

Dedicated to Abolishing War, Establishing Justice, and Fighting Climate Disaster
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The Machinery of Terror

Chris Hedges' essay below, published four days after Renee Good was brutally murdered by ICE agents in Minneapolis and two weeks before Alex Pretti was shot in the back by ICE agents of terror, lays out the stark choices facing us. Neutrality is not an option.—The Editors

By Chris Hedges Jan 11, 2026

I have seen the masked goons who terrorize our streets before. I saw them during the “Dirty War” in Argentina, where 30,000 men, women and children were “disappeared” by the military junta. Victims were held in secret prisons, savagely tortured and murdered. To this day, many families do not know the fate of their loved ones.

I saw them in El Salvador, when death squads were killing 800 people a month. I saw them in Guatemala under the dictatorship of José Efraín Ríos Montt. I saw them in Augusto Pinochet's Chile and in Saddam Hussein's Iraq. I saw them in Iran under the rule of the ayatollahs where I was arrested and jailed twice and once deported in handcuffs. I saw them in Hafez al-Assad's Syria. I saw them in Bosnia, where Muslims were herded into concentration camps, executed and buried in mass graves.

I know these goons. I have been a prisoner in their jails and spent hours in their interrogation rooms. I have been beaten



The Missing Link - by Mr. Fish

by them. I have been deported, and in several cases banned, from their countries. I know what is coming.

Terror is the engine that empowers dictatorships. It eliminates dissidents. It silences critics. It dismantles the law. It creates a society of timid and frightened collaborators, those who look away when people are snatched off streets or gunned down, those who inform to save themselves, those who retreat into their tiny rabbit holes, pulling down the blinds, desperately praying to be left in peace.

Terror works.

The iron doors have not yet shut. There are still protests. The media is still able to document state atrocities, including the Jan. 7 murder of Renee Nicole Good in Minneapolis by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent Jonathan Ross. But the doors are closing fast. ICE has deported over 300,000 people and detained nearly 69,000 others—as well as been involved in 16 shootings, including four killings—since Trump began his campaign against immigrants.

ICE, our Americanized Gestapo, is being birthed.

Resistance must be collective. We must assert not only our individual rights, but economic, social and political rights—without them we are powerless. Resistance means organizing to disrupt the machinery of commerce and government. It means preventing arrests by patrolling neighborhoods to warn of impending ICE raids. It means protesting outside detention facilities. It means strikes. It means blocking streets and highways and occu-

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A First Lady in a New York Cell

By Medea Benjamin and Michelle Ellner

On International Working Women's Day in 2025, Cilia Flores, the wife of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, read a poem she wrote highlighting the historic role played by Latin American women in the fight against imperialism.

*We're not flowers the wind can pluck,
we're roots of rebel and loyal land,
we're grandmothers, mothers, daughters, grand-*

daughters;

*we are woman.
Our blood pulses with the Manuelas,
Luisas, Josefás, Juanas, Cecílias,
Apacuanas, Bartolinas, Eulalias,
Martas, Anas Marías, Barbaritas
and so many others who legacy inspires,
commits, and strengthens us
to continue walking and traveling our path.
And in our hands and chests
a light is on that nobody will ever turn off:
love, peace and liberty.*

—Cilia Flores, International Working Women's Day 2025

One year later, she languishes in a cell in New York City, having been dragged out of her room and kidnapped by U.S. forces on the Jan. 3 attack on Venezuela. The first images after her abduction showed her face bruised. We later learned she had broken ribs, 23 stitches in her forehead, and deteriorating health inside U.S. custody.

Flores is no ordinary first lady. She first rose to prominence in 1992 as a defense lawyer for a group of Venezuelan military officers who rose up against the government of Carlos Andrés Pérez, which had massacred thousands of people in the Caracazo of 1989—nationwide riots following the imposition of neoliberal austerity measures. Key among those officers was Hugo Chávez, the founder of the Bolivarian Revolution.

In 1993, Cilia founded the Bolivarian Circle of Human Rights and aligned herself with Chávez's revolutionary movement. In 2000, having helped Chávez win consecutive presidential elections, she was elected to the legislature. By 2006, she became the president of the National Assembly, the first woman in Venezuela's history to occupy the post. Flores held important positions in the United Socialist Party of Venezuela and became the country's Solicitor General in 2012, a post she left to run

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Cilia brought feminism to the Bolivarian Revolution: 'Our women are patriots ... and in the next scenario, whatever it may be, we will be victorious because women will be at the forefront of any battle.'

Editorial

On Heroes

Here we go again. Another day, another war. Whose war is it this time? Whom are we fighting? What's to be gained? What's to be lost? It is the last of those questions I'd like to address by altering the word "what" to "who." In doing so, I'd like to also wade through some of the euphemisms that always rise up when a war is waged.

Take "theater," for example, the word used by armchair warriors to refer to the devastated lands we boots-on-the-ground warriors occupy. And our time "in country" (I'm a veteran of the Vietnam War) is referred to as a "tour"—you know, like a luxury liner cruise. And then there's the horrific term "body count" that came out of the Vietnam war because the traditional signs of success in war—the capture of real estate—no longer applied in a guerrilla war. So success was achieved when we killed more of "them" than they killed of us. And other bodies were given another name—"collateral damage." Those were the little kids and grandparents who happened to get in the way of our "mission" (let's bring religion in too). Now, I'm warming up to the euphemism that is really being tossed about in this year's war in Iran—the soldier as "hero."

Okay. Let's get to it. First off, we should be reminded that the "hero" referred to in mawkish media accounts is often referred to by warmongers as an "asset" in closed door war-planning sessions. As in "how many assets can we afford to lose by attacking that place?" Imagine seeing a flag-draped casket as carrying an asset. They don't want you to see that. They'd rather call the occupant a "hero" instead.

So, what then is the definition of a "hero"? For me, heroes are people who sacrifice their own well-being for the benefit of another. A hero is a person whose empathy rises to the highest level. A person like Hugh Thompson, for example, the chopper pilot who brought the My Lai massacre (March 1968) to an end. Of course the aforementioned armchair dudes hated him because he saved Vietnamese lives. We who were there saluted him for using his moral courage to stop the slaughter of innocent mothers, grandmothers, and children. He's a hero.

On the other hand, some poor soldier on the way to the latrine who got caught in the open during a mortar attack, say, is not necessarily a "hero." More likely a person in the wrong place at the wrong time. Truly a tragic death, yes, but let's

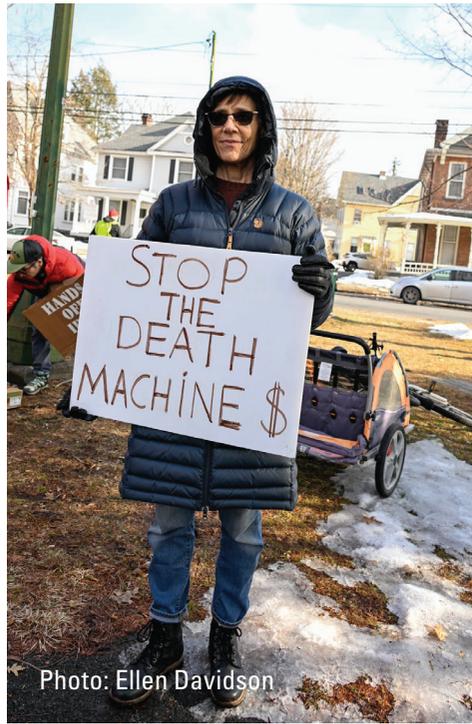


Photo: Ellen Davidson

not adorn it with fake accolades and, worse yet, let's not make this death a reason for killing more people. That's where the word "hero" comes into its most egregiously evil usage.

And, by the way, calling a soldier a "hero" actually diminishes that person's ability to speak honestly. After all, if mom and dad call you that, how can you sit down with them and tell them what you actually did in that war? You don't. You close down. And then PTSD and moral injury set in. And then alcoholism, drug addiction and often suicide become your only options.

What can we do in reference to those soldiers caught up in the war? Forget the euphemisms. We can work to end the war and to bring the soldiers home alive, not in caskets. They are human beings who deserve to be treated with respect, not treated as pawns in some demented autocrat's little game.

Let's save the "hero worship" for professional sports. Here are a few athletes who have lived up to that accolade: Muhammed Ali, the greatest boxer of all time who risked his career by resisting the Vietnam War draft; Jim Brown, the greatest running back of all time, who was a supporter of Muhammad Ali and a key figure in the Black Power Movement; and the five Iranian women soccer players who recently refused to sing their national anthem to protest their government's repressive policies and have been exiled to Australia. Those are the real heroes.

—Doug Rawlings

Letter to the Editor

Deutschland, Deutschland über alles?

"Deutschland, Deutschland über alles, über alles in der Welt." So begins the German national anthem, which was used by the Nazis as a declaration of world hegemony. No international laws could hold Germany back. No sense of decency or morality would alter its drive for military dominance.

The same ultra nationalist thinking now controls our own White House. We bomb, we starve, we invade any country that gets in our way. We laugh at the rules that have held us back since World War II. Any world leader who resists will be assassinated or captured. With 800 military bases in the rest of the world, we will crush all dissent both home and abroad.

How did Germany think it could control the world? Racism convinced Hitler that Germany would prevail against all other countries. Also, Hitler ruled by hunches and constantly went against his generals. By the time he invaded Poland, there was nobody in the press, or the courts, or the universities who could stand up against him.

Our own Hitler is busy crushing dissent and destroying our Constitution. His billionaire class has bought up all the media. He controls what is taught in our colleges, and simply ignores the courts when they urge caution. Finally, he is deeply racist and has energized the white Christian nationalists.

He is talking about taking a third term, and has ICE as his private Storm Troopers. Unless we stop Trump now, we will have to fight him in the streets.

Sweet land of liberty. These were the words sung to our elementary school class as the U.S. flag went up the pole, snapping in the morning breeze. I remember thinking that my country must be an amazing place if grownups choke up about it. I was proud to be part of a country that even sang these words.

So many years later, my basic beliefs in these words and the country that still sings them, are gone. The U.S. is the mightiest nation the world has ever seen. We are starving two million people in Palestine. We are bombing Iran. We are kidnapping world leaders, or assassinating them along with their families. We threaten the rest of the world with endless wars, and our implacable war machine is on the move, looking for more victims.

Is there anything sweet about U.S. militarism? Is there any liberty after the U.S. and its reprehensible ally in crime, Israel, have murdered millions? The reasons for our perpetual invasions of other countries have turned out to be transparent lies.

I don't think that the U.S. and Israel can conquer the rest of the world. Their heinous crimes against humanity will be their epitaph.

—Fred Nagel

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Photo: Ellen Davidson

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ICE Operations Resemble Israeli Occupation. That's No Coincidence

U.S. immigration enforcement has long cultivated ties with Israel. Now it adapts algorithmic surveillance tactics from Gaza for use on American streets.

By Sophia Goodfriend

As U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents have swarmed cities across the United States, American politics has appeared to enter a new phase, one in which armed federal forces turn civilian neighborhoods into active conflict zones. Part of what is driving this political shift is a potent technical infrastructure: ICE operations are now expedited by mobile surveillance and targeting systems, where agents' most powerful weapon can fit in the palm of their hands.

Recent reporting has revealed ICE is relying on at least two applications to guide its crackdown. The first is ELITE (Enhanced Leads Identification and Targeting for Enforcement), a new geospatial system built by the data analytics firm Palantir for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and designed for use on smartphones and tablets. ELITE "populates a map with deportation targets, brings up a dossier on each person, and provides a 'confidence score' on the person's current address," according to a



Los Angeles, June 12, 2025: U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Photo: Tia Dufour/U.S. Department of Homeland Security

user manual published late last month. The second is Mobile Fortify, a facial recognition application manufactured by the biometrics company NEC that allows immigration enforcement officers to identify both citizens and undocumented migrants. ICE and other DHS agents have reportedly photographed and scanned the faces of Americans in cities like Minneapolis and Chicago—images that are cross-checked with biometric databases, compiled into dossiers, and stored for up to 15 years.

'I wouldn't feel comfortable if they used it in the mall in [my hometown], ...' an Israeli intelligence operative told the Washington Post ... 'It's a total violation of the privacy of an entire people.'

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New York Times columnist Lydia Polgreen described an "occupation designed to punish and terrorize." The technologies supporting their operations illustrate how thoroughly ICE is following in Israel's footsteps: Both ELITE and Mobile For-

tify bear a striking resemblance to mobile targeting applications Israeli forces have integrated into their policing arsenal over the last decade.

Israel's Surveillance 'Selling Point'

Since Sept. 11, 2001, Israel has cultivated close ties with U.S. immigration enforcement through joint delegations, trainings, and technology exchanges, all of which helped deliver Israeli counterterrorism methods into the hands of ICE. But DHS would only begin to experiment with data mining and algorithmic surveil-

lance—practices largely pioneered by Israeli intelligence agencies—during President Donald Trump's first term in office. It happened just as Israeli forces were automating their surveillance and targeting tactics across Palestine.

At Israel's first International Homeland Security Forum in Jerusalem in 2018, with a host of Trump-appointed officials in the crowd, Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan boasted that Israeli forces were using "advanced web intelligence tools and algorithms to find potential terrorists" for the first time. He told reporters that Israel's experience "can help other countries deal with this kind of terrorism."

The "advanced tools" Erdan referred to were part of a growing suite of algorithmic

surveillance systems first deployed in the West Bank and later in Gaza. By the late 2010s, in response to a series of so-called lone-wolf terror attacks, Israeli intelligence units had developed an extensive dragnet of surveillance tech to fish "potential terrorists" from the civilian population.

One of them is Blue Wolf, an application that allows soldiers to access biographical information on civilians by photographing their faces or scanning an ID card. Alongside details like addresses, employment history, and place of residence, the app analyzes intelligence from phone calls, texts, social media, and other surveillance sources to generate a "security rating"—an estimate of the individual's likelihood of carrying out an attack, on a scale of one to ten.

"I wouldn't feel comfortable if they used it in the mall in [my hometown], let's put it that way," an Israeli intelligence operative told the *Washington Post* when news of the application first broke in late 2021. "It's a total violation of the privacy of an entire people."

Pillar of Fire, a mobile mapping system modeled on civilian GPS interfaces, also became part of the Israeli combat arsenal around 2020. It allows intelligence units to mark terror targets for ground forces patrolling a given area or flag certain geographic regions where another set of machine learning systems predict militant activity is likely. Combat troops can then toggle through and search for people to arrest or places to raid based on algorithmically synthesized intelligence.

"It has an interactive layer, where we would upload targets and share them with forces in the field," an Israeli veteran of the elite cyberintelligence unit 8200 told me last week, describing his experience using these systems over the last few years.

