said: "We are rabbis representing hundreds of thousands of Jews affiliated with Jewish Voice for Peace Action imploring our leaders to end their complicity in the Israeli military's genocidal campaign

While Israel continues to slaughter children, women and men, the extreme misuse of the "antisemitism" charge often boils down to: Be quiet. Don't protest. Don't even speak up

in the name of tzedek (justice) and real safety for all people."

Are we supposed to believe that those rabbis are antisemitic?

The Jewish American author Anna Baltzer grew up learning about the evils of antisemitism. "Much of my family was killed in the Holocaust," she wrote. "My grandparents arrived at Ellis Island traumatized by the unfathomable murder of their families in the gas chambers of Auschwitz while the world let it happen." And she added: "We must get clear that Israel's wiping out of entire families in Gaza is not simply revenge for October 7; Israel is continuing its long-existing practice of forcing Palestinians out of Palestine and closing the door behind them."

Do Baltzer's words make her antisemitic?

In mid-October, 43 Jewish American writers, academics and artists – including Michael Chabon, Francisco Goldman, Masha Gessen, Judith Butler, Tony Kushner, and V (formerly known as Eve Ensler) – released an open letter to President Biden saying: "We condemn attacks on Israeli and Palestinian civilians. We believe it is possible and in fact necessary to condemn Hamas' actions and acknowledge the historical and ongoing oppression of the Palestinians. We believe it is possible and necessary to condemn Hamas' attack and take a stand against the collective punishment of Gazans that is unfolding and accel-

erating as we write."

Along with denouncing Israel's "war crimes and indefensible actions," the statement added: "We write to publicly declare our opposition to what the Israeli government is doing with American assistance."

Do those words mean the signers of the statement are antisemitic?

Or how about the more than 100 Jewish Americans who signed the statement released this week denouncing AIPAC, the Israel-is-never-wrong lobby?

Ten years ago, 40 Holocaust survivors issued a statement condemning Israel for its "wholesale effort to destroy Gaza." The statement, also signed by 287 people who were descendants of Holocaust survivors or victims, called for "an end to all forms of racism, including the ongoing genocide of Palestinian people" and decried "the extreme, racist dehumanization of Palestinians in Israeli society, which has reached a fever pitch."

Were the 327 Jewish signers of the statement antisemitic?

For that matter, when I write here that the Israeli government has been committing mass murder and genocide in Gaza, does that mean I'm antisemitic?

There's a word for seeing – and saying – that Israel is engaged in large-scale crimes against humanity. And that word isn't "anti-semitism." It's realism. **CT**

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Armed by the US, Israel trashes the Genocide Convention

Stop treating Gaza like a natural disaster – it's time to confront the real reasons for the suffering

It's been almost two months since the International Court of Justice ordered Israel to stop killing Gazans and destroying their means of subsistence. So let's look back and ask (1) how Israel has responded to its "orders," and (2) how hard the Biden administration has pushed Israel to abide by those orders. Spoiler alert: the short answers are (1) not well and (2) not very.

The American government has provided most of the armaments and targeting technologies being used to kill Gazans by the thousands while turning many of the rest of them into refugees by destroying their homes, offices, schools, and hospitals. Nor did the Biden administration threaten to withdraw that support when Israel blocked shipments of crucial food and fuel to the 25-mile-long Gaza Strip. It also keeps vetoing UN Security Council resolutions that would

hold Israel accountable. And President Biden, despite an increasing amount of rhetorical shuffling, continues to back Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), even though they have ignored the International Court's orders and continue committing atrocities.

On January 26, the International Court of Justice handed down a ruling in a case brought by the Republic of South Africa accusing Israel of genocide. It ordered that Israel must "ensure with immediate effect that its military does not commit any acts described" in the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

The court's first order prohibited "killing members" of the Palestinian population or "causing serious bodily or mental harm" to them.

How did Israel respond? Consider that, between late December 2023 and January 21st of this year, the IDF had killed about 5,000 Palestinians, already pushing the death toll in the Gaza Strip past 25,000. The court's order, issued days later, would have essentially zero effect. Another 5,000-plus Palestinians would be killed by late February, raising the death toll to more than 30,000.

During the month after the ruling, Israeli troops repeatedly killed or injured civilians fleeing to, or taking shelter in, areas the IDF had advertised as "safe zones." Typically, when, on February 12th, Israeli aircraft attacked 14 homes and three mosques in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, killing 67 Palestinians, some of the survivors told reporters that they'd been inside tents in a refugee camp. Similarly, on February 22nd, Israeli warplanes struck a residential area in central Gaza, killing

40 civilians, mostly women and children, and wounding more than 100.

Worse yet, the Biden administration has enabled that ongoing killing spree by approving 100 separate military sales to Israel since the conflict began in October. As a former administration official told the *Washington Post*, "That's an extraordinary number of sales over the course of a pretty short amount of time, which really strongly suggests that the Israeli campaign would not be sustainable without this level of US support."

In other words, the backbone of the war on Gaza comes with a label: "Made in USA." In the decade leading up to October 7th, as the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute has reported, two-thirds of Israel's arms imports came from the United States. (From 1950 to 2020, the US share was a whopping 83%.)

In just the first couple of months of the war, the Biden administra-

tion sent 230 cargo planes and 20 ships full of military goods to Israel, a trove that included 100 BLU-109 bombs (2,000-pounders designed to penetrate hardened structures before exploding), 5,400 MK84 and 5,000 MK82 bunker-busters, 1,000 GBU-39 bombs, 3,000 JDAM bomb-guidance kits, and 200 "kamikaze drones."

Such powerful bombs, reported Al Jazeera, "have been used in some of the deadliest Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip, including a strike that levelled an apartment block in the Jabalia refugee camp, killing more than 100 people." And yes, such bunker-busters were widely used in the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but not in places as densely populated as Gaza's cities. Israeli sources tried to justify that particular death toll by insisting it was necessary to kill one

of Hamas's leaders. If so, we're talking about a 100-to-1 ratio, or a kind of collective punishment being supported by our tax dollars.