"The more data you have the more you can do," he continued. "Israel's selling point was its ability to amass all these reserves of information and build up systems for policing on the ground," systems that have become too attractive for U.S. law enforcement to ignore.

Deploying 'the Israeli Method'

Over time, collaboration among Israeli intelligence units, tech companies, and the U.S. homeland security state has only deepened. Palantir opened an office in Tel Aviv in 2015, where it scored contracts with the Israeli government. Veterans of Israeli intelligence units founded surveillance firms like Paragon and Cellebrite, which have sold military-grade spy tech to DHS.

For decades, national and local U.S. law enforcement agencies have sent officers to Israel to learn new policing and counterterrorism tactics, which some participants said were too potent to be implemented at home: monitoring telecommunications and scraping internet content to decide whom to arrest; mining health records and location data to track others down; photographing civilians on the street to determine whether they should be questioned; and shooting them with impunity.

"A little more invasive than what you would see here in the U.S." is how Bill Ayub, a sheriff from southern California, described the predictive policing tools Israel demoed during a delegation trip he attended in 2017. "It was like, 'Wow, you do that?' ... We'd be in jail if we did something like that here."

In 2022, Santa Barbara Police Chief Craig Bonner also noted Israeli methods were far more aggressive than what was legally permissible in the United States. Recalling his training in Israel, he em-

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By George Yancy

Back in 2016, I was asked what I thought about Donald Trump. Even back then, I saw him as an aspiring fascist, and I responded:

Simply put, he is a conduit through which white America expresses its most vile desire for white purity. An apocalyptically dangerous white man who sees himself as the center of the world. That kind of hubris bespeaks realities of genocide.

Trump 2.0 has only confirmed my fears, my dread, and my anger. This administration is unapologetically hellbent on establishing a violent white fascistic state. The horrible reality of anti-Black fascism is not a new formation. The soul of this country was founded upon white power, white greed, and white violence. Trump is a product of a vicious poison, a historical legacy, that predates his abominable presidency. This isn't speculation or exaggeration. Black bodies and psyches are a record of this history: chains, enslavement, dehumanization, scarred backs, raped bodies, castrated bodies, broken necks, broken family ties, denied rights, denied citizenship, mass incarceration, and slow death. There are Black voices who recorded this history and who understood its fascistic logics. For example, Black poet and activist Langston Hughes wrote:

"Negroes in America do not have to be told what Fascism is in action. We know. Its theories of Nordic supremacy and economic suppression have long been realities to us."

And Black sociologist and philosopher W.E.B. Du Bois wrote, "We have conquered Germany ... but not their ideas. We still believe in white supremacy, keeping Negroes in their place."

Thinking about the reality of anti-Black fascism led me to the indispensable work of Jeanelle K. Hope and Bill V. Mullen. When it comes to documenting anti-Black fascism, they trace a longer arc with respect to the rise of fascism; they show how European fascists drew from early U.S. laws for their own specific fascist formations, and how the U.S. functioned as the very hub of fascist discourse and practice. Given this rich history and its importance for how to strategize moving forward, I interviewed Hope, an independent scholar and a lecturer at the University of California-Washington Center.

George Yancy: It is important to historically situate the phenomenon of fascism, especially within our contemporary context where the Constitution is being trampled upon, and what one might call the paramilitary deployment of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Your book, *The Black Antifascist Tradition: Fighting Back from Anti-Lynching to Abolition*, which you co-authored with Bill V. Mullen, powerfully challenges the narrative that fascism is a phenomenon that is exclusive to 20th-century Europe. It constitutes a necessary counter-narrative that highlights the gratuitous violent history that Black people in the U.S. have faced since their enslavement. This counter-narrative is what you term the Black antifascist tradition. What are some of the features that define the Black anti-

The Black Antifascist Tradition Recognized Fascism Didn't Begin in Europe

Black antifascists have long warned about creeping fascism, from slavery to mass incarceration to ICE terror



Prisoners at the Attica Correctional Facility give the Black Power salute on Sept. 10, 1971. "I believe the connection between abolition and Black antifascism is crystallized in the writings and activism of political prisoners and prison abolitionists," says scholar Jeanelle K. Hope.

fascist tradition?

Jeanelle K. Hope: The Black antifascist tradition recognizes that there has been a long arc of fascism throughout history, and that anti-Blackness has long undergirded fascist policies and formations, thus, disrupting prevailing historical narratives and theorizing on fascism. We argue that the earliest roots (or pillars) of fascism—authoritarian rule, genocide and ethnic cleansing, militarism, racial capitalism, dual application of the law—can be traced to the colonization of Africa and chattel slavery across the Americas. One of the most salient and defining features of anti-Black fascism is genocide. We chart out the systematic genocide of Black people from the brutality of enslavement, post-emancipation lynchings, to state-sanctioned violence and police brutality. Ida B. Wells's *Southern Horrors* and *Red Record*, W.E.B. Du Bois's lynching reports in *The Crisis*, William Patterson's petition to the United Nations entitled, "We Charge Genocide," and Arlene Eisen's 2012 report "Operation Ghetto Storm" all meticulously document the impact of lynchings and the immiseration of Black life. And with such damning evidence in hand, they argued that such acts constitute genocide. Indeed, "We Charge Genocide" emerges as a cross-generation rallying cry among Black antifascists like Patterson, Stokely Carmichael, and the Chicago-based youth group aptly named "We Charge Genocide."

Beyond presenting this counter-narrative, so much of our book also names how Black people have been on the front lines of antifascist struggles in Europe

(the Spanish Civil War), Ethiopia (the Italian invasion of Ethiopia), and across the United States. Moreover, the Black antifascist tradition underscores that fascism attacks on multiple fronts (i.e., art and cultural production, education, immigration, law and policy, health care, housing, etc.) and subsequently, requires a multifaceted resistance. Black antifascists have incorporated various organizing strategies, tactics, and actions including legal challenges, mutual aid, anarchy, autonomy, self-defense, boycotts, solidarity, and abolition.

What I think is an important takeaway from the Black antifascist tradition is knowing that Black people have long warned about what I describe as fascism's incessant creep. Fascism is not born overnight. It is relentless and creeps through society, systems, laws, and more over time. Black antifascists have played the long game, trying to check the creep of fascism at every turn, knowing that if left unchecked, humanity will enter some truly dark days.

GY: In your book, you write, "By the time the regimes of Hitler and Mussolini began to theorize racial purity and Aryan identity politics, discussing race in this quasi-biological sense in the U.S. was old news." This is such an important observation as it places anti-Black racism at the very core of the foundation of this nation. Talk about the centrality of "racial purity" and how that myth shaped the U.S., and how it continues to do so. And here I'm thinking about Trump's disgusting use of the expression "shithole countries" and his encouragement of immigrants from Norway.

JKH: Recognizing that race/racism/racial hierarchy are at the very foundation of colonial rule, it is of no surprise that race is also at the crux of fascism. From the onset, the history of the United States is marked by colonialism, and race almost immediately emerges as a system of domination to subordinate Indigenous peoples and enslaved Africans brought to the country. This racial hierarchy had/has significant economic and social implications. With Black, Brown, and Indigenous people viewed as subordinate, the belief of white supremacy and white domination in the western hemisphere was fomented. Up until the early 20th century (and some would even argue still today), great lengths (i.e. anti-miscegenation laws, racial integrity laws, racial purity tests, etc.) were undertaken to ensure a rigid racial hierarchy. The mere existence of interracial relationships and mixed-race people has long served as a threat to this system, blurring the racial binary, and forcing society and governments to have deeper questions about "who is white," and thus, gets to benefit from this system of domination.

Moreover, throughout U.S. history, this "gatekeeping" or protectionism of the white race shows up countless times from anti-immigration laws (i.e., the Chinese Exclusion Act), Jim Crow laws, the eugenics movement, and recent discourse around the "Great Replacement" theory. These efforts have largely (and unsuccessfully) sought to stymie influxes of non-white immigration, non-white births, and interracial relationships. It is also important to name that the constant pursuit of white racial purity is fundamentally tied to patriarchy, natalism and the regulation of women's bodies, hence the recent rollbacks on abortion access and reproductive health care.

GY: I was aware of Adolf Hitler's admiration for the U.S.'s racial segregationist practices and its eugenics movement, but your argument delineates in detail that European fascism "had its roots in American Anti-Black Fascism." This is a significant charge against the U.S.'s view of itself as "innocent," and as a "shining city on a hill." Indeed, it is this understanding of the U.S. that is necessary as we currently confront fascism in this country. You write, "Seldom have historians drawn connections between the Nuremberg Laws, Italian Racial Laws, and Jim Crow Laws of the U.S." What is it about certain historians that they have failed or refused to make such a significant connection?

JKH: Naming that U.S. racial policies effectively served a blueprint for the various legal systems of European fascism would disrupt a decades-long historical narrative surrounding WWI and WWII. The story of the "Axis vs. the Allies," and the United States' role in defeating fascism has long been the prevailing historical narrative taken up by historians. I think there is at times a failure among historians to step back, read across archives, and to stitch multiple historical events together. There has been a concerted effort among politicians and historians to preserve a liberal or redeeming narrative surrounding the

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On the Verge of Nothing

*Martial law,
constitutional theater,
and abusive authority*

By Tad Stoermer

In a recent interview, a journalist asked me directly: does what DHS and ICE did (and might yet do) in Chicago, Minneapolis, and elsewhere amount to martial law?

It's the right question. And almost everyone answering it goes wrong in the same way.

The people who claim to oppose the Trump regime keep insisting we're on the verge—on the verge of a constitutional crisis, on the verge of authoritarianism, on the verge of an emergency.

That framing is doing real damage. Not just because it's alarmist, but because it's also wrong about where the problem is. The crisis isn't waiting somewhere ahead of us. It's happening in the gap between what Americans imagine the Constitution does and how power is actually operating right now.

Americans have been trained to treat the Constitution as civic scripture—a document that somehow contains mystical guidance for every danger and pro-

tection against every abuse. It doesn't. It never did. The Anti-Federalists said so from the beginning. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. said so as Watergate was unfolding, sticking the term “the Imperial Presidency” in our collective consciousness. Nobody was hiding the ball. The problem is that nationalist storytellers taught people to ignore it.

That matters because it distorts how people read what's happening right in front of them. They keep asking whether the country has crossed some formal threshold—whether a court has called out the condition, whether an official declaration has been made, whether the Constitution has been visibly broken in a way everyone can agree on. And that confusion is leaving Americans baffled, uncertain, even unmoored from what they thought was their civic reality.

But abusive authority doesn't work that way. It's exercised first. The legal arguments come after. And the people get handed a cleaner story about what happened than the people on the receiving end ever experienced.

Abraham Lincoln, for example, didn't wait for constitutional consensus before suspending habeas corpus in 1861. He acted. The legality was contested in real time. Congress later authorized part of it.



ICE in Los Angeles June 12, 2025. Photo: Tia Dufour/U.S. Department of Homeland Security

The Supreme Court later imposed limits. But none of that changed how the authority had already operated on actual people. The legal story came after. The power came first. It always does.

So the debate over martial law is too narrow if it stays inside formal definitions. In the classical sense, martial law means military authority openly displacing civil authority. Fine. But if that becomes the only definition that counts, it becomes a way to miss what's actually happening.

The better question is functional. How

is authority being applied on the ground? Who is being subjected to it? What happens to ordinary civil protections when federal force enters a community over the objections of governors and mayors—of the civil authority—and starts moving at speed against targeted populations?

Look at what's in front of us. Federal agents and troops deployed selectively, even surgically. Immigration enforcement functioning as a national police power. People seized, transferred, and

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Antifascists

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United States' role in WWII. For example, it took decades for mainstream American history to finally recognize that the incarceration of Japanese Americans during the war was heinous. Yet some would still draw the line at comparing those “internment camps” to Nazi concentration camps. But it is that type of comparison that is direly needed to be able to understand the impact and evolution of fascism across time and space. We must also connect the current ICE detention centers to this broader history as well.

I think one of the biggest issues among historians, and even many leftist activists, is the aversion to name any formation of fascism outside of interwar Europe as fascism. For far too long, many have believed that Hitler and Mussolini's fascist rise was like capturing lightning in a bottle, when fascism had long existed beyond the confines of early 20th-century European history. From a deeply human standpoint I understand why one would want to believe that the atrocities of the Holocaust and Nazism could not be replicated. Yet, Black antifascists have long rang the proverbial alarm about the incessant creeping nature of fascism and its onslaught on Black life. Furthermore, to ignore or discount the claims of Black people like Robert F. Williams, Harry Haywood, George Jackson—among a host of others that have named fascism as the greatest threat to Black people (and all people) just because they don't neatly fit within longstanding scholarly traditions on historical

fascism—to me, is ahistorical.

GY: I agree! Talk about how contemporary forms of abolitionist discourse and activism are linked to the Black antifascist tradition.

JKH: The connection between abolition and Black anti-fascism is crystallized in the writings and activism of political prisoners and prison abolitionists starting with George Jackson, Angela Davis, Ericka Huggins, Kathleen Cleaver, and later in the work of Ruth Wilson Gilmore and Dylan Rodriguez, among others. Many

*“Negroes in America do not have to be told what
Fascism is in action. We know. Its theories of
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long been realities to us.”*

of the Black political prisoners of the late 1960s and early 1970s were among the most vocal in naming that America was engaging in fascism, arguing that prisons and the rise of mass incarceration amounted to the latest evolution of fascism's incessant creep on society. They recognized that prisons helped facilitate systematic genocide and was buttressed by a criminal justice and legal system that openly practiced a dual application of the law, whereby Black people were subjected to different interpretations of the law and harsher sentences, among other injustices. I think about Ericka Huggins's letters from Niantic prison where she describes their poor conditions, the in-

humane nature of solitary confinement, and the unjust way many Black Panther Party members, and other radicals of the era, were largely swept into prisons on trumped-up charges. I even think of those early pages of Assata Shakur's autobiography (*Assata: An Autobiography*) where she describes the guards of the prison in which she was incarcerated giving Nazi salutes to each other. The Attica prison uprising of 1971 stands as a major inflection point in this history.

Prison abolitionists have long con-

nected American prisons to the long arc of fascism, arguing that they are so deeply entrenched in fascism that they are beyond reform, concluding that abolition is the only solution. These arguments, of course, are most fervently explored in Angela Davis's *Are Prisons Obsolete?* and the work of Critical Resistance. It is from Davis and Critical Resistance's work that more contemporary abolitionists descend. Thus, it is of no surprise that during the height of the Black Lives Matter movement, calls to abolish the police emerged, and with the current wave of mass deportations and practice of “criminal migration,” there are calls to abolish ICE. The Black antifascist tradition recognizes

that the incarceration of Black people has long been tied to the fascist pillar of genocide, thus, any reproduction of incarceration—be it ICE detention centers or Japanese internment camps—will always be part of a broader fascist project. The harrowing reports of ICE detention center conditions and deaths is the latest harbinger of fascism's incessant creep.

GY: Given the specificity of how Black people in the U.S. have been brutalized and dehumanized in terms of anti-Black fascist logics, talk about what strategies have emerged out of Black struggles for countering and resisting (I want to say overthrowing) U.S. fascism. On this topic, I often feel a great deal of pessimism. Yet I agree with Robin D. G. Kelly where he said to me, “There is no guarantee that we will win—whatever that means—but I guarantee that if we don't fight, we lose.”

JKH: To feel pessimistic under the boot of fascism is only natural, and a feeling that is important to sit with. To draw upon the words of Kelly Hayes and Mariame Kaba, I think we also must work through that pessimism and “let this [moment] radicalize you.” Earlier in the interview, I highlighted some of the major organizing tactics, strategies, and actions that animate the Black antifascist tradition, so I'll use this space to stress some more practical forms of resistance for this moment. First and foremost, we all must begin the resistance to fascism through organizing and studying.

Remember, fascism attacks on all fronts, so we must develop a strategy that recognizes this and can be adapted in various spaces. Fascist policies are dismantling

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Terror

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pying buildings. It means providing photographic evidence. It means sustained pressure on local politicians and police to refuse to cooperate with ICE. It means providing legal representation, food and financial assistance to families with members detained. It means a willingness to be arrested. It means a nationwide campaign to defy the state's inhumanity.

If we fail, the dimming flames of our open society will be snuffed out.

Authoritarian states are constructed incrementally. No dictatorship advertises its plan to extinguish civil liberties. It pays lip service to liberty and justice as it dismantles the institutions and laws that make liberty and justice possible. Opponents of the regime, including those within the establishment, make sporadic attempts to resist. They throw up temporary roadblocks, but they are soon purged.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn in "The Gulag Archipelago" notes that the consolidation of Soviet tyranny "was stretched out over many years because it was of primary importance that it be stealthy and unnoticed." He called the process "a grandiose silent game of solitaire, whose rules were totally incomprehensible to its contemporaries, and whose outlines we can appreciate only now."

"What would things have been like if every Security operative, when he went out at night to make an arrest, had been uncertain whether he would return alive



doubt. It makes a population—often unconsciously—conform outwardly and inwardly. It conditions citizens to relate to those around them with suspicion and distrust. It destroys the solidarity vital to organizing, community and dissent.

Rat out your neighbors and coworkers and survive. If you see something, say something.

The worse it gets, the more established institutions, desperate to survive, silence those who warn us.

"Before societies fall, just such a stratum of wise, thinking people emerges, people who are that and nothing more," Solzhenitsyn writes of those who see what is coming. "And how they were

yers and the courts. Due process, once a constitutional right afforded to everyone in the United States, no longer exists.

"Laws that are not equal for all revert to rights and privileges, something contradictory to the very nature of nation-states," Hannah Arendt writes in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. "The clearer the proof of their inability to treat stateless people as legal persons and the greater the extension of arbitrary rule by police decree, the more difficult it is for states to resist the temptation to deprive all citizens of legal status and rule them with an omnipotent police."

The FBI, in an example of how justice is perverted, refuses to cooperate with local law enforcement agencies in Minneapolis, blocking access to any evidence that would allow them to file criminal charges against Jonathan Ross.

Killing of unarmed citizens by the state is carried out with impunity.

ICE has more than doubled the size of its force since early 2025—to 22,000 agents—hiring 12,000 new officers in four months from a pool of 220,000 applicants. It plans to spend \$100 million over a one-year period to hire even more recruits, part of the \$170 billion for border and interior enforcement, including \$75 billion for ICE, to be spent over four years.

ICE is building new detention centers nationwide in 23 towns and cities. It promises that once it is fully operational, it will go door-to-door as part of the largest deportation effort in American history.

ICE agents, intoxicated by the license to kick down doors while wearing body armor and firing automatic weapons at terrified women and children, are not warriors as they imagine, but thugs. They have few skills, other than weapons training, cruelty and brutality. They intend to remain employed by the state. The state intends to keep them employed.

None of this should surprise us. The repressive techniques used by ICE and our militarized police were perfected overseas in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya and Occupied Palestine, and earlier in Vietnam. The ICE agent who murdered Good was a machinegunner in Iraq. A night raid in Chicago, with agents rappelling from a helicopter to storm an apart-

ment complex filled with terrified families, does not look any different from a night raid in Fallujah.

Aimé Césaire, the Martinican playwright and politician, in "Discourse on Colonialism" writes that the savage tools of imperialism and colonialism eventually migrate back to the home country. It is known as imperial boomerang.

Césaire writes:

"And then one fine day the bourgeoisie is awakened by a terrific boomerang effect: the gestapos are busy, the prisons fill up, the torturers standing around the racks invent, refine, discuss."

People are surprised, they become indignant. They say: "How strange! But never mind—it's Nazism, it will pass!" And they wait, and they hope; and they hide the truth from themselves, that it is barbarism, the supreme barbarism, the crowning barbarism that sums up all the daily barbarisms; that it is Nazism, yes, but that before they were its victims, they were its accomplices; that they tolerated that Nazism before it was inflicted on them, that they absolved it, shut their eyes to it, legitimized it, because, until then, it had been applied only to non-European peoples; that they have cultivated that Nazism, that they are responsible for it, and that before engulfing the whole edifice of Western, Christian civilization in its reddened waters, it oozes, seeps, and trickles from every crack.

During the interregnum between the last gasps of a democracy and the emergence of a dictatorship, the nation is gaslighted. It is told the rule of law is respected. It is told democratic rule is inviolate. These lies mollify those being frog-marched into their own enslavement.

"The majority sit quietly and dare to hope," Solzhenitsyn writes. "Since you aren't guilty, then how can they arrest you? It's a mistake!"

Maybe, the fearful say, Trump and his minions are only being bombastic. Maybe they don't mean it. Maybe they are incompetent. Maybe the courts will save us. Maybe the next elections will end this nightmare. Maybe there are limits to extremism. Maybe the worst is over.

These self-delusions prevent us from resisting while the gallows are being constructed in front of us.

Authoritarian states start by targeting the most vulnerable, those most easily demonized—the undocumented, students on college campuses who protest genocide, antifa, the so-called "radical left," Muslims, poor people of color, intellectuals and liberals. They strike down one group after the next. They blow out, one by one, the long row of candles until we find ourselves in the dark, powerless and alone.

Chris Hedges is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, Presbyterian minister, author, and television host. His books include America: The Farewell Tour; American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America; and War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning. He previously worked for the Dallas Morning News, the Christian Science Monitor, and NPR, and hosted the Emmy-nominated RT America show On Contact.

Maybe, the fearful say, Trump and his minions are only being bombastic. ... Maybe the courts will save us. Maybe the next elections will end this nightmare. ... These self-delusions prevent us from resisting while the gallows are being constructed in front of us.

and had to say goodbye to his family?" Solzhenitsyn asks. "Or if, during periods of mass arrests, as for example in Leningrad, when they arrested a quarter of the entire city, people had not simply sat there in their lairs, paling with terror at every bang of the downstairs door and at every step on the staircase, but had understood they had nothing left to lose and had boldly set up in the downstairs hall an ambush of half a dozen people with axes, hammers, pokers, or whatever else was at hand? After all, you knew ahead of time those bluecaps were out at night for no good purpose. And you could be sure ahead of time that you'd be cracking the skull of a cutthroat. Or what about the Black Maria sitting out there on the street with one lonely chauffeur—what if it had been driven off or its tires spiked? The Organs would very quickly have suffered a shortage of officers and transport and, notwithstanding all of Stalin's thirst, the cursed machine would have ground to a halt!"

Manufactured fear engenders self-

laughed at! How they were mocked!"

The authoritarian state cannibalizes the institutions that foolishly aid and abet the witch hunts. It replaces them with pseudoinstitutions populated with pseudo-legislators, pseudo-courts, pseudo-journalists, pseudo-intellectuals and pseudo-citizens. Columbia University is a shining example of this willful self-immolation. Nothing is as it is presented.

There are increasing numbers of violent kidnappings by masked ICE agents in unmarked cars on our city streets. People are ripped from their vehicles and beaten. They are arrested outside schools and day care centers. They are raided at work, thrown onto the floor, handcuffed, driven away in vans and shipped off to concentration camps in countries such as El Salvador. They are seized when they appear at court for a green card application or interview to finalize a visa.

Once detained, they disappear into the labyrinth of over 200 detention centers, where they are moved from one facility to the next to hide them from family, law-

Verge of Nothing

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processed before lawyers, families, local officials, or courts can intervene in any meaningful way. Civilian institutions still exist. Courthouses are still open. Governors still hold office. On paper, the constitutional order remains in place.

For everyone except the people caught inside those operations.

A right that exists on paper but can't be reached in time isn't much of a right. Due process isn't preserved in any serious sense if people are moved through a federal machinery before they can make meaningful use of it. Habeas corpus isn't doing much work for someone already disappeared into the system before review can matter.

The Constitution hasn't been formally suspended. What's happening is more precise than that. Particular groups are being carved out of its protections. For targeted populations, ordinary civil protection is ceasing to function in practice.

Call it functional martial law. Call it selective authoritarian enforcement. Call it

a federalized state of exception. The label matters less than the structure. Coercive authority is being applied in concentrated ways that override ordinary civic life for the people subjected to it, while everyone outside the target zone is encouraged to keep talking as though the system remains basically intact.

That's how modern authoritarianism works. It doesn't arrive with one declaration, one dramatic rupture, one universally recognized break. It advances through selective enforcement, intimidation, unequal protection, procedural delay, and the rapid normalization of exception. It preserves the shell of legality while hollowing out the substance.

Once rights begin to function by status, vulnerability, and political convenience, they aren't rights in any constitutional sense. They're prizes distributed by those in power. The state will determine who gets protected—who is recognized by the Constitution—and when.

Which is why the language of being “on the verge” is so dangerous. It reassures people that the decisive break still lies ahead, waiting to be formally announced.

It tells them the real emergency hasn't arrived yet. It lets them keep treating this as an ordinary political problem, manageable through ordinary political habits.

If the state can already create spaces where ordinary protections fail in practice, the emergency isn't theoretical. If the executive can already exercise coercive authority first and leave courts, Congress, and the public to argue over names afterward, the constitutional crisis isn't impending.

It's already here.

By the time the whole country agrees on the name, the useful window for stopping it is usually already closing.

In 1961, Tom Hayden left Michigan and went to McComb, Mississippi, to cover what SNCC was doing there. No court had declared a constitutional crisis. The legal architecture of segregation was still standing. Governors held office. Courthouses were open. On paper, constitutional order was intact.

He went because the functional reality was already legible to anyone willing to look directly at it. The people on the receiving end weren't waiting for a legal categorization. They were living inside it.

Hayden got beaten by white segregationists in McComb and came out of it and wrote *Revolution in Mississippi*, one of the clearest accounts of what the structure actually was—not what it was called, but how it worked and who it worked on.

He didn't argue about the name. He looked at the structure. And then he worked on doing something about it.

That's the shift. Not a tactical prescription. Not a call to go somewhere and do something. Just the basic decision to stop asking whether the condition has been formally announced and start looking at what authority is actually doing to actual people right now.

The legal story will come eventually. And it will arrive after those in power have already abused, and then moved on to the next target.

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ICE Operations

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phasized that, “In many instances, the things done there are simply not allowable by law and/or the constitution.”

“American ideals on the use of force revolve around using the least amount of force in a conservative, defensive manner,” an officer in the Memphis police department reflected after receiving combat training in Israel. “In the Israeli method, the intent is to bring the maximum amount of force into play in an offensive manner.”

Nonetheless, DHS increasingly emulated Israeli surveillance and targeting methods, and ICE has come to operate more like a military unit than an immigration enforcement body.

For most of the last decade, these experiments primarily ensnared undocumented immigrants and their communities, leaving the more privileged sectors of American society unscathed. But Trump

2.0 rolled back whatever limitations the United States had placed on the indiscriminate use of these tools. Since January 2025, the DHS has worked with firms with deep roots in military targeting, like Palantir, to expand their reach to citizens and non-citizens alike.

To grasp the most severe implications of AI-powered surveillance technology in the hands of rogue military actors, we only have to observe Israel's conduct in Gaza over the past two years. Not only did intelligence operatives and air force pilots rely on algorithmically-generated targeting databases to guide airstrikes, but on the ground, the Israeli military's “Operational Cloud” meant that combat troops could access much of the same data in real time. Soldiers pinpointed buildings to blow up on operational maps and identified civilians to detain—or kill—using facial recognition systems, all accessible through tablets and smart phones.

Juan Sebastián Pinto, a former employee at Palantir Technologies who is now calling for AI regulation and ac-



An Israeli soldier photographs Palestinian activist Rabia Abu Naim in Al-Mughayyir, in the occupied West Bank. Photo: Avishay Mohar/Activestills

countability in the company's home state of Colorado, put it plainly when we spoke last week. “Platforms used by the DHS bring war-grade technologies we see in Gaza to American neighborhoods,” he said. “They give ICE officers the same kind of common operating picture as military and intelligence agencies.”

Pinto also emphasized that these technologies are error prone. Mobile Fortify—like the facial recognition platforms used across Palestine—has reportedly misidentified people as ICE agents detain them. The platform's algorithms are less reliable in inclement weather, when photos are taken at certain angles, and when identifying people of color. The confidence scoring powering ELITE, ICE's geospatial intelligence platform, similarly rests on faulty machine learning algorithms, unable to parse nuance or contextual variation in the troves of data they collect.

But where these systems fail technically, they succeed politically. In the case of Israel's military operations across the

Palestinian territories, they have offered technical justification for skyrocketing rates of policing, detention, and death. All the while, Israel's authoritarian government marshals the growing lists of those assassinated or incarcerated as proof that it is shoring up regional dominance and national security.

Trump appears eager to follow Israel's example, which is why some analysts say it may not be long before ICE dispatches armed drones over the skies of American cities to hunt down targets—in this case, those the Trump administration classifies “as a threat to the safety or security of the American people.” That future may be inevitable, so long as ICE continues to make itself over in the image of an Israeli military unit.

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Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) agent during an operation in Minneapolis Jan. 6, 2026. Photo: Tia Dufour/U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Yes, We're Bombing Again, But Then What?

By Mike Ferner

Today the flyers and banners say “Stop the War on Iran.” Two weeks ago they said, “Stop the War on Venezuela” or “Stop the War on Cuba” or “Stop the War on Gaza.” And yes, we easily recall the ones that said “Stop the War on Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia Vietnam, etc. etc. etc.”

Personally, when I see those banners parading through my lifetime, it makes me crazy.

How many years ... decades ... and for some of us *generations* will we be OK taking to the streets in righteous anger, maybe get arrested here and there, forming bucket brigades for one fire after another?