Worse yet, our military seems to have been participating directly in the IDF's operations. According to the *Intercept's* Ken Klippenstein and Matthew Petti, the Defense Department has been providing satellite intelligence and software to help the IDF find and hit targets in Gaza. An "Air Defense Liaison Team," they report, even travelled to Israel in November to offer targeting help, adding that "for the first time in US history, the Biden administration has been flying surveillance drone missions over Gaza."

And even then, some members of Netanyahu's government felt it wasn't enough. Far right-wing Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich put it this way when it came to President Biden's warning not to send the IDF into the southern Gazan



Starving children line up for meagre handouts of food in besieged Gaza enclave.

Photo: TV screenshot

city of Rafah where hundreds of thousands of refugees were gathered: “American pressure or fear of harming civilians should not deter us from occupying Rafah and destroying Hamas.”

The Israeli hostages held by Hamas are the excuse for so much of this, but the way to free them would be to negotiate, as Israel did successfully last fall, not try to “wipe Hamas off the face of the earth.” The Israelis are mostly bombing civilian sites in that campaign, because they’re reluctant to fight their way through the vast fortified network of tunnels from which the military wing of Hamas, the Qassam Brigades, mounted a formidable resistance to the invasion, largely with weaponry they manufactured themselves, along with ammunition recycled from unexploded ordnance dropped in past Israeli attacks.

In the second of its orders, the International Court of Justice prohibited “deliberately inflicting ... conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part [or] imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group.”

The Netanyahu government and the IDF blew off this directive as well. In the month that followed the ruling, Israeli troops continued to besiege hospitals across Gaza, thoroughly crippling, if not destroying, its healthcare system, especially two of its most important facilities: al-Shifa Hospital in the north and Nasser Hospital in the south. Before it was put out of service in mid-February, Nasser was one of the last hospitals still operating there in any capacity. Not surprisingly, the World Health Organisation has since reported a striking rise in respiratory infections, diarrhoea, chickenpox, jaundice, skin rashes, and scabies, among other horrors.

Many Gazans, especially children, have been forced to turn to polluted water sources, putting them at risk of severe gastrointestinal disease

Israel’s military has also been making conditions unlivable by restricting the food aid entering the territory and destroying local fishing boats, greenhouses, and orchards. It’s a formula for mass starvation. As Michael Fakhri, the UN special rapporteur on the right to food, told the *Guardian* in late February, “The speed of malnourishment of young children is also astounding. The bombing and people being killed directly is brutal, but this starvation – and the wasting and stunting of children – is torturous and vile.” Around the same time, UNICEF announced that 90 percent of children under five in Gaza were consuming “two or fewer food groups a day,” the functional definition of “severe food poverty.” About the same percentage were suffering from infectious diseases, most commonly diarrhoea, which only exacerbated their malnutrition.

The world’s top group tracking food emergencies reported on March 17 that famine “is now projected and imminent” in northern Gaza within six weeks, and that “half of the population of the Gaza Strip (1.11-million people) is expected to face catastrophic conditions,” with starvation and death expected to be widespread. Keep in mind that, under the Geneva Conventions, it’s a war crime to starve civilians or “attack, destroy, remove, or render useless any items necessary for civilians’ survival.” Attacking a hospital can also be a war crime. In that context, here’s a thought experiment: What would President Biden

and his top officials do if they suspected any other country of committing acts it knew could potentially lead to mass civilian deaths from starvation and disease? Would they shower it with more weaponry?

In defiance of the International Court’s orders – and undeterred by mild tut-tutting from Washington – the Israeli military is also inflicting intolerable “conditions of life” with its approach to Gaza’s water supply. With fuel shipments blocked by the Israelis, Gazans are unable to keep running the desalinisation plants that produce a significant amount of the Strip’s water. As a result, by late February, the water supply had dropped to 7 percent of its prewar level. In desperation, many Gazans, especially children, have been forced to turn to polluted water sources, putting them at risk of severe gastrointestinal disease with no functional hospitals to help them.

Israel is also, in effect, violating the International Court’s bar on “measures intended to prevent births,” since pregnant women are considered especially vulnerable to the food deprivation that is now the essence of life in Gaza. At the Deir al Balah clinic in central Gaza, one out of five maternity patients were being treated for malnutrition in February, causing doctors deep concern, since any malnourished mother will be carrying a malnourished fetus (with awful health prospects for both of them). Meanwhile, the UN Population Fund reports that women are miscarrying at a higher rate than before the war, while doctors are being forced to perform emergency caesarian sections without anaesthetics, posing a high risk to both mother and child.

The International Court of Justice’s third order was to “enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assis-

tance to address the adverse conditions of life faced by Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.” Israel’s leaders are ignoring that as well – or maybe they’ve just reinterpreted “enable” to mean “thwart.”

In January, before the court order, the IDF had been allowing approximately 140 aid trucks through their checkpoints into Gaza daily, instead of the 500 of the prewar period. If Gazans’ needs were to be fully satisfied, that flow of aid should have been steeply increased. Instead, the Israelis reduced the number of trucks allowed into Gaza to only 96 per day in February, all too literally feeding fears of starvation.

To make matters worse, groups of Israeli civilians have been blocking aid convoys, some by lying on the ground in front of the trucks. On a single day in February, 130 trucks were blocked and the IDF made no effort to deter the demonstrators. The Association of International Development Agencies reported that, even when their trucks were getting through the southern border crossings, most of them weren’t managing to reach the central or northern parts of the Strip, including Gaza City, because they were “hindered by Israeli military operations, including constant bombardment and checkpoint closures.”

The most notorious aid-denial incident occurred on February 27, when at least 118 Palestinians were killed after Israel forces opened fire on a crush of people in Gaza City trying to get food from a truck convoy. Most of the victims of this “Flour Bag Massacre” seem to have been killed either by IDF troops firing from tanks or to have died in the crush of people desperately trying to escape being shot.