With many valiant, dedicated movement colleagues for over 50 years I've done all the above. Most recently, on March 4, a jury refused to convict five of us who blocked our U.S. Senator's office here in Toledo for over two hours. But I also firmly believe we have to talk about and act on fire prevention instead of just fire fighting.

There is no question we are experts at fire fighting, at opposing the serial horrors rolled out by the U.S. empire. For that matter, we are experts at fighting what the highway lobby, the health insurance industry, the toxic waste industry, Big Ag, and the chemical industry throw at us, too.

I'm talking primarily about working for peace, but also including our struggles for universal health care, mass transit, sustainable agriculture, an energy policy based on more than just how quickly we can burn our planet.

Case in point:

A recent *New York Times* article featured the Bayer Corp. plant in Soda Springs, Idaho, that produces glyphosate, the cancer-causing active ingredient in Roundup, banned in Europe for decades. Significantly, it also explained that in the glyphosate production process, White Phosphorus (Willy Pete to the U.S. military) is a chemical precursor. Environmentalists can picket the plant because it produces glyphosate. Peace activists can do the same because of Willy Pete. What would be revolutionary would be for a joint action that focuses on corporations' abuse of Constitutional protections on equal billing with the harms of glyphosate and Willy Pete.

So when do we start striking at the root of the problem and not just the branches? What can we do to prevent the empire's murder and arson sprees instead of just reacting to them? How long do we want to walk in circles with the same signs expecting something different to happen? This is the question that bedevils me—and it is not a rhetorical question.

The U.S. doesn't cause every evil in the world, just a hugely disproportionate share. We, and so much of the Earth, struggle to survive these crises because, myths aside, we do not govern this country. Most people reading this would agree we are run by corporate elites with enormous wealth at their disposal, enabling them to do all the aspects of governing. They buy the politicians, write the legislation, insure it is interpreted for them and their shareholders' ben-

efit to the exception of all else. Marine Corps General Smedley Butler's pamphlet, “War Is a Racket” laid it out clearly almost 100 years ago ... and it has only gotten worse.

Our health care policy is written by insurance companies, our foreign policy is written by weapons manufacturing corporations, our transportation policy is written by the Highway Lobby. Corporations have achieved this privileged status primarily because the Supreme Court has usurped for them all the constitutional protections originally meant only for human beings.

That story has been carefully traced and laid out in brief, plain language.

The way to reverse that history of corrupt usurpation is also laid out in plain language. Here's former Transportation Secretary, Pete Buttigieg boiling it down: “We've got some serious, structural problems in our democracy, the biggest having to do with money in politics. Everybody says ‘you can't do anything about that because the Constitution and the Supreme Court,’ but here's the thing. If the Constitution leaves us no choice but to accept this corruption of our politics, then it's time to change the Constitution. I'm not saying that will happen overnight, but in a country that amended its constitution so you couldn't

purchase a beer, realized that wasn't a good idea and amended it back, surely we could have an amendment saying a corporation is not a person and money isn't speech.”

As he clearly says, it will not be a quick fix. There aren't any. But if we can change the constitution so you can't drink beer, and then change it back so you can, clearly it's possible, as suffragists proved with a persistent campaign, to get voting rights for women and the NAACP proved with a decades-long strategy to abolish Jim Crow.

The critical part of ending corporate rule is in our minds. That's where the bars of the prison are. When we break out of those prison bars and see ourselves not just as taxpayers or customers or consumers or workers but as “We the People,” from which all authority flows according to the Constitution, then we can accomplish anything. On the way there, victories like in Minneapolis when people came together to provide for their neighbors, booted out ICE, and even held a general strike, we will see ourselves not just as victims of the system but as people able to democratically run the show for the good of all.

That requires, however, that we learn this history and find ways to articulate it, while we make our demands for peace,

health care, clean air, clean water and a sustainable planet. It's not hard to do. Here's my attempt to include it at a Gaza ceasefire rally in two minutes.

As with the Bayer Corp./glyphosate/Willy Pete example above, we do NOT have to drop any particular campaign or firefight we're engaged in. It's important work we must continue. But we can walk and chew gum at the same time. We can rail against the latest horrors, but articulate, even briefly, why they keep coming. The videos linked above are examples. You'll be able to craft one that works for you.

Then ... THEN when lots of people are talking about taking constitutional rights away from corporations, we will be in a good place to join with Move to Amend.org to promote the amendment that will do just that.

We did it so women could vote. We did it so Blacks, under law, would be equal citizens. We did it (twice) for beer. We can do it for democracy and the planet!

Mike Ferner was a Navy corpsman during the Vietnam War. He was formerly executive director of Veterans For Peace and served as a member of the Toledo City Council. He is the author of Inside the Red Zone: A Veteran For Peace Reports from Iraq.



Black Antifascists

... continued from previous page

public education before our eyes. Parents and teachers must organize at the school district level to resist book bans and anti-ethnic studies bills. And even more so, parents must see “school choice” and “school vouchers” for what they are—the privatization of public schools. This is anti-democratic.

Fascism will quite literally starve its constituents. I cannot over-emphasize the importance of mutual aid in a moment where unemployment is increasing, particularly amongst Black women, and the federal government has slashed the budgets of many social safety-net programs, like SNAP. As fascism seeks to further divide society, we must remember to take care of those in our communities.

While there have been several boycotts and protests over the last 13 months, I do think there is much we can learn from European citizens that have mounted national strikes in response to government austerity. Overall, there is much that can be done to organize

workers, as fascism's grip on capitalism will have disproportionate impacts on the worker—as we are currently witnessing.

And most importantly, one of the most significant efforts we can do to resist fascism is to build solidarity. Solidarity is crucial to resisting fascism as it spurs organizations and mass movements. Solidarity is built through relationships, shared struggle, and deep communication with one another. While this work may seem ancillary, it will prove to be our most challenging, as fascism (and predatory social media algorithms) has fractured so many communities. Fascism thrives on division (racial, economic, national, political, gender, age, etc.), so one of the most important ways to resist it is to close those divides through respect and mutual cooperation.

George Yancy is the Samuel Candler Dobbs professor of philosophy at Emory University and a Montgomery fellow at Dartmouth College. He is the author, editor and co-editor of over 25 books. Recent books include Until Our Lungs Give Out: Conversations on Race, Justice, and the Future and a (with Bill Bywater) In Sheep's Clothing: The Idolatry of White Christian Nationalism.



¡Paki Wieland Presente!

Paki at the window of the Venezuelan Embassy in 2019. At the invitation of the Venezuelan government, activists camped out there to protect the property from U.S.-annointed “president” Juan Guaido, but they were arrested and removed.
Photo: Ellen Davidson

Paki Wieland was a peace movement giant packed into a 5’3” frame. On March 12, she “walked on” after a yearslong battle with cancer. While we will miss her twinkling eyes and warm low voice, we are sure she is now making good trouble on another plane with Barbara Briggs-Letson, Ken Mayers, Daniel Ellsberg, Jesse Jackson and the other greats we have lost in the last few years.

Below are just a few of the tributes from the many activists who knew and loved her.—The Editors

Crystal Zevon: Two days ago, the best friend I ever had walked on. I had the honor of being chosen to be at her side for her final weeks on this planet.

There have been many tributes referencing the many things Paki did. Mostly, activist and familial. I want to write about a part of Paki most people didn’t know about.

A few years ago, Paki moved into low income elder housing in Greenfield, Mass. Converted from an old, stately hotel, The Weldon had definitely lost most of its former luster. But, not to Paki. Everyone who visited got a tour of the photos of the old dining room with its chandeliers, white tablecloths with floral centerpieces, everyone was instructed to read the history in the entryway.

Nevertheless, there wasn’t a lot about the place that signaled cheer. At least, not until Paki arrived. In her usual style, she took in the sad faces, and set out to change things. On top of her ga-zillion political and social activities, she showed up every Wednesday morning and cut the coffee cake for coffee hour. She coaxed people who traditionally stayed away from gatherings to join in. On Fridays, she was there when bread was delivered to be distributed to those who couldn’t afford bread. She never missed a community meeting, or lunch when one was held. She lobbied for improvements and insisted that old or not, low income or not, we all deserve the dignity of decent internet. She organized potlucks around football games (she always supplied the main course and ice cream sundaes), and brought people of very different persuasions (especially political) together.

One of the people she came to consider one of her best friends was Bob. A raging Trumpster, she saw the other qualities. She uncovered kindness underneath the gruff exterior. She also learned he knew everything about football and would willingly and patiently explain it to others. Recently, when Bob had surgery and was in the hospital, Paki went to visit him. He said, “You’re the only person who has visited.” She smiled and said, “Well, Bob, with you lying on that pillow and your hair out from under your hat, you look just like Karl Marx,

and I always wanted to meet Karl Marx!”

Paki’s last outing after she had moved into her daughter, Marcelle’s house, was to go to coffee hour. It cost her something, but no one would ever know it as she insisted on cutting the coffee cake and serving it as always. The next week, her long estranged brother and her brother-in-law showed up in her place. The tenants had a card for Paki.

They asked for a minute of silence in her honor, and then they showed her family the wall where they were going to create a memorial to Paki. Someone said, what about so-and-so who died. It only took a moment for them all to agree, no one else was like Paki and they needed a wall to remind them to keep doing the things she showed them how to do.

Be together.

Medea Benjamin: When I think of who is a true model of a peace activist, someone whose life we should strive to emulate, I think of Paki Wieland.

Paki embodied the values we talk about so often in the peace movement but rarely see lived with such grace. She showed compassion to everyone—even to those she disagreed with or considered adversaries. She believed deeply that our humanity had to come first, and she lived that belief every single day.

So many of us flocked to Paki—for advice, for creative ideas, for strategic thinking, or simply for the privilege of being in her presence. She had a way of making people feel heard, valued, and inspired to keep going, even in the most difficult moments of activism.

Paki also helped transform the activist “Pink House” in Washington, DC, into something much more than a place to stay. Under her spirit and care, it became a home for the movement—a place filled with joy, camaraderie, laughter, and the kind of community that sustains people doing hard work for peace and justice.

When we remember Paki, we will always picture her with a big smile, her legendary sense of humor, and that warm laugh that could lighten even the heaviest room.

And yes, there will always be a touch of sadness, because we have lost such a beautiful light. But the example she set—the compassion, the courage, the joy she brought to activism—will continue to guide all of us who were lucky enough to know her.

Paki showed us what it means not just to work for peace, but to live it.

Ann Wright: Paki was a great CODEPINKer, a model for us all. She traveled with CODEPINK delegations to

Iran, Pakistan, Cuba, Yemen, Afghanistan, and the U.S. border to witness the effects of U.S. imperialism, then returned home to pressure Congress to stop these policies—particularly her own Massachusetts congressional delegation, to whom she was a “thorn in their side.”

Paki was also the remarkable “housemother” of the CODEPINK house in Washington, DC, for several years, welcoming CODEPINKers from around the world, hosting events for the community, and sharing her wisdom not only with Codepinkers but with people from a wide variety of organizations.

Paki remained a “good troublemaker” to her final days, with her last trial for disrupting the military industry concluding only a few days before she “walked on.”

Jodie Evans: A very bright light of peace left the world this morning. ¡Paki Wieland, Presente!

Paki was a tireless peacemaker; peace was in everything she did. It was her very being. She could move from fierce anger at what power was doing to innocent people into a delight-filled agitator in seconds. She could process her rage and it came out as a “disarming” invitation to be peace. She was it. Nothing was too much for Paki, and she was engaged in action until almost her last breath. She fed us, traveled with us, gathered us to learn and to teach, dressed up, dressed power down, gave nourishment to all who were lucky enough to be in her orbit. And she always brought me present to the moment, the depth of her voice was a calling to be here now. Just as she was.

My heart hurts today to know that I will not hear that voice again, but she planted so many seeds of peace in me that I know all my acts carry a piece of her and she will always be in my heart. Reminding me that peace is joy and it is all our work everyday all day, and it is the most fulfilling thing one can do with one’s life. Celebrating your life today dearest Paki. Rest in Peace and all of our love.

CODEPINK Staff: Paki stood up for so many people around the world—whether in Guantánamo, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Latin America, or right here in North America. She showed us what it means to fight for justice and to plant seeds of peace and compassion that keep growing long after you’re gone.

Every person she advocated for, every protest she joined (and inspired others to join), and every moment of understanding she helped create are part of her incredible legacy. A life spent working for peace is the greatest gift anyone can leave behind, and Paki lived that fully.

We are endlessly grateful to Paki. May the next stages of her journey be filled with the same love and compassion she shared with the world. Rest in peace.

Rep. Jim McGovern (D-Mass.): Paki Wieland was an incredible leader. She was a peacemaker in our community, and a fierce advocate for human rights and human dignity at home and around the world.

Paki and I bonded after we learned that each of us had been arrested—multiple times—for civil disobedience. I often turned to her for advice and guidance—strategizing and working together on how to eliminate nuclear weapons, stand up to defense contractors, and fight back against those who seek war and destruction. Occasionally, we disagreed. But in our disagreement, there was genuine admiration. I saw in Paki someone who loved and cared so deeply, and whose passion and energy could ignite and inspire others to action.

Paki was always willing to stand up for a neighbor in need—and the whole world was her neighborhood. She never stopped speaking out, never stopped organizing, and never stopped challenging the rest of us to live up to our values. I so admired her tenacity and her deep, deep desire to bring peace and love into this world.

I pray that her family finds comfort and inspiration in her memory. Paki touched so many lives, and her spirit and legacy will live on in all of us who will continue fighting on her behalf for a more just, compassionate, peaceful future for all.

The world will miss Paki. I already do.

Three Million Years of Life Erased

By Eman Mohammed

For the first time this year, sunlight slips through the skylight above my kitchen table in Dublin, though it does not arrive gently. The wind is still rattling the gutters from rain that hammered the windows only minutes earlier, a reminder that Ireland can hold four seasons in a single afternoon.

My children beg to take their bikes outside when the clouds thin, but I hesitate, remembering how I fell last week on slick pavement, sprawled like a clumsy five year old in a thirty eight year old body.

I tell them the weather cannot be trusted and they roll their

yet confident that whatever arrives will eventually pass.

My friend in Gaza does not live with that assurance. They are a journalist, and I will not name them because in Gaza names can become coordinates.

In my kitchen, lentils soften and split while steam gathers along the skylight. Cumin opens in warm oil, garlic sweetens, and my children drift in and out, tearing bread before I can stop them as they wait for the hour to arrive. Outside, the wind continues its argument with the gutters, but inside there is the steady comfort of something moving toward completion.

At the same hour in Gaza, my friend stands over their own



Yusuf Asliyya.

cide, their sister, three brothers, and father were buried under rubble when Israel struck their home. Their mother survived, but their sister's body was never recovered, leaving no grave to visit and no marker to stand beside.