The Biden administration did not respond to such incidents as it should have – by threatening to cut off war funding and supplies to Israel, as it had earlier suspended fi-

To make matters worse, groups of Israeli civilians have been blocking aid convoys, some by lying on the ground in front of the trucks

nancial support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), Gaza’s biggest prewar supplier of food, water, and shelter. The reason: allegations that some Palestinian UNRWA staff had, in the past, aided Hamas. Now, however, Reuters and the *Times of Israel* suggest that several agency staff members released from Israeli detention were coerced into falsely “admitting” to Hamas affiliations through physical beatings, waterboarding, and threats to their family members. (At the time of writing, US aid is still being withheld from UNRWA.)

Instead of pushing the Netanyahu government ever harder to allow more aid, the Biden administration decided to put on an airshow by dropping pallet-loads of packaged food into Gaza from military aircraft. Aid organisations panned the airdrops as little more than empty “gestures,” or a “theatre of cruelty.” Even a hulking C-130 cargo plane can carry only the equivalent of one or two aid trucks. And despite similar expenditures, such airdrops can deliver only one-eighth to one-tenth as much food as a truck convoy. Worse yet, tons of cargo dropped from the sky can itself prove deadly. During an airdrop over a refugee camp along the northern Gaza coast on March 8th, a parachute failed to open, and the heavily loaded pallet attached to it plummeted into a group of adults and children who had been watching the drop from a

rooftop. Five of them were killed, and 10 injured.

To Netanyahu & Co., the orders issued by the International Court of Justice have had about as much impact as a mosquito bite. And the United States, which could put more pressure on Israel than any other nation, has shied away from substantive action of any sort. President Biden and other officials continue to act largely as if they were just bystanders and the carnage in Gaza was being caused by some random natural disaster.

We aren’t policy experts, but it seems to us that any national leader with a strong sense of justice, of right and wrong, would do whatever was necessary to stop a genocide like the one now unfolding in Gaza. He or she would at least threaten to end all military support to Israel and press other supplying nations to do the same. He or she would put real effort into forcing Israel to let the aid trucks roll in and allowing Palestinians to decide their own fate.

Sadly, those aren’t our leaders. For now, Palestinians remain trapped in a nightmare vividly evoked by a recent photo that shows pallets of food aid parachuting earthward into Gaza as plumes of smoke from Israeli airstrikes rise to meet them – with both the food and the munitions courtesy of the United States of America. **CT**

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► MIKE ALLEYNE

Reggae rebel's retail resurrection

A look inside Bob Marley's posthumous and very prosperous musical and merchandising empire

The long-awaited Bob Marley biopic *One Love* will highlight important moments in the musician's life – his adolescence in Trench Town, Jamaica, his spiritual growth, the attempt on his life. But as a music industry scholar, I wonder if the film is yet another extension of the Marley marketing machine.

When he died in 1981 at the age of 36, Marley had achieved a level of mainstream success unrivalled by other reggae acts, and he did so while challenging global capitalism and speaking to the oppressed.

This image, however, is fundamentally at odds with what has happened to Marley's name and likeness since his death.

Now you can buy Bob Marley backpacks, Bob Marley jigsaw puzzles – even Bob Marley flip-flops.

The accusation of “selling out” could once seriously threaten an artist's credibility; the insult wields far less power in an era when an artist's survival often depends on sponsorship and licensing deals. Meanwhile, a deceased artist's ongoing earnings are left in the hands of others.

Nonetheless, when a musician as revered as Marley – and whose songs were suffused with messages of liberation, anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism – becomes so com-

mercialised, it's worth wondering how this happened and whether it threatens his artistic legacy.

In its 2023 list of highest-paid dead celebrities, *Forbes* placed Marley in the ninth slot, right behind former Beatles front man John Lennon. According to the publication, Marley earned US\$16-million – or rather, his estate did.

Marley's business affairs are now controlled by family members – the estate – who have made deals with various merchandising and marketing partners, with all parties sharing in the profits. The commercial power of Bob Marley's name generates the royalties earned by the estate, though precise percentages are not publicly available.

One posthumous musical release, in particular, has been a gold mine: Marley's *Legend* compilation album.

Released in 1984 and featuring mainstays like *Could You Be Loved* and *Three Little Birds*, it's the most successful reggae album of all time. It has sold more than 15-million copies in the US and has spent more than 800 nonconsecutive weeks on the Billboard 200. Collectively, its tracks have accounted for well over four-billion Spotify streams, and its phenomenal success is a key reason that the private music publishing company Primary Wave, which is backed by investors such as BlackRock, spent more than

\$50-million to buy a share of Marley's publishing catalogue in 2018.

A series of other albums have been released after Marley's death. These include *Natural Mystic* (1995); the pop and hip-hop crossover *Chant Down Babylon* (1999); *Africa Unite* (2005); *Uprising Live!* (2014), which features his final concert appearance; the polarising electronic mashup *Legend Remixed* (2013); *Easy Skanking in Boston '78* (2015); and the curious *Bob Marley & the Chineke! Orchestra* (2022).

The *Legend* album has earned more than these later releases combined. But the material absent from that record speaks volumes. In his 2022 autobiography, Chris Blackwell, the former head of Island Records, the label that

brought Marley's music to mainstream listeners, revealed that *Legend* had been carefully tailored for white mainstream audiences.

It achieved this by prioritising songs centred on themes of love and peace, rather than those about Marley's revolutionary Afrocentric politics and Rastafarian worldview, which appear on records such as 1979's *Survival*.

On that album's second track, *Zimbabwe*, Marley commends the country's freedom fighters in their battle against the oppressive Rhodesian regime, declaring, “Every man got a right to decide his own destiny”; he rails against the forces of exploitation and division in *Top Rankin'* and *Babylon System*; in *Survival*, he hails the African world's “hopes and dreams” and “ways and means”; and *Wake Up and Live* is a clarion call to spiritual and political awakening.

These tracks don't appear on *Legend*. In fact, none of the tracks from *Survival* do.

And so four decades after his death, Bob Marley remains the world's top reggae artist. But it's his lighter, less controversial fare that's established him as a global superstar.

In an era of minuscule music royalties, a large portion of that \$16-million in earnings also comes from merchandising, which has further watered down Marley's revolutionary politics and spiritualism.

Thanks to what two writers called

“the Disneyfication of all matters Marley,” you can now buy Bob Marley-themed coffee, ice cream and body wash. There's sustainably sourced, Bob Marley-branded audio equipment, in addition to a line of Bob Marley skateboard decks.

The cannabis brand Marley Natural shows how the Marley name has become commercially intertwined with corporate America.

It's funded by the American private equity company Privateer Holdings, which the Marley family had approached to gauge their interest in collaboration for the product's release. The creators of the Starbucks logo were hired to design the logo for Marley Natural, further underlining the venture's commercial ties.

Aside from the obvious fact that these associations pay no heed to Bob Marley's anti-capitalist messages, I find it bitterly ironic that the private equity firm calls itself “Privateer.” Privateers were commissioned ships involved in plundering and murder across the Caribbean. They are among the “old pirates” Marley sang about in his mournful *Redemption Song*.

While the Marley family claims that Bob would have approved of the cannabis enterprise, critics see indiscriminate mass-marketing.

The artist's popular songs and lyrics have also been adopted as marketing tools to sell products that bear little relation to Marley's music and message. In 2001, his daughter Cedella, who runs parts of the estate, released a fashion line called *Catch a Fire*. The name comes from the Wailers' first international album, which the group released in 1973. On it, tracks like *Slave Driver*, *Concrete Jungle* and *400 Years* connect the poverty of the present to the injustices of the past.

Can T-shirts and other apparel help spread these messages? Perhaps. But it's hard to argue that

Marley-themed hot sauce does.

Critiquing any aspect of Bob Marley's legacy can elicit defensive responses. The estate has long portrayed the rampant commercialisation of the Marley name and image as an important way to sustain and spread the artist's ideals.

However, I think it's important to ensure that the artistic and cultural values embedded in his music do not become clouded in a haze of consumerism.

While many of the commercial enterprises tied to his name reportedly raise money for Jamaican youth, I'd hesitate to say that this serves as a complete counterbalance to the erosion of Marley's messages.

The *One Love* movie backed by Paramount Pictures – with four Marleys listed as producers – will certainly extend the mythologies and harsh realities of Bob Marley's all-too-brief life, which was cut short by melanoma. But it's also a massive international marketing vehicle for the sale of even more officially branded merchandise.

On the one hand, the fact that people so eagerly buy products plastered with Marley's face and words reflects the profound connection he continues to have with his listeners. But on the other hand, it's difficult squaring Marley – a symbol of post-colonialism and anti-capitalism – with branding collaborations and private equity firms.

His music means so much more. And his anti-imperialist messages, as warmongers threaten basic human rights around the world, are perhaps needed now more than ever. **CT**

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Christian fascism: Biden's parting gift to America

The Democratic Party had a chance to implement the kind of New Deal reforms that could save us from another Trump presidency and Christian fascism. It failed

Joe Biden and the Democratic Party made a Trump presidency possible once and look set to make it possible again. If Trump returns to power, it will not be due to Russian interference, voter suppression or because the working class is filled with irredeemable bigots and racists. It will be because the Democrats are as indifferent to the suffering of Palestinians in Gaza as they are to immigrants, the poor in our impoverished inner cities, those driven into bankruptcy by medical bills, credit card debt and usurious mortgages, those discarded, especially in rural America, by waves of mass layoffs and workers, trapped in the serfdom of the gig economy, with its job instability and suppressed wages.

Biden and the Democrats, along with the Republican Party, gutted antitrust enforcement and deregulated banks and corporations, allowing them to cannibalise the nation. They backed legislation in 1982 to green light the manipulation of stocks through massive buybacks and the "harvesting" of companies by private equity firms that resulted in mass layoffs.

They pushed through onerous trade deals, including the North American Free Trade Agreement, the greatest betrayal of the working class since the 1947 Taft-Hart-

ley Act, which crippled union organizing. They were full partners in the construction of the vast archipelagos of the US prison system – the largest in the world – and the militarisation of police to turn them into internal armies of occupation. They fund the endless wars.

The Democrats dutifully serve their corporate masters, without whom most of them, including Biden, would not have a political

A second Trump term will not be like the first. It will be about vengeance. Vengeance against the institutions that targeted Trump

career. This is why Biden and the Democrats will not turn on those who are destroying our economy and extinguishing our democracy. The slops in the trough would dry up. Advocating reforms jeopardise their fiefdoms of privilege and power. They fancy themselves as "captains of the ship," labour journalist Hamilton Nolan writes, but they are "actually the wood-eating shipworms who are consuming the thing from inside until it sinks."

Authoritarianism is nurtured in

the fertile soil of a bankrupt liberalism. This was true in Weimar Germany. It was true in the former Yugoslavia. And it is true now. The Democrats had four years to institute New Deal reforms. They failed. Now we will pay.

A second Trump term will not be like the first. It will be about vengeance. Vengeance against the institutions that targeted Trump – the press, the courts, the intelligence agencies, disloyal Republicans, artists, intellectuals, the federal bureaucracy and the Democratic Party.

Our imperial presidency, if Donald Trump returns to power, will shift effortlessly into a dictatorship that emasculates the legislative and judicial branches. The plan to snuff out our anaemic democracy is methodically laid out in the 887-page plan amassed by the Heritage Foundation called "Mandate for Leadership."

The Heritage Foundation spent \$22-million to draw up policy proposals, hiring lists and transition plans in Project 2025 to save Trump from the rudderless chaos that plagued his first term. Trump blames "snakes," "traitors," and the "Deep State" for undermining his first administration.