This is the third Ramadan they have cooked since that day, preparing food they will not eat and carrying it outside in the names of the family they lost. As the light thins and the call to prayer approaches, they portion the soup into containers and hand it to surviving neighbors, quietly saying their sister's name, then their brothers', then their father's, as though speaking them aloud pushes back against the finality rubble tries to impose. When the fast breaks, they remain standing a little longer, watching others eat.

Ramadan in Gaza now arrives with empty chairs already anticipated. Across Gaza, other families set tables with absence already accounted for. The Asliyya family enters this month without their son Yusuf, 14 years old, killed by a drone strike while gathering firewood east of Jabalia. Cooking gas is scarce and priced beyond reach, so children collect wood from the edges of destroyed neighborhoods to keep meals possible. Yusuf was trying to secure fuel so his sisters could eat when the fast ended.

His mother, Reem Asliyya, was killed in December 2023 by an Israeli airstrike. Fourteen years earlier, another son, also named Yusuf, was killed during an Israeli incursion into Jabalia. When the second Yusuf was born, the family gave him his brother's name so memory would remain inside the house. This Ramadan, both brothers and their mother are gone.

The family now gathers in a damaged displacement shelter where the iftar table is modest

and portions are measured. Their father, Rassem, has said that Yusuf sold gathered wood to buy food and, when he could, meat for his sisters, doing the work of an adult in a body that was still a child's. He left one morning to collect enough wood for the first days of Ramadan, and a drone fired directly at him. The family could not retrieve his body for hours as aircraft circled above.

What happened to Yusuf was not an exception in Gaza. It was life under Israeli occupation.

There are no stable days to return to because Israel controls

caused by starvation, untreated wounds, destroyed hospitals, contaminated water, and siege.

Years do not vanish; bombs and artillery cut them short. Governments supply the weapons and defend them in language so neutral it sounds procedural. In many Israeli strikes there are no intact bodies to count, entire families reduced to fragments and entered into ledgers that almost certainly undercount the dead.

This is not something that clears by evening. It is funded, signed, and defended with our tax dollars.

They are cooking in a place their family did not survive, and I have to pause before writing that sentence because it feels impossible that a stove can remain when four bodies do not.

eyes, certain I am exaggerating, until the rain returns in a hard sideways burst that drums against the glass and ends the conversation. Just as quickly, the sun seeps back in as though nothing happened.

We laugh about Irish weather because its volatility feels harmless; it keeps us layered and watchful, never entirely certain what the next hour will bring,

pot of lentils, moving the spoon in the same slow circle. The oil warms, the scent rises, and the ritual looks familiar enough to resemble ordinary life. They are cooking in a place their family did not survive, and I have to pause before writing that sentence because it feels impossible that a stove can remain when four bodies do not.

In the first month of the geno-



A Palestinian mother searching for her son's body.
Photo: Omar El Qattaa

Ramadan in Gaza now arrives with empty chairs already anticipated. Across Gaza, other families set tables with absence already accounted for.

the conditions of instability. It announces a ceasefire and then violates it. It opens a crossing and then seals it shut. It permits aid and then resumes bombardment before dawn.

While American politicians debate ceasefires and security cooperation, families in Gaza are still retrieving children from open ground, even as reconstruction plans are drafted in climate-controlled rooms and funding negotiated far from the blast sites.

A letter published in *The Lancet* estimates that more than three million years of life have been lost in Gaza since Oct. 7, calculated from recorded direct deaths, not simply bodies but years that should have been lived. More than one million of those lost years belonged to children under 15, and the estimate does not include indirect deaths

The sun in Dublin slips behind another bank of cloud while my children hover near the door with their bikes, waiting to see which version of the sky will win. In Gaza, my friend stands over a stove as the call to prayer approaches, handing out plates of food they will not taste and whispering their sister's name before serving strangers.

The weather here will change by morning, as it always does, while what happens there continues because it is permitted to continue. The difference is not climate but choice.

Eman Mohammed is a Palestinian photojournalist from Gaza, now in exile. He says of his writing. "This is my diary during genocide and its aftermath, undiluted, and intentional. It's not written to explain, but to remember. To defy silence. To fight erasure."

'Radical Trust'

Kindergartners get a playground in al-Mughayyir.

By Cara MariAnna

First thought, best thought.
—Allen Ginsberg

My first thought as Marwa, my guide and interpreter, drove us away from a tiny two-room kindergarten in the remote West Bank village of al-Mughayyir was one I blurted out loud: "I'm going to raise money to build a playground for those kids. Are you willing to help me?" She nodded. And she did.

That was in the final week of May 2024. Two months later and back in the U.S., I published an account of my unsettling encounter with the kindergartners—"Soldiers! Soldiers! Soldiers!"—and launched a GoFundMe campaign, made successful by generous donations from many of our readers.

It is now my great delight to share with you the happy news that the playground is finally finished, as of the second week in February 2026. To all who made this possible: Shukran. Thank you. I waited for photographs of the children at play before publishing this update.

As you might imagine, given the situation in Occupied Palestine, this project did not always go smoothly. There were significant delays, long months when nothing happened as checkpoints were closed and violence erupted, including the first war against Iran. For nearly six

months we waited for the play equipment to be delivered. The supplier, we learned, had imported it from China. It was sitting in an Israeli port and would not be released. The money was returned, all of it, and we found another vendor.

From start to finish this project was a lesson in something almost entirely missing in the United States: Trust. Trust in other people. Trust that, working together, something good can be realized even in the most difficult of circumstances.

I'm calling this radical trust.

Why radical? Consider some synonyms: far-reaching, thorough, profound. And: revolutionary. The Latin origin radix—"root" in the botanical meaning—means the foundation, source, or origin of something. Trust is assuredly the foundation of all meaningful human relationships and endeavors. Two other closely related words—and synonyms for revolutionary—include unorthodox and imaginative. Far-reaching indeed when you consider the impacts of this project: for the children a little happiness, for the parents the same knowing their children are happier—and knowing others outside of Palestine see them and care. For the community it's an expression of solidarity.

Unorthodox and imaginative problem solving is a necessity in the West Bank, where finding ways to accomplish the impossible while flying beneath the radar are necessary skills. Everything depends upon trust. Personal safety and liberty are not infrequently at stake because anything that supports community, anyone who works to build

and strengthen Palestinian community, can be targeted.

My project partners, who deserve recognition, must, of necessity, remain anonymous.

It's difficult getting money into the West Bank. The money we raised was funneled through a contact in al-Khalil (also known as Hebron). This person managed the process and then held the funds for nearly 18 months as it was disbursed.

A woman from a tiny village near Ramallah made four trips to al-Khalil to pick up each of the four disbursements—in cash—and carry them north. Every trip in the West Bank entails difficulties and dangers. Carrying cash is a danger all its own—especially if a person is searched by occupation soldiers.

Yet other partners were members of a long-established and highly regarded civil-society group that Israel designated a terrorist organization in 2021—part of its demonic project to shred Palestinian society and life by all means imaginable. These women take personal risks—unthinkable in the West—to provide services for children and women in rural areas. One of my fondest memories is meeting them at a Ramallah coffeehouse.

From start to finish this project was held together and accomplished on trust. And the trust of which I write is a connection and bond between people spread across continents. Every person who made a donation did so on trust—trust that doesn't stop now that the playground is finished, but that will reverberate into the future.

The playground transformed the kindergarten. It has and will touch and shape the life of every child who uses it. The smiles



you see in these pictures—rare smiles indeed—are proof of that.

The finished project included repairs to the kindergarten's roof and bathroom, a new septic tank, concrete work, a sunshade, artificial grass, outdoor play equipment, and indoor educational board games.

Al-Mughayyir endures frequent attacks by settlers and soldiers. In 2025 two teenaged boys were martyred in separate shoot-

ings, one of which I reported on here. That same year nearly all of its agricultural land was stolen—over 42,000 dunams (the equivalent of 10,380 acres) of farm and grazing land, olive orchards, vineyards, wheat fields, almond trees, greenhouses, and more. An estimated 3,000 olive trees were uprooted during a major military incursion at the end of August, as reported here. During that same operation a road was carved through the farmland to a hilltop overlooking the village where a new settlement is under construction.

The day-to-day experience of these children is one of fear, anxiety, and the constant threat of violence. The smiles you see on these faces are all the more precious. The kindergarten's Facebook page is full of videos showing children learning and at play—smiling and laughing. You can watch two of my favorites here and here. Another fun video shows the transformation of the playground as the equipment is installed. And enjoy the Arabic music!

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Cara MariAnna is a writer and artist. She writes essays and reports from and about the West Bank based on travels and encounters with Palestinians.

Iran Weighs Tactical Shift in Persian Gulf Strikes

A senior Iranian official said that Iran has achieved most of its tactical aims against U.S. military infrastructure, but warned it will still respond to attacks launched from Arab states.

By Jeremy Scahill

In the early stages of the U.S.-Israeli war against Iran, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and other Iranian military forces orchestrated a decentralized retaliatory campaign. Within hours of the strike that assassinated Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran activated a regime of retaliatory strikes based on a bank of targets in Israel and across the Persian Gulf that had been planned in advance. As the war reached the end of its first week, according to the senior Iranian officials, military commanders and political leaders shifted to more centrally coordinated operations.

“The political and decision-making system has been restructured. In the military sphere as well, we are witnessing more organized and systematic actions,” the senior Iranian official said. “The military system has been operating in a much more organized way, both in timing and in the choice of targets.” Iran’s overarching military strategy, he said, is aimed at “exerting maximum pressure on U.S. and Israeli interests in the region in order to compel them to move toward halting the war and de-escalating the situation.” President Donald Trump, he said, “has cornered both himself and U.S. interests.”

The choice by Iran’s Assembly of Experts to name Ayatollah Khamenei’s son

Mojtaba as Supreme Leader was a rebuke of Trump’s insistence that he must be involved in choosing Iran’s next leader. Mojtaba Khamenei is known for his close relationship with the IRGC, the most elite military and security force in the country. In addition to the assassination of his father, the U.S.-led war has killed his mother, his wife and one of his children. “He believes in taking a firm and strong stance,” the senior Iranian official said. “This decision will probably escalate the war in the short term.”

The choice of Khamenei was viewed in the upper echelons of power in Tehran as asserting the nation’s sovereignty and continuing the position of no surrender or negotiations based on U.S. or Israeli ultimatums.

“It was not just a symbolic or performative act to defy or spite Trump/Israel but a strategic position in the face of the U.S. and Israeli attempt to break Iran’s will to resist. If any other leader was chosen, this may have been interpreted by Trump as weakness and possibly even surrender to

enjoys a tremendous amount of credibility within a lot of the decision-making bodies within the country,” Al-Arian told Drop Site. “But a lot of that has less to do with just simply the family lineage and more the fact that he was quite active across a number of the key decisions that have been made in recent times and enjoys good relations with a number of different state bodies and institutions, including the IRGC, but not solely the IRGC.”

The internal strategic discussions among the Iranian leadership about its retaliatory strikes in the Persian Gulf seeped into public view on Saturday when President Masoud Pezeshkian released a video statement saying that Iran would end its strikes. “I personally apologize to neighboring countries that were affected by Iran’s actions,” he said. Pezeshkian’s comments were widely reported as an apology for launching retaliatory strikes in those countries, and Trump celebrated his comments as a sign of weakness and

misconceptions about my statements; the enemy wants us and neighboring countries to be at war,” Pezeshkian later said. “If they seek to attack and invade our soil from any country, we are compelled to respond to this aggression.”

Soon after Pezeshkian’s original comments, a desalination plant in Iran was bombed, and Tehran accused the U.S. of launching the attack, saying it was a war crime to target vital civilian infrastructure. “President Pezeshkian expressed openness to de-escalation within our region—provided that our neighbors’ airspace, territory, and waters are not used to attack the Iranian people,” Araghchi wrote on X Saturday after the desalination plant was bombed. “Gesture to our neighbors was almost immediately killed by President Trump’s misinterpretation of our capabilities, determination and intent.”

That night, Iranian forces conducted heavy strikes across the region, including an attack on the U.S. base in Bahrain, which Iran said was the site from which the attack on the desalination plant was launched.

The senior Iranian official maintained that internal discussions about shifting away from strikes inside regional countries and focusing on striking Israel have largely resulted from Iran’s military assessments of the damage inflicted on U.S. capacity in the Gulf. But the possible shift in tactics also coincides with nascent and fragile diplomatic efforts at backdoor diplomacy with countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council. With the exception of Oman, these Gulf states have spent the past week portraying Iran as an aggressor, while almost entirely avoiding any denunciations of the U.S. or Israel. They have characterized Iran’s strikes as attacks on their sovereignty, offering no credence to Iran’s claims to be engaged in retaliation against U.S. military targets.

If Iran does reduce its strikes inside the borders of most Gulf countries, as the senior Iranian official suggested, Tehran would expect those nations to pressure

continued on page 19 ...

[The choice of Khamenei] “was not just a symbolic or performative act to defy or spite Trump/Israel but a strategic position in the face of the U.S. and Israeli attempt to break Iran’s will to resist.”

U.S. diktat,” said Amal Saad, a lecturer on international relations and politics at Cardiff University in the UK and author of *The Iran Connection: Understanding the Alliance with Syria, Hizbu’llah and Hamas*.

Khamenei’s succession as Supreme Leader also offers Iran’s military and political system continuity at a moment when both the U.S. and Israel have threatened to assassinate any leader deemed unacceptable by Trump or Netanyahu, said Abdullah Al-Arian, an Associate Professor of History at Georgetown University in Qatar. “There’s also a sense of this being something of a consensus figure who

surrender. “Iran, which is being beat to HELL, has apologized and surrendered to its Middle East neighbors, and promised that it will not shoot at them anymore. This promise was only made because of the relentless U.S. and Israeli attack,” Trump wrote on Truth Social on March 7.

Iranian officials moved swiftly to clarify that Pezeshkian’s remarks were misinterpreted, and that the Iranian president was effectively acknowledging collateral damage suffered by Gulf states and that Iran reserves its right to continue striking any U.S. bases or facilities that initiate attacks against Iran. “The enemy had crude

The Peace of Wild Things

By Wendell Berry

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children’s
lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the
great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with
forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still
water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am
free.



The Nuclear Deception

On Feb. 28, a few hours after negotiators said that Iran had accepted many of the demands regarding its nuclear program, the United States and Israel launched strikes on Iran.

This was the second strike since the United States and Israel attacked Iran in June 2025. Both strikes are illegal, since they violate Iran's sovereignty, which is guaranteed by the United Nations Charter.

Iran is a sovereign country and, just like the United States, a founding member of the United Nations. It is therefore entitled to all the benefits and responsibilities of the U.N. Charter. The United States signed and ratified the U.N. Charter, which means that the U.S. government has a treaty obligation to the charter and to the other member states.

After President George W. Bush violated the U.N. Charter to start a war of aggression against Iraq, U.S. President Donald Trump told Howard Stern on April 16, 2004, "I think Iraq is a terrible mistake. And to think that when we leave, it's gonna be this nice democratic country. I mean give me a break." Trump is not taking his own advice.

Why did the United States want to attack Iran, a country with nearly a hundred million people and a centuries-long tradition of patriotism, first in 2025 and then in 2026?

In his last State of the Union address, Trump said that the main reason was that he believed that Iran has a nuclear weapons program. Yet Iran has repeatedly said that it does not have a nuclear weapons pro-



Iranians mourn those who died on Iran Air Flight 655, a civilian plane downed by the United States Navy on July 3, 1988. Photo: IRNA/Wikimedia Commons

to verify it, we are prepared."

He asked, "In what language should we say we don't want nuclear weapons?"

His statement, in Farsi, was translated into a range of languages. Yet it seems that news of this did not reach the White House.

In 1957, Iran and the United States signed the Agreement for Cooperation Concerning Civil Uses of Atomic Energy, which allowed the U.S. to transfer nuclear technology and materials through the Atoms for Peace program created by President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

In 1959, the Iranian government—then controlled by the last shah of Iran, Mo-

Hussein's government). Iran, which was previously hemmed in by its neighbors, now had the opportunity to build relations with Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon.

This was a shock to Washington, which had not clearly understood the ramifications of its illegal wars. To isolate Iran, the Bush administration concocted the myth of Iran's nuclear weapons ambitions and cynically used the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for its campaign.

Bush, ignored that, in 2007, the U.S. intelligence community's National Intelligence Estimate concluded, "We judge with high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program." Whether Iran actually had a nuclear weapons program before this date is not the issue; the CIA and other agencies agreed that there was no program after 2003.

After Bush left office in January 2009 other key developments followed:

"In 2011, an IAEA report suggested that Iran's actions to procure various kinds of materials ("nuclear related and dual-use equipment") indicated a "possible military dimension," but with no evidence. Each of the accusations came with caveats. It seemed that the IAEA was under

"In what language should we say we don't want nuclear weapons?" [This] statement, in Farsi, was translated into a range of languages. Yet it seems that news of this did not reach the White House.

gram. This was laid out clearly by Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei in a fatwa (judgment) that he first made public in 2003, but which had been written a decade earlier. In that fatwa, Ayatollah Khamenei noted that Iran's soldiers suffered from the use of illegal mustard gas and other chemical weapons by Iraq (supplied by the United States and West Germany), and that this experience and his reading of Islamic ethics made it unconscionable to use weapons of mass destruction. Leader after leader in Iran has reiterated the same view.

In the State of the Union address on Feb. 24, Trump said, "We haven't heard those secret words, 'We will never have a nuclear weapon.'" But this is precisely what Ayatollah Khamenei had said.

In fact, a few hours before Trump's address, this is exactly what Iran's Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi tweeted: "Iran will under no circumstances ever develop a nuclear weapon."

On Feb. 17, Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian said, "Based on the fatwa of the Supreme Leader, from an ideological standpoint we are absolutely not pursuing nuclear weapons, and however they wish

hammad Reza Pahlavi—opened the Tehran Nuclear Research Centre. Several years later, the U.S. provided Iran with a 5-megawatt thermal nuclear reactor that was designed for medical radioisotope production and scientific research.

After the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the new government shut down the nuclear energy research program. Following the war with Iraq, which ended in 1988, and the death of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1989, Iran restarted its nuclear energy program for electricity generation, medical isotope production and scientific training.

In 1995, Iran signed a deal with Russia to rebuild the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant in Iran (built in 1975 by the West Germans and bombed by the Iraqis using West German intelligence). Again, Iranian officials have repeatedly said they do not want nuclear weapons ever. The U.S. did not seem to disbelieve the Iranians when it restarted nuclear energy programs for these purposes.

Everything changed after the U.S. attacked Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, removing Iran's two historical adversaries (the Taliban and Saddam

But Iran cannot solve its problems without an end to the U.S.-imposed hybrid war that suffocates its economy and its peoples. The Iranian people know war very well.

immense pressure from the U.S. government and its European allies. The report bore all the marks of political influence.

"In 2015, the IAEA released its Final Assessment on Past and Present Outstanding Issues regarding Iran's Nuclear Program, written by its director general, Yukiya Amano. This report conclusively says that there are "no credible indications" of any activities relevant to a nuclear explosion device after 2009 and no credible evidence of diversion of nuclear material for weapons.

"In 2025, IAEA Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi told Al Jazeera defin-

itively, "We did not find in Iran elements to indicate that there is an active, systematic plan to build a nuclear weapon."

There can be no clearer statement than that of Grossi: "we did not find." Put that beside the statement from President Pezeshkian: "In what language should we say we don't want nuclear weapons?"

There are no nuclear weapons in Iran. To go to war on that pretext is to follow the example of Bush and his "weapons of mass destruction" in Iraq. Where were those weapons? In his imagination.

Certainly, there are great problems within Iran. A combination of the attempt by the United States and Europe to make Iran's economy scream and poor economic management by Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance Seyed Ali Madanizadeh (trained at the University of Chicago) have created serious problems for Iran's working people.

But Iran cannot solve its problems without an end to the U.S.-imposed hybrid war that suffocates its economy and its peoples.

The Iranian people know war very well. It has been imposed on them repeatedly, from the Anglo-Persian War (1856–1857) to the Iraqi invasion (1980) to the current hybrid war.

In the poem "Lidless Coffins with No Bodies," Iranian poet Behzad Zarrinpour (born 1968) wrote about the terror of war, a terror that was inflicted by Bush's "terrible mistake." I want to share a part of that beautiful and impactful poem with you:

*The Wind has filled the city's nostrils
with destruction's odour.
No one flees the harsh sun
For the gentleness of unstable walls.
Spread-out inhospitable tablecloths,
Empty promises,
Stomachs that instead of bread
Eat bullets,
And bankrupt salt sellers
Who have dispatched their gunnysacks
To the war front to be swelled with sand.
Grandmother's tongue is so terror-struck
She cannot remember her prayers.
Vijay Prashad is an Indian historian,*

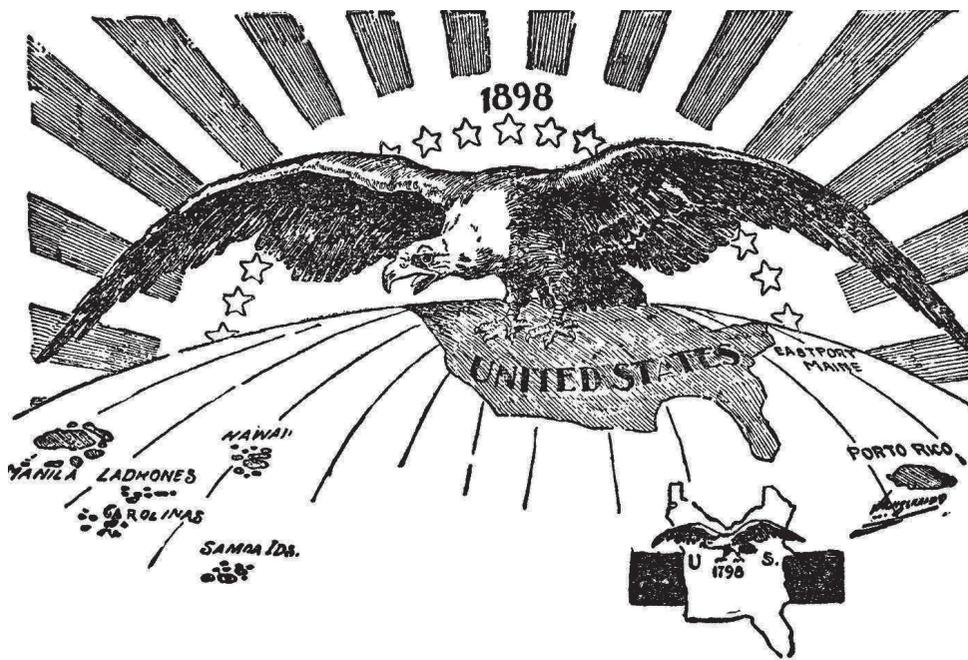
Why This War?

The U.S. empire is no different from any other empire

By Matthew Hoh

An empire founded by war has to maintain itself by war.—Montesquieu

The impetus or driving force behind American foreign policy decisions is American. Specifically, when it comes to Israel, I believe the Israelis have an outsized voice in U.S. Middle Eastern policies, and increasingly in U.S. policies like censorship and social media ownership, but that is due to the American structure of legalized bribery that the Israelis, and every other moneyed interest, use to their advantage. The American government, dominated by oligarchs and corporations, is an empire, and so a nation like Israel, or realities such as the military-industrial complex (MIC), are manifestations of empire. The U.S. has a MIC because, as an empire, it requires a massive standing weapons industry to provide for its purposes. The U.S. was an empire long before the MIC existed. American imperial wars across the continent, through the Caribbean and Latin America, and into Asia occurred before Dwight Eisenhower defined the MIC as we know it in 1961. That the MIC now exerts its own influ-



Ten thousand miles from tip to tip. Philadelphia Press

ence on the empire, because of the empire's own political corruption, does not negate the ideology at the empire's core, the empire's reason for being, or an inertia of expansion and domination that began before the colonies became the United States and continues today. Imperial institutions and political corruption not only coexist but can be mutually reinforcing.

A similar imperial explanation exists for Israel's relationship with the U.S. After WWII, with the demise of the British Empire, the U.S. assumed the British role in the Levant. The British understood both pre-1948 Jewish control of Palestine and the subsequent Jewish state to be, in the words of Ronald Storrs, the second British Governor of Jerusalem, a "little loyal Jewish Ulster in a sea of potentially hostile Arabism." Five decades later, the Nixon Doctrine would identify Israel, as well as the Shah's Iran, as the U.S.'s "cops on the beat" in the Middle East, respective Jewish and Persian counterweights. Just as you had a containment strategy of the Soviet Union, you had an American policing strategy towards "Arabism."

Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and Ronald Reagan's rebuke to Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Israel.

We live in an era where the U.S. system of legalized bribery carries more weight than real national interests. This is the

The American government, dominated by oligarchs and corporations, is an empire, and so a nation like Israel, or realities such as the military-industrial complex (MIC), are manifestations of empire.

case for domestic and foreign policy. U.S. healthcare policy demonstrates this domestically as the U.S. maintains a unique healthcare system in the world, one that is the most expensive and provides the worst outcomes. This healthcare system benefits a single industry while impoverishing, sickening and killing the U.S. population.

U.S. policy towards Israel is similar in that it fails to achieve U.S. interests in the

reasoning and truth, articles of faith, while the other provides the money that builds and sustains Washington's individuals and institutions, and disciplines those who go against them. However, the power of the Israeli lobby is not unique and comes not from itself, but rather from the U.S.'s own corruption, a corruption that any industry and interest can take advantage of to the detriment of the national interest.

That the empire is no longer able to determine policies based on its interests is likely an attribute of imperial life cycles. As empires acquire wealth and become dominant, the greed that underwrites the base imperial motives turns on the empire itself. The American empire's agency has been eaten away by the selling of its organs to the highest bidder. A fitting loss of agency for an organism that itself profited from the violent theft of others. Likewise, the American empire cannot understand itself or the world except through narratives and myths that are now expired or overcome. I imagine it was the same in London, Moscow, Madrid, and Rome as it is today in Washington, D.C.'s offices,

corporate media's newsrooms, Hollywood's studios and school and university classrooms.

The same argument is true for all the other actors that are enjoying the benefits of the Iran War; many of these are the same industries and institutions that enjoy the benefits of any war: the military-industrial complex, the fossil fuel industry, the tech companies and other industries that will benefit from 92 million new consumers, the news and entertainment media, etc. All of those, in one way or another, are either manifestations of the U.S. empire, as is Israel, or understand that their particular dominance and privilege are maintained through the U.S. imperial system, even if the American empire in its current form will not survive long in the multipolar world.

All of these institutions, which we can rightly state are principles in explaining the war on Iran, do have a role, but they did not come into existence on their own or can survive without the U.S. empire. They are all manifestations of the U.S. empire. This war on Iran is occurring because the U.S. is an empire, and nations like Iran, that stand against the hegemon, whether it be the U.S. or Israel's imperial subset of America, will always have such a war as their fate.

Capt. Matthew Hoh had nearly 12 years experience with the U.S. military and the wars overseas with the Marine Corps, Department of Defense and State Department. In 2009, Matthew Hoh resigned in protest from his State Department post in Afghanistan over the American escalation of the war.

A Young Man Plays the Oud

By Carter McKenzie

amidst the tents in Rafah
the grace of the instrument
the color of wheat
the curve of ripeness
rosewood or walnut
a remembered tree
a hand noting song
on an arrangement
finely tuned somehow
protected even in the midst
of war, of genocide
the young man's voice
amidst the snap of wind
of the tents cold
under the sky of drones
along the cold sea
the song holding
the full attention
of children
their circle of light
reflecting
back to the singer
amidst the sand
the navigation of song
its radiance right now
accompanying them
knowing who they are

[T]he power of the Israeli lobby ... comes not from itself, but rather from the U.S.'s own corruption, a corruption that any industry and interest can take advantage of.

This need for policing was reinforced by Nasser and the pan-Arab movement of the 50s and 60s and the alignment of the Soviet Union with Arab capitals (I wonder if it ever occurred to the Americans that the alignment of the Soviets and the Arabs had as much to do with U.S. policies pushing them towards Moscow as it did with any ideological or shared interests). The U.S. empire created the circumstances in which Israel became indispensable as a sword and shield for U.S. interests in the Middle East. There certainly was political pressure from the Israel lobby in the U.S. from the 1940s to 1980s, including significant pressure in 1948, but I don't see the modern pressure of the Israel lobby, and its current strength, coming into the power that we now know it as until after

region by catering to a small, antagonistic nation in a region that no longer resembles the Cold War era in which the U.S.-Israeli relationship began. Both Storrs' and Nixon's explanations for Israel's purpose are no longer necessary. For example, the U.S. has military bases in every country in the region besides Yemen and Iran. During Nasser's time, the U.S. had no permanent bases in the region.

The U.S. is controlled more by political corruption than by national interest, but the post-WWII understanding of the necessity of Israel to American Middle Eastern policy still has a tremendous grip on the foreign policy establishment's mindset and worldview. The Israel lobby and the imperial mindset in Washington reinforce one another; one provides the narrative,

‘Up There With My Lai’

Investigations Find U.S. Was Likely Behind Iranian School Massacre

By Jake Johnson

U.S. investigators reportedly believe that American forces were behind the bombing of an Iranian girls’ school that killed more than 160 people—mostly young children—during the initial wave of attacks launched Saturday by President Donald Trump in coordination with the Israeli military.