Our industrious American fascists, clutching the Christian cross and waving the flag, will begin work



on day one to purge federal agencies of "snakes" and "traitors," promulgate "Biblical" values, cut taxes for the billionaire class, abolish the Environmental Protection Agency, stack the courts and federal agencies with ideologues and strip workers of the few rights and protections they have left. War and internal security, including the wholesale surveillance of the public, will remain the main business of the state. The other functions of the state, especially those that focus on social services, including Social Security and protection of the vulnerable, will wither away.

Unfettered and unregulated capitalism, which has no self-imposed limits, turns everything into a commodity, from human beings to the natural world, which it exploits, un-

til exhaustion or collapse. It first creates a mafia economy, as Karl Polanyi writes, and then a mafia government.

Political theorists, including Aristotle, Karl Marx and Sheldon Wolin, warn that when oligarchs seize power, the only options left are tyranny or revolution.

The Democrats know the working class has abandoned them. And they know why. Democratic Party pollster Mike Lux writes:

"[C]ontrary to many pundits' assumptions, economic issues are driving the problems of Democrats in non-metro working class counties far more than the culture war... [T]hese voters wouldn't care all that

much about cultural difference and the woke thing if they thought Democrats gave more of a damn about economic challenges they face deeply and daily...The voters we need to win in these counties are not inherently right-wing on social issues."

But the Democrats will not alienate the corporations and billionaires who keep them in office. They have opted instead for two self-defeating tactics: lies and fear.

The Democrats express a faux concern for workers who are victimised by mass layoffs while at the same time courting the corporate leaders who orchestrate these layoffs with lavish government contracts. The same hypocrisy sees them express concern for civilians being slaughtered in Gaza while funnelling billions of dollars in weapons to Israel

and vetoing ceasefire resolutions at the UN to sustain the genocide.

Les Leopold in his book *Wall Street's War on Workers*, filled with exhaustive polling and data, illustrates that economic dislocation and despair is the engine behind an enraged working class, not racism and bigotry. He writes about the decision by Siemens to close its plant in Olean, New York with 530 decent paying union jobs. While Democrats bemoaned the closure, they refused to deny federal contracts to Siemens to protect the workers at the plant.

Biden then invited Siemens' USA CEO Barbara Humpton to the White House signing of the 2021 infrastructure bill. The photo of the signing shows Humpton standing in the front row along with New York Senator Chuck Schumer.

Mingo County in the early 20th-century was the epicentre of an armed clash between the United Mine Workers and the coal barons, with their hired gun thugs from the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency. The gun thugs evicted striking workers in 1912 from company housing and beat up and shot union members until the state militia occupied the coal towns and broke the strike. The federal siege was not lifted until 1933 by the Roosevelt administration. The union, which had been banned, was legalised.

"Mingo County didn't forget, at least not for a long time," Leopold writes. "As late as 1996, with more than 3,200 coal miners still at work, Mingo County gave Bill Clinton a whopping 69.7 percent of its vote. But every four years thereafter, support for the Democrats declined, going down and down, and down some more. By 2020, Joe Biden received only 13.9 percent of the vote in Mingo, a brutal downturn in a county that once saw the Democratic Party as its saviour."

The 3,300 Mingo County coal min-



The reigning oligarchs, not content with mass layoffs and slashing the unionised workforce, are trying to shut down the federal agency that enforces labour rights

ing jobs by 2020 had fallen to 300, the largest loss of coal jobs in any county in the country.

The lies of Democratic politicians did far more damage to working men and women than any of the lies spewed by Trump. There have been at least 30-million mass layoffs since 1996 when the Bureau of Labor Statistics started tracking them, according to the Labor Institute.

The reigning oligarchs, not content with mass layoffs and reducing the unionised workforce in the private sector to a paltry 6 percent, have filed legal papers to shut down the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), the federal agency that enforces labour rights.

Elon Musk's SpaceX as well as Amazon, Starbucks and Trader Joe's targeted the NLRB – already stripped of most of its power to levy fines and force corporate compliance – after it accused Amazon, Starbucks and Trader Joe's of breaking the law by blocking union organising.

The NLRB accused SpaceX of il-

legally firing eight workers for criticising Musk. SpaceX, Amazon, Starbucks and Trader Joes are seeking to get the federal courts to overturn the 89-year-old National Labor Relations Act to prevent judges from hearing cases brought against corporations for violating labour laws.

Fear – fear of the return of Trump and Christian fascism – is the only card the Democrats have left to play. This will work in urban, liberal enclaves where college educated technocrats, part of the globalised knowledge economy, are busy scolding and demonising the working class for their ingratitude.

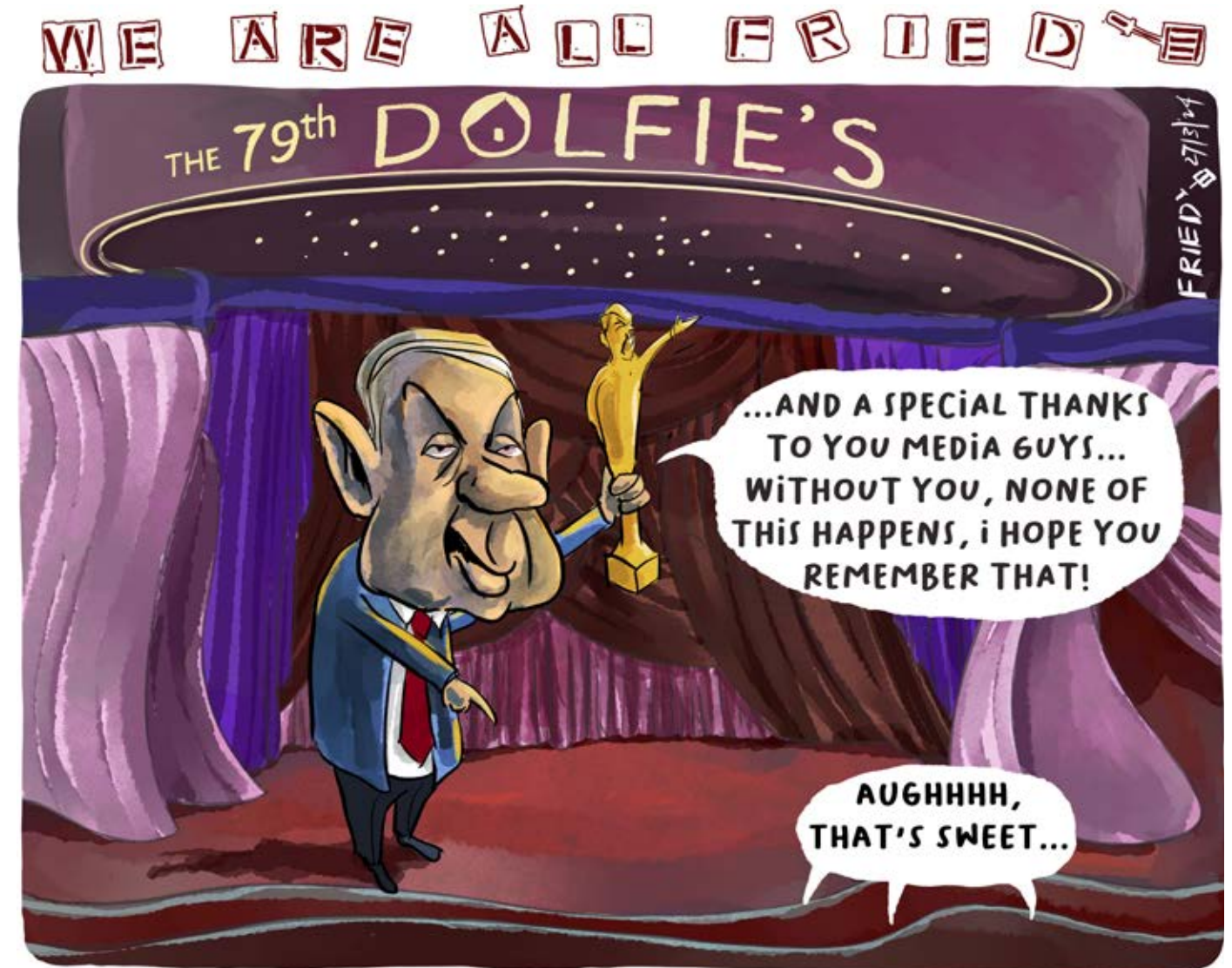
The Democrats have foolishly written off these "deplorables" as a lost political cause. This precariat, the mantra goes, is victimised not by a predatory system built to enrich the billionaire class, but by their ignorance and individual failures. Dismissing the disenfranchised absolves the Democrats from advocating the legislation to protect and create decent-paying jobs.

Fear has no hold in de-industrialised urban landscapes and the neglected wastelands of rural America, where families struggle without sustainable work, an opioid crisis, food deserts, personal bankruptcies, evictions, crippling debt and profound despair.

They want what Trump wants. Vengeance. Who can blame them?

CT

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RON FASSBENDER

Thousands march against racism in the UK

Protesters unite against right-wing extremist groups that propagate racism, and laws that will effectively ban political protest in Britain

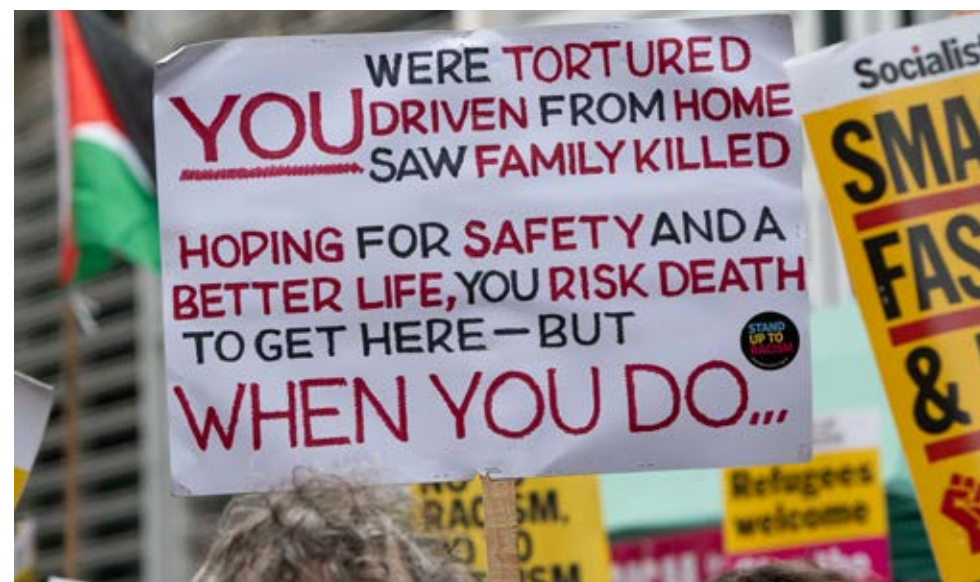


Photo: Ronn Fassbender

Above: Marchers assemble for a rave outside Downing Street.

Right: Protester responds to Tory donor Frank Hester, who racially abused MP Diane Abbott.

Photos: Ron Fassbender



Thousands of protesters took part in a London protest march on March 16 that culminated in a musical rave in Whitehall, the heart of the UK government. The march, which began outside the Home Office, was part of a campaign organised by Stand Up to Racism against the ruling Conservative Party and racism, and was backed by trade unions and other campaign groups.

The rave, featuring some of the UK's top DJs, was closed by police an hour before its advertised ending time because, they said, "it was unlicensed."

Attended by 5,000 people, the protest was called in reaction to accusations by communities secretary

Michael Gove that targeted a number of Muslim groups with accusations of extremism.

Marchers were also angered by racist comments by Frank Hester – who donated £10-million over the past year to the Conservative Party – against black MP Diane Abbott. He is reported to have told colleagues that looking at Diane Abbott made you "want to hate all black women" and said the MP "should be shot."

Unlike previous years, only one Labour Party MP, – John McDonnell – took part in the protest.