Citing two unnamed officials, Reuters reported Thursday that U.S. military investigators have found it is “likely” that American forces were responsible for the deadly strike on the school in the southern Iranian town of Minab, though the investigation has not yet been completed. Schools are protected under international law, and targeting them is a war crime.

“Reuters was unable to determine more details about the investigation, including what evidence contributed to the tentative assessment, what type of munition was used, who was responsible, or why the U.S. might have struck the school,” the outlet noted. “The officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive military matters, did not rule out the possibility that new evidence could emerge that absolves the U.S. of responsibility and points to another responsible party in the incident.”

“If a U.S. role were to be confirmed,” Reuters added, “the strike would rank among the worst cases of civilian casualties in decades of U.S. conflicts in the Middle East.”

HuffPost’s Akbar Shahid Ahmed

echoed Reuters’ reporting, writing that Pentagon officials “told Congress in multiple briefings this week that they believed the U.S. was most likely responsible (though [the probe is] ongoing).”

The reporting came on the heels of a *New York Times* analysis that concluded the U.S. was “most likely to have carried out the strike,” given that American forces were simultaneously bombarding an adjacent Iranian naval base. The *Times* also rejected the claim that an Iranian missile hit the elementary school.

“The strikes were first reported on social media shortly after 11:30 a.m. local time,” the *Times* reported. “An analysis of those posts—as well as bystander photos and videos captured within an hour of the strikes—helps corroborate that the school was hit at the same time as the naval base. One video, pinpointed by geolocation experts, showed several large plumes of smoke billowing from the area of the base and the school.”

Beth Van Schaack, a former State Department official who currently teaches at Stanford University’s Center for Human Rights and International Justice, told the *Times* that “given the U.S.’ intelligence capabilities, they should have known that a school was in the vicinity.”

Trump administration officials have said very little about the Iranian school strike in their triumphant rhetoric about the war, which Pentagon Secretary Pete Hegseth hailed as the “most lethal, most complex, and most precise aerial operation in history.” Hegseth has also openly



dismissed what he’s called “stupid rules of engagement,” rejecting constraints on U.S. forces that are designed to prevent the killing of civilians.

Asked about the school strike during a March 4 press conference, Hegseth responded: “All I know—all I can say is that we’re investigating that. We, of course, never target civilian targets, but we’re taking a look and investigating that.”

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio referred reporters to the Pentagon when asked about the attack, but added that “the United States would not target, deliberately target, a school,” in purported contrast to the Iranian government, which Rubio claimed is “deliberately targeting civilians” because “they are a terroristic regime.”

Two first responders to the scene of the attack, as well as a parent of one of the killed children, told Middle East Eye earlier this week that the school was hit by two strikes, a possible “double-tap” attack. An Al Jazeera investigation con-

cluded the attack on the school was likely deliberate.

Jeremy Konyndyk, president of Refugees International, called the school attack “a horrific U.S. war crime, up there with My Lai,” referring to U.S. soldiers’ massacre of Vietnamese civilians in 1968. The U.S. military initially covered up the massacre.

“In a sane world, Hegseth would resign, Congress would hold immediate hearings and establish an investigation, and the U.S. would come clean,” Konyndyk wrote on social media. “None of that is likely, so international mechanisms should kick in, including the [International Criminal Court]. And Hegseth should probably talk to a lawyer.”

On Thursday, as U.S. and Israeli officials vowed to ramp up their assault on Iran, two boys’ schools southwest of Tehran were reportedly bombed.

Jake Johnson is a senior editor and staff writer for Common Dreams.

Schoolgirls

By Bill Ehrhart

The students are all girls ages 7 to 12. The first attack comes about 10:00 a.m. The second comes shortly thereafter as first responders, those who’ve survived, and others nearby rush to try to help—a deliberate tactic called “double-tap” designed to inflict maximum carnage. One graphic photo shows a child’s severed arm, another a bloody backpack.

This is what passes for foreign policy. This is how we defend our nation. This is what our taxes are buying. This is what Congress refuses to stop.

This is what the world sees of us. Take a good look. This is what we are.



Father to Son—the Same Cancerous War

By Mike Hastie

As I write this the U.S. is carpet bombing Tehran.

If you do not know the past, you will believe the lies of the present. Whenever the truth threatens one's core belief system, there is an urgent need to deny its reality. That is why history repeats itself.

When I found myself in a padded cell of a psychiatric facility in 1980, I was dying inside because I could not get to the source of my anguish. As an Army medic in Viet Nam, I intellectually knew the American War in Viet Nam was a complete total lie. But, I could not let out my years of suppressed emotional trauma and torment, because I was terrified I would not survive after a mental collapse.

A compassionate therapist entered the padded cell with me, and after an intense conversation, the rage finally came out of me, because I trusted that therapist. I screamed at the top of my lungs that I hated my government for sending me to Viet Nam because the United States committed mass murder against the poor Vietnamese people every single day. I yelled at the therapist: "I was the enemy in Viet Nam!"

The brutal betrayal I felt dismantled my core belief system.

I was raised in the military, as my fa-

ther was a career Army officer and World War II combat veteran. When my father got orders for Japan after the war, our family went with him to Tokyo. We were there from February 1947 until May 1949.

My father had a top security clearance. What he was involved in was absolutely secret. His military unit was the 29th Corps of Engineers. The U.S. was secretly flying B-25s that were painted white, at low altitudes over North Korea, and taking pictures of the terrain, to include all living situations with highly sophisticated camera equipment. Those images were taken back to my father's unit, where the film was developed and very detailed topographic maps were printed. Those maps were eventually given to U.S. pilots and ground troops when the Korean War started in June 1950.

My father's younger brother received one of those maps when he got to South Korea, as a combat First lieutenant. Those highly detailed documents eventually led to the barbaric slaughter bombing of North Korea. The non-stop bombing campaign killed over one million civilians, to include 400,000 soldiers.

Conventional bombs, incendiary bombs, and napalm destroyed nearly all of North Korea's villages, towns, and cities. By the end of the Korean War, the U.S. high command said there were no



Korean War 1951.

more targets to bomb in North Korea. The U.S. carpet bombed everything.

"We went over there and fought the war and eventually burned down every town in North Korea. There are no innocent civilians, so it does not bother me so much to be killing innocent bystanders."—General Curtis LeMay, Head of U.S. Strategic Air Command

I was raised in a very stressful home, because my father had a lot of secrets. He spent a lot of his life in turmoil.

The American people have absolutely no idea what their government does behind barbaric closed doors.

Whenever the truth threatens one's core belief system, there is an urgent need to deny its reality. The United States of America will reap what it sows.

Mike Hastie was an Army medic during the Vietnam War. He has since returned to Vietnam three times. He is a photographer, poet, and writer and a lifetime member of Veterans For Peace.

First Lady in Jail

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Nicolás Maduro's presidential campaign after President Chávez's passing.

Cilia married Nicolás, her longtime partner, following the election. Feeling that the title of "first lady" could not capture her importance to the Bolivarian Revolution, her husband dubbed her the primera combatiente, or first combatant.

After working behind the scenes as a key advisor to President Maduro, she ran for election to the National Assembly and won in 2015, 2020, and 2025.

Today, she faces charges of conspiracy to import cocaine, along with possession of machine guns and destructive devices. The charges are absurd.

In the early 1990s, back when Venezuela was a key ally of the United States, over 50% of the world's cocaine was trafficked through the country. By 2025, as Venezuela was considered an "unusual and extraordinary threat" to the United States, that number was down to 5%. Trump's rhetoric of Venezuela flooding the U.S. with cocaine, and his constant conflation of cocaine with fentanyl (which is neither trafficked through nor produced in Venezuela), has no basis in reality.

Now that the Trump administration controls Venezuela's oil trade, the rhetoric on drugs has flipped. Following a visit to Venezuela, the head of U.S. Southern Command touted a new counternarcotics cooperation agreement. Was the abduction of Nicolás and Cilia sufficient to end whatever alleged narcotics operation the



U.S. forces dragged Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores from their bedroom during the Jan. 3 operation. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Venezuelan government was accused of running? It's more likely that such operations never existed in the first place. The allegations of drug trafficking served not only to discredit the Venezuelan government and its leaders but also paved the way for the January 3 attack.

Cilia Flores is one of the most prominent political prisoners in the world, yet most women's rights organizations have not said a word in her defense. She is a sitting member of Venezuela's National Assembly and played an instrumental role in the movement that greatly expanded democratic, economic, and social rights in the country.

Cilia stands with Palestine. In a November 2023 conference in Turkey, she

said, "We are witnessing a genocide ... We see the victims in Gaza. We see the death of children, women, the elderly, and civilians. We see civilian victims coming out of their destroyed homes, but unable to leave the city because they are in an open-air prison."

Cilia brought feminism to the Bolivarian Revolution. On International Working Women's Day in 2023, she helped launch a social mission aimed at protecting women from the worst of the economic war. At the time, she said, "Venezuelan women have shown they are the vanguard. Women make up more than half the population, but we are also mothers of the other half, so we form a whole. And in this war that Venezuela has endured,

we achieved victory and are standing firm thanks to the participation of Venezuelan women, who did not just stay home taking care of children, building their families, but also took to the streets to defend the nation. Our women are patriots ... and in the next scenario, whatever it may be, we will be victorious because women will be at the forefront of any battle."

Little did she know that the next scenario would be a prison cell in the United States. Out of solidarity with Cilia, with Venezuelan women in general, we must make it our cause to fight for her freedom.

Recalling her beautiful poem above, today our blood pulses with Cilia.

Medea Benjamin is co-founder of Global Exchange and CODEPINK: Women for Peace. She is the co-author, with Nicolas J.S. Davies, of War in Ukraine: Making Sense of a Senseless Conflict. Other books include Inside Iran: The Real History and Politics of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kingdom of the Unjust: Behind the U.S.-Saudi Connection, Drone Warfare: Killing by Remote Control, Don't Be Afraid Gringo: A Honduran Woman Speaks from the Heart, and (with Jodie Evans) Stop the Next War Now.

Michelle Ellner is a Latin America campaign coordinator of CODEPINK. She was born in Venezuela and holds a bachelor's degree in languages and international affairs from the University La Sorbonne Paris IV, in Paris. After graduating, she worked for an international scholarship program out of offices in Caracas and Paris and was sent to Haiti, Cuba, The Gambia



We're Tired of Marco Rubio Speaking for Us

A New Cuban-American Movement

By Justine Medina

Put three Cubans in a room together, you'll have five different opinions," a Cuban friend of mine likes to joke. He was referring to debates in the town-hall meetings during Cuba's constitutional convention process of 2018. But I immediately thought, of course, of any Nochebuena celebration at my dad's house, just a few hundred miles north. Siblings, cousins, babies, abuelas, family, and friends of all ages and political opinions gathered around a brilliant feast. Between the devouring of lechón, yuca, plátanos, and flan, a flurry of back and forth between English and Spanish. Everyone hugging, praying, laughing, and occasionally yelling. Well, maybe more than occasionally.

The existence of contradictory political opinions across generations will come as no surprise to diaspora families from all over, and my Cuban family is no exception. My abuelo participated in the Cuban Revolution against Batista before being turned off by what he saw as the horrors of communism. My family moved to Miami, and after being jailed for counterrevolutionary terrorism, my grandfather then defected and fought for the U.S. in the Bay of Pigs. (A Brigada 2506 flag hung on the wall of my childhood home.)

Like many Cuban-Americans growing up in Florida, I was taught countless criticisms and failures of the government of Cuba by family members. But my proudly capitalist father also raised his children to lobby against the U.S. embargo on Cuba. And as an adult, I learned about the positive aspects of Cuba's policies, such as the nation's historic biomedical achievements, or the remarkable advances of LGBTQ rights under the recent

Families Code referendum. Today, my older brother and I are openly Marxists and organize as such for labor, social, and environmental justice. As you may guess, sometimes things get a little complicated!

Following the festivities this past December, one of mis primos worried to me about her brother who lives on the island. With increasing blackouts and energy strains, a stressed economy, and hawkish U.S. policies towards her first homeland, things were only getting harder. "The only people who pay attention to what's happening in Cuba are Cubans," we lamented. "Hopefully that will change."

Then 2026 came. With it, the Trump

he's willing to go to war with the island, that he's willing to bomb, and destroy. And this hyper-machismo image, along with intergenerational trauma in Cuban families, has been used for decades to push U.S. policies against Cuba that do nothing but harm the people of the island. That harms our family, our friends, and a country that we deeply love.

I'm tired of the extremist "Miami Cuban" propaganda machine. I'm tired of the Marco Rubios and Ted Cruzes of this country claiming to speak for Cuban-Americans.

I know, however varied our politics, what my family wants is this:

I'm tired of the extremist 'Miami Cuban' propaganda machine. I'm tired of the Marco Rubios and Ted Cruzes of this country claiming to speak for Cuban-Americans.

administration's war games: Kidnapping presidents, murdering leaders in other countries, seizing foreign oil, and threatening sovereignty. People were paying attention.

People are starting to learn about the 66 years of failed U.S. policy against Cuba. People are learning about the trade restrictions that prevent medicine, food, and fuel from getting to the island. People are learning about the starvation, pain, disease, and death that come from these policies. And people are also beginning to notice that Cubans across the political spectrum want something different than what the U.S. provides!

There has long been a particular image, a particular idea, of what it means to be Cuban-American. You know it well: "The Miami Cuban." The man opposed the communist policies in Cuba so much that

We want the embargo to end. We want the cruel, inhumane oil blockade by the Trump regime to end. We want the current administration's posturing towards war games and invasion to end. We want engagement, not escalation. We want friendship. We want trade. We want to gather with our families, watch béisbol, and drink cafecitos by the Malecón.

Despite what the Marco Rubios, Maria Salazars, and Carlos Giménez of the world try to tell people, this is what most Cubans in America want.

Ready to speak up, a group of us has come together to build the Cuban Americans for Cuba movement. We have launched an open letter against the current U.S. policies towards Cuba (CubanAmericansForCuba.Org/Letter), so other Cubans can sign on and show the world the true values of Cuban-Americans. Our

organization is growing, with members all over the United States, and we span a variety of opinions. What we share is the belief that the future of Cuba should be left to Cubans on the island to decide without U.S. interference and meddling. We work together across our differences to end the Embargo, knowing that this is the best way to allow for freedom for all to flourish.

And that is why a delegation of Cuban-Americans is going on the Nuestra América convoy later this month with other Cuba solidarity activists, a delegation which I am proud to join. We are going to deliver thousands of pounds of medical aid to the people and communities that we love. We are going to show that Cuba is not alone, and that the working people of the USA stand with them. We are going to build bridges of friendship and solidarity and a better world where we all have liberation. A world where we all have peace.