Other anti-racist marches were held in Glasgow and Cardiff over the same weekend. – TS. **CT**



Above: Marchers show their solidarity with Diane Abbott, who was suspended as a Labour MP by party leader Keir Starmer. Right: The T-shirt says everything that needs to be said.

Photos: Ron Fassbender



Above: Peace is the keyword for the marchers, despite calls in the right wing media for bans. Left: Former Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn leads the fight against racism; while a banner shows what many Brits think of the ruling Conservative Party.

Photos: Ron Fassbender



Above: Police lead away a protester outside New Scotland Yard.

Right: A banner suggests that the real extremists are in the Tory government.

The Photographer
 Ron Fassbender is a London-based documentary photographer. See more of his work at www.ronfassbender.com and on Instagram @ronfassbender

Below: The people, united and fighting all forms of racism.

Photos: Ron Fassbender



Above: John McDonnell, the only Labour Party MP to speak at the event.

Left: Hand-drawn sign is a reminder of the long-term political racism shown by various British governments.

Photos: Ron Fassbender

Tyranny rises as freedom falls

The state of the nation that no one in the US is talking about

“Never has our future been more unpredictable, never have we depended so much on political forces that cannot be trusted to follow the rules of common sense and self-interest – forces that look like sheer insanity, if judged by the standards of other centuries.”

– Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*

Day by day, tyranny is rising as freedom falls.

- The US military is being used to patrol subway stations and police the US-Mexico border, supposedly in the name of national security.

- The financial sector is being used to carry out broad surveillance of Americans’ private financial data, while the entertainment sector is being tapped to inform on video game enthusiasts with a penchant for violent, potentially extremist content, all in an alleged effort to uncover individuals subscribing to anti-government sentiments

- Public and private venues are being equipped with sophisticated surveillance technologies, including biometric and facial recognition software, to track Americans wherever they go and whatever they do. Space satellites with powerful overhead surveillance cameras will render privacy null and void.

This is the state of our nation that

no one is talking about – not the politicians, not the courts, and not Congress: the government’s power grabs are growing bolder, while the rights of the citizenry continue to be trampled underfoot.

Hitler is hiding in the shadows, while the citizenry – the only ones powerful enough to stem the authoritarian tide that threatens to lay siege to our constitutional republic – remain easily distracted and conveniently diverted by political theatrics and news cycles that change every few days.

This sorry truth has persisted no matter which party has controlled Congress or the White House.

These are dangerous times.

Yet while the presidential candidates talk at length about the dangers posed by the opposition party, the US government still poses the gravest threat to our freedoms and way of life.

Police shootings of unarmed individuals, invasive surveillance, roadside blood draws, roadside strip searches, SWAT team raids gone awry, the military industrial complex’s costly wars, pork barrel spending, pre-crime laws, civil asset forfeiture, fusion centres, militarisation, armed drones, smart policing carried out by AI robots, courts that march in lockstep with the police state, schools that function as indoctrination centres, bureaucrats that keep the Deep State

in power: these are just a few of the ways in which the police state continues to flex its muscles in a show of force intended to intimidate anyone still clinging to the antiquated notion that the government answers to “we the people.”

Consider for yourself the state of our nation:

- **Americans have little protection against police abuse**

The police and other government agents have been generally empowered to probe, poke, pinch, taser, search, seize, strip and generally manhandle anyone they see fit in almost any circumstance, all with the general blessing of the courts. It is no longer unusual to hear about incidents in which police shoot unarmed individuals first and ask questions later. What is increasingly common, however, is the news that the officers involved in these incidents get off with little more than a slap on the hands.

- **Americans are little more than pocketbooks to fund the police state**

If there is any absolute maxim by which the federal government seems to operate, it is that the American taxpayer always gets ripped off. This is true, whether you’re talking about taxpayers be-



ing forced to fund high-priced weaponry that will be used against us, endless wars that do little for our safety or our freedoms, or bloated government agencies with their secret budgets, covert agendas and clandestine activities.

- **Americans are no longer innocent until proven guilty**

We once operated under the assumption that you were innocent until proven guilty. Due in large part to rapid advances in technology and a heightened surveillance culture, the burden of proof has been shifted so that the right to be considered innocent until proven guilty has been usurped by a new norm in which all citizens are suspects. Indeed, the government – in cahoots with the

corporate state – has erected the ultimate suspect society. In such an environment, we are all potentially guilty of some wrongdoing or other.

- **Americans no longer have a right to self-defence**

While the courts continue to disagree over the exact nature of the rights protected by the Second Amendment, the government itself has made its position extremely clear. When it comes to gun rights in particular, and the rights of the citizenry overall, the US government has adopted a “do what I say, not what I do” mindset. Nowhere is this double standard more evident than in the government’s attempts to arm itself to the teeth, all the while viewing as suspect any-

one who dares to legally own a gun, let alone use one in self-defence. Indeed, while it still technically remains legal to own a firearm in America, possessing one can now get you pulled over, searched, arrested, subjected to all manner of surveillance, treated as a suspect without ever having committed a crime, shot at, and killed.

- **Americans no longer have a right to private property**

If government agents can invade your home, break down your doors, kill your dog, damage your furnishings and terrorise your family, your property is no longer private and secure – it belongs to the government. Likewise, if government officials can fine and arrest you for growing

vegetables in your front yard, praying with friends in your living room, installing solar panels on your roof, and raising chickens in your backyard, you're no longer the owner of your property.

● **Americans no longer have a say about what their children are exposed to in school**

Incredibly, the government continues to insist that parents essentially forfeit their rights when they send their children to a public school. This growing tension over whether young people, especially those in the public schools, are essentially wards of the state, to do with as government officials deem appropriate, in defiance of the children's constitutional rights and those of their parents, is at the heart of almost every debate over educational programming, school discipline, and the extent to which parents have any say over their children's well-being in and out of school.

● **Americans are powerless in the face of militarised police forces**

With local police agencies acquiring military-grade weaponry, training and equipment better suited for the battlefield, Americans are finding their once-peaceful communities transformed into military outposts patrolled by a standing military army.

● **Americans no longer have a right to bodily integrity**

The debate over bodily integrity covers broad territory, ranging from abortion and euthanasia to forced blood draws, biometric surveillance and basic healthcare. Forced vaccinations, forced cavity searches, forced colonoscopies, forced blood draws, forced breath-alcohol tests, forced DNA extractions, forced eye scans, forced inclusion in biometric databases: these are just a few ways in which Americans continue to be

This steady slide towards tyranny has been carried forward by each successive president over the past seventy-plus years regardless of their political affiliation

reminded that we have no control over what happens to our bodies during an encounter with government officials.

● **Americans no longer have a right to the expectation of privacy**

Despite the staggering number of revelations about government spying on Americans' phone calls, Facebook posts, Twitter tweets, Google searches, emails, bookstore and grocery purchases, bank statements, commuter toll records, etc., Congress, the president and the courts have done little to nothing to counteract these abuses. Instead, they seem determined to accustom us to life in this electronic concentration camp.

● **Americans no longer have a representative government**

We have moved beyond the era of representative government and entered the age of authoritarianism, where all citizens are suspects, security trumps freedom, and so-called elected officials represent the interests of the corporate power elite. This topsy-turvy travesty of law and government has become America's new normal.

● **Americans can no longer rely on the courts to mete out justice**

The US Supreme Court was intended to be an institution established to intervene and protect the people against the government and its agents when they overstep their

bounds. Yet through their deference to police power, preference for security over freedom, and evisceration of our most basic rights for the sake of order and expediency, the justices of the Supreme Court have become the architects of the American police state in which we now live, while the lower courts have appointed themselves courts of order, concerned primarily with advancing the government's agenda, no matter how unjust or illegal.

I haven't even touched on the corporate state, the military industrial complex, SWAT team raids, invasive surveillance technology, zero tolerance policies in the schools, overcriminalisation, or privatized prisons, to name just a few, but what I have touched on should be enough to show that the landscape of our freedoms has already changed dramatically from what it once was and will no doubt continue to deteriorate unless Americans can find a way to wrest back control of their government and reclaim their freedoms.

This steady slide towards tyranny, meted out by militarised local and federal police and legalistic bureaucrats, has been carried forward by each successive president over the past seventy-plus years regardless of their political affiliation. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

We are walking a dangerous path right now.

Having allowed the government to expand and exceed our reach, we find ourselves on the losing end of a tug-of-war over control of our country and our lives. And for as long as we let them, government officials will continue to trample on our rights, always justifying their actions as being for the good of the people.

Yet the government can only go as

far as "we the people" allow. Therein lies the problem.

The pickle we find ourselves in speaks volumes about the nature of the government beast we have been saddled with and how it views the rights and sovereignty of "we the people."

Now you don't hear a lot about sovereignty anymore. Sovereignty is a dusty, antiquated term that harkens back to an age when kings and emperors ruled with absolute power over a populace that had no rights. Americans turned the idea of sovereignty on its head when they declared their independence from Great Britain and rejected the absolute authority of King George III. In doing so, Americans claimed for themselves the right to self-government and established themselves as the ultimate authority and power.

In other words, in America, "we the people" – sovereign citizens – call the shots.

So when the government acts, it is supposed to do so at our bidding and on our behalf, because we are the rulers.

That's not exactly how it turned out, though, is it?

In the 200-plus years since we boldly embarked on this experiment in self-government, we have been steadily losing ground to the government's brazen power grabs, foisted upon us in the so-called name of national security.

We have relinquished control over the most intimate aspects of our lives to government officials who, while they may occupy seats of authority, are neither wiser, smarter, more in tune with our needs, more knowledgeable about our problems, nor more aware of what is really in our best interests.

The government has knocked us off our rightful throne. It has usurped our rightful authority. It has staged the ultimate coup. Its agents no longer even pretend that

In the 200-plus years since we boldly embarked on this experiment in self-government, we have been losing ground to the government's brazen power grabs

they answer to "we the people."

Worst of all, "we the people" have become desensitised to this constant undermining of our freedoms.

How do we reconcile the Founders' vision of the government as an entity whose only purpose is to serve the people with the police state's insistence that the government is the supreme authority, that its power trumps that of the people themselves, and that it may exercise that power in any way it sees fit (that includes government agents crashing through doors, mass arrests, ethnic cleansing, racial profiling, indefinite detentions without due process, and internment camps)?

They cannot be reconciled. They are polar opposites.

We are fast approaching a moment of reckoning where we will be forced to choose between the vision of what America was intended to be (a model for self-governance where power is vested in the people) and the reality of what it has become (a police state where power is vested in the government).

We are repeating the mistakes of history – namely, allowing a totalitarian state to reign over us.

Former concentration camp inmate Hannah Arendt warned against this when she wrote: "No matter what the specifically national tradition or the particular spiritual source of its ideology, totalitari-

an government always transformed classes into masses, supplanted the party system, not by one-party dictatorships, but by mass movement, shifted the center of power from the army to the police, and established a foreign policy openly directed toward world domination."

Where does that leave us?

Aldous Huxley predicted that eventually the government would find a way of "making people love their servitude, and producing dictatorship without tears, so to speak, producing a kind of painless concentration camp for entire societies, so that people will in fact have their liberties taken away from them, but will rather enjoy it, because they will be distracted from any desire to rebel by propaganda or brainwashing, or brainwashing enhanced by pharmacological methods. And this seems to be the final revolution."

The answer? Get un-brainwashed, stop allowing yourself to be distracted and diverted.

Learn your rights. Stand up for the founding principles.

Make your voice and your vote count for more than just political posturing.

Never cease to vociferously protest the erosion of your freedoms at the local and national level.

Most of all, do these things today.

CT

*John W. Whitehead, a constitutional lawyer and author, is founder and president of The Rutherford Institute. His book *Battlefield America: The War on the American People* (SelectBooks, 2015) is available online at www.amazon.com. Whitehead can be contacted at john@rutherford.org.*

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