Some, including Republicans in the U.S. Congress, have accused the convoy of being an anti-American venture and the participants of being communist agents. But just like Cubans and Cuban-Americans, the Nuestra América convoy and our supporters are made up of people across the political spectrum. The out-of-touch politicians who seek violence may not understand this, but here's the truth: the only thing you need to be to oppose the U.S. Embargo on Cuba and the Trump administration's war games is a human being.

Originally published by Scheer Post.

Justine Medina is a Cuban-American raised in Tampa, Florida, with over 15 years of experience as an electoral, labor, and community organizer. Collective work she is most proud to have participated in includes the movement to elect AOC to Congress, and the fight to win the first-ever U.S. labor union election against Amazon via the Amazon Labor Union.

Sinners

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ing struggle against white supremacy.

Sinners refuses to forget the price Black musicians have paid for every riff, every howl, every aching note of the blues—leaving the audience wondering who is more terrifying: the vampires or the Klan. The brutality of white violence in Mississippi was perhaps best captured by blues legend J.B. Lenoir, who sang in his song “Born Dead”:

*Why was I born in Mississippi
When it's so hard to get ahead?
Every Black child born in Mississippi
You know the poor child was born dead.*



Angela Davis.

In just a few lines, Lenoir captured the crushing reality of what it meant to be Black and poor in the Jim Crow South: to be born under siege, fighting for breath, with the odds stacked against you from your first cry. Lenoir knew that reality well. Like many Black southerners during the Great Migration, he left Mississippi and carried the blues north to Chicago, where the music helped transform American culture. But the promise of escape was often more illusion than liberation. Even though Lenoir had a hit song and toured Europe with many blues greats, like many Black blues artists of his era, he was never properly compensated for the songs that helped shape American music. By the late 1960s, living in Chicago, Lenoir had to work a second job as a dishwasher just to survive.

North or South, the story was often the same: Black artists created the music that changed the world while others reaped the profits—sometimes recording more lucrative versions of the very songs Black musicians wrote. As Imani Perry writes in *Black in Blues*, “The blues were marketed, copyrighted, and taken out of their home grounds, and heard without being listened to, as though there were neither anguish nor art, just entertainment.” As Smoke tells his younger cousin Sammie—who dreams of escaping the oppression and lack of opportunity in Mississippi—“Chicago ain’t shit but Mississippi with tall buildings instead of plantations.” Or as Malcolm X once said, “Stop talking about the South. As long as you are South of the Canadian border, you are South.”

With the vampires at the door of the juke joint, it is Annie who shows the community how to fight back; and it is significant that in *Sinners*, as often in real life, it is a Black woman who carries the wisdom, strategy, and spirit needed for survival.

Annie’s spiritual practice of hoodoo—the African American folk spiritual tradition born from West and Central African religions, Indigenous knowledge, and the brutal necessity of survival under slavery—is shown to be sacred ancestral knowledge that protects her community.

Sinners treats Black women’s wisdom and guidance with unmistakable reverence. Director Ryan Coogler’s wife, Zinzi Coogler (née Evans), was a lead producer deeply involved in the development process—and

it shows. The film is alive with the same electricity Black women blues singers once carried onto the stage in the early 20th century. During the 1920s—what scholars call the “classic blues” period—Black women dominated the blues stage and recording industry. As Angela Davis argues in *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, these singers were doing something radical: reclaiming their bodies and desires in public after centuries in which Black women’s bodies had been treated as property.

Under slavery, enslavers routinely raped Black women and forced them to bear children to increase the enslaved labor force. Emancipation did not end the violence. In the Jim Crow era that followed, Black women remained at the bottom rung of the social order, still vulnerable to exploitation, poverty, and sexual abuse.

Against that backdrop, blues women’s voices were revolutionary.

Artists like Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Mamie Smith, Victoria Spivey, and Lucille Bogan sang openly about desire, pleasure, independence, bisexuality, and lesbian love—with fearless honesty that defied white supremacist codes of respectability.

These women used the blues to assert sexual autonomy and emotional emancipation in a world that had long denied them both—and *Sinners* carries that legacy forward. The Black women in the film are not passive figures—they are agents of their own pleasure and power. Their sexuality is not hidden or sanitized; it is vibrant, joyful, rebellious. It refuses to be stolen, shamed, or silenced.

As bell hooks observed, too often when Black women appeared in Hollywood films, “our bodies and being were there to serve—to enhance and maintain white womanhood as object of the phallogocentric gaze.” In *Sinners*, Black women are not background figures serving a broader project of white hegemony and its intersection with sexism—they are carriers of knowledge, power, and desire, shaping the fate of their community.

In an era of mass book bans and laws that prohibit almost half of public school students in the U.S. from learning about systemic racism and honest accounts of Black history, *Sinners* gathers what this country has tried to forget: the chain gangs, the terror of the Klan, the monstrous theft of Black creativity, the spiritual knowledge that kept a people alive, the laughter that survived, and the music that carried those memories forward.

In one unforgettable scene, Delta Slim rides with Sammie and Stack past a chain gang laboring by the side of the road. As the prisoners’ work song drifts through the air, he recounts the lynching of a dear friend. When the story ends, he offers no sermon or explanation. Instead, he lets out a low, aching moan and begins humming along with the rhythm of the chain gang’s song. In interviews, Lindo later revealed that the moan was spontaneous—a reminder that the blues has always sprung from improvisation, memory, and the raw expression of lived experience.

To Sammie’s father Jedidiah (played by the incomparable Saul Williams), the preacher who warns his son against the blues, the dancers, drinkers, lovers, and musicians of the juke joint are sinners. But the film ultimately rejects that judgment, insisting the real demons are white supremacy, racial violence, and the theft of Black creativity. Even though Preacher Boy leaves the confines of his dad’s church, the blues—rather than damning his soul—allows him to tell his story to the world.

As the legendary blues bassist and

songwriter Willie Dixon once said, “The blues is truth.” *Sinners* lets that truth sing.

And the soundtrack is sizzling. In one of the film’s most beautiful surprises, legendary Chicago blues guitarist Buddy Guy appears at the end as an older Sammie—a moment that knocked me out the first time I saw it. In a closing-credits scene, Guy shares the stage with Christine “Kingfish” Ingram, the two of them representing the living history and future of the blues. The soundtrack itself features some of the greatest living blues and roots artists alive, including Rhiannon Giddens, Justin Robinson, Bobby Rush, Cedric Burnside, and Eric Gales, with Lawrence “Boo” Mitchell and Jake Blount serving as some of the film’s music consultants.

Perhaps only a force as powerful as love could have created such a cinematic achievement. Ryan Coogler has said the seed for *Sinners* was planted by an uncle who loved the blues and spent hours sharing those records and stories with him. After his uncle passed away, Coogler made his first pilgrimage to Mississippi to learn more about the culture that produced the music his uncle cherished—a journey that echoes my own recent trips South to learn more about my family’s roots and the land where my ancestors lived and labored.

Sinners is a blues poem. It is a freedom cry. It is a love letter—to Coogler’s uncle, to the blues, and to ancestors like mine who endured that brutal world in Mississippi and still left behind a culture so powerful that no vampire could ever drain its lifeblood.

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Jesse Hagopian is a Seattle educator, the director of the Zinn Education Project’s Teaching for Black Lives Campaign, an editor for *Rethinking Schools*, and the author of the book, *Teach Truth: The Struggle for Antiracist Education*. You can follow him at [IAmAnEducator.com](https://www.IAmAnEducator.com), Instagram, Bluesky or Substack.



Maime Smith.



Active Duty and National Guard:
You have a duty to
REFUSE
ILLEGAL ORDERS
Paid for by VeteransForPeace.org

Veterans Group Launches Billboard Campaign

Veterans For Peace has launched a billboard campaign to remind our brothers and sisters, sons and daughters and grandchildren who have joined the military that they have the right and the responsibility to refuse illegal orders, and that we will support them when they do.

Illegal orders would include:

- Orders to unconstitutionally deploy to U.S. cities in support of racist ICE attacks or to suppress peaceful protests;
- Orders to participate in illegal regime-change wars, such as against Venezuela and Iran;
- Orders to ship weapons to Israel while it is conducting a genocide of Palestinians.
- Orders to attack civilians or to torture and kill prisoners of war.

Many of us entered the military with a

purpose—seeking service, opportunity, stability, or a way to live our ideals. While we may not have agreed with everything, we believed in enough of the mission to sign up.

But what happens when that belief changes?

What if you begin to question the mission you're supporting, or face orders that you cannot carry out in good conscience?

These are serious, personal questions. But you don't have to navigate them alone.

Members of Veterans For Peace and the Conscientious Resistance Working Group have stood where you are. We joined the military—whether by choice or conscription—with the hope of doing good. Over time, some of us came to question that mission.

Some chose to stay silent and leave quietly. Others pursued conscientious objection or refused specific actions. Many found a path somewhere in between.

Wherever you are in this process, you are not alone. There are people and resources ready to support you with clarity, compassion, and solidarity.

As service members, we are not just trained to follow orders—we are also moral agents. We have a legal and ethical obligation to assess not only whether an order is lawful, but also whether it aligns with our conscience.

If you are struggling with these questions, this resource is for you.

This page is currently in development and will be fully launched by Memorial Day. It is intended to support service members seeking moral clarity and exploring conscientious resistance in all its forms.

VFP's Conscientious Resistance Working Group supports military service members who are questioning, resisting, or objecting to military actions. We provide

peer support, guidance, outreach training, and connections to legal, mental health, and spiritual care. You can email us at (conscientiousresistance@gmail.com).

Whether you are refusing unlawful orders, applying for conscientious objector status, or simply seeking to understand your own values more clearly—we are here to support you.

Resources

GI Rights Hotline: Free, confidential support for service members, veterans, and families. 877-447-4487; girightshotline.org

Military Law Task Force: Advocates through law for servicemembers and veterans. nlmltf.org

Center on Conscience and War: Supporting the rights of conscientious objectors and opposing conscription. centeronconscience.org

About Face: Veterans Against the War: Post-9/11 veterans resisting endless war and militarism. aboutfaceveterans.org

Do Not Turn On Us: A grassroots initiative affirming the right to resist unlawful orders, including during states of emergency or martial law. linktr.ee/donotturonus

You are not alone.

Your questions are valid.

Your conscience counts.

Visit veteransforpeace.org for more information.

Tactical Shift

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the U.S. to end the war, a political calculation complicated by these states' reliance on the U.S. military and their deep business ties to Trump and his family. Trump has signed massive business deals in the Gulf and his son-in-law Jared Kushner's firm is largely bankrolled by Gulf money.

Iran's Arab neighbors understand they must "walk this tightrope very cautiously" in their approach to Trump, knowing that they could quickly fall out of favor with him, said Al-Arian.

"This comes down to the bigger question about what leverage these states are willing to exert regarding the U.S. and Israel and their maximalist goals and the fact that until the U.S. sees a reason for it to back down from its stated positions, then diplomacy can only go so far between the states of the region," Al-Arian told Drop Site. "It's pretty clear that all of this is a result of U.S.-Israeli aggression. The reason that many of these states have probably resisted stating the obvious is in part due to maintaining what they see as a more positive and open direct line to Washington and to the U.S. President. Any words of condemnation in public would be seen potentially as affecting or harming that relationship which they are depending on, in part, to bring this to an end at some point."

Iranian officials maintain that they have not reached out in any way to discuss a ceasefire with the Trump administration

and that they intend to continue their counterstrikes against Israel and any U.S. bases used in attacks on Iran. "Iran's position [is] that it will continue to defend itself firmly until a credible and robust framework is established for a ceasefire and for preventing any renewed attacks by the United States or Israel," said the senior Iranian official.

Saad said she thinks it is unlikely Iran would accept any temporary deal with the U.S. that leaves open the possibility that another war could be launched again in the near future.

"Iran will not accept any ceasefire at this stage because what it is pursuing is not a mere end to hostilities, which can and will be easily broken by Israel and the United States, but a deterrence-restoring outcome that creates the conditions for a lasting and enforceable settlement," she said. "The strategic logic is that holding out now, despite the costs, is the precondition for an agreement that actually holds—a ceasefire concluded only after Iran has demonstrated sufficient retaliatory capacity to make the cost of violating it prohibitive for the other side."

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The Four Horsemen Ride Again

By Doug Rawlings

Beware the Idiots of March—once again on call—the very embodiment of Artificial Intelligence dancing to the apocalyptic tune of white privilege determined to wound, maim, and slaughter us all

First, they start with their own sense of inhumanity efficiently boxed up as MacDonal'd's take out meals dressed with elementary school girls' blood and screams and smattered with the mustard of their own depravity

Then they collect soldiers and teach them to strut with pride to be scattered hither and thither from country to country carrying the crosses of their warped sense of Christianity marching up their own Golgotha slopes to be crucified

Finally, the day shall come when we all ascend to eternity carried up on the blooms of nuclear bombs sent forth by those incapable of giving thought to another's worth—four horsemen of greed, stupidity, egotism, and immorality.

In Era of Book Bans and War on History, *Sinners* Reveals What U.S. Tries to Forget

By Jesse Hagopian

Warning: This article contains spoilers.

Near the end of *Sinners*, there is a moment that Hollywood rarely permits. The character Smoke guns down a gang of Ku Klux Klan members who have come to murder his people—and then, with hands still trembling, he cradles his newborn child in his arms.

Watching it, something strange and powerful stirred within me—as if the film were bending time, reaching across generations to reply to a story I recently learned in my journey to understand my family history.

A few years ago, my dad, Gerald Lenoir, made a stunning discovery: He found the Mississippi plantation where our family had been enslaved and the land where they lived after emancipation.

dren. in an effort to drive them off their land. But the community didn't run. They armed themselves, rebuilt the school in a tent, and stayed. They fought back and held onto their land.

That's why that scene in *Sinners* hit me so hard.

For families who have passed down stories of surviving the Klan—and the trauma and resilience of those encounters through their blood—that moment on screen was not just witnessed. It was remembered in the body.

Cultural critic bell hooks once wrote that enslaved Black people were often punished simply for looking at white slave-owners, and she wondered how that traumatic history shaped “Black parenting and Black spectatorship.” Out of that history, hooks argued, Black audiences developed what she called an “oppositional gaze”—

ist and preacher's son; Delta Slim (poignantly portrayed by Delroy Lindo), a piano and harmonica player; and Pearline (Jayme Lawson), a blues singer who catches Sammie's eye and lands a gig at Smoke and Stack's juke joint.

Smoke and Stack purchase an old sawmill from a white man, who hides the fact that he is the local head of the Ku Klux Klan, and turn it into their juke joint. That evening it becomes a sanctuary for Black residents of Clarksdale—a place where music, laughter, and community create moments of magic and freedom.

Inside Smoke and Stack's juke joint, Sammie's music does something astonishing: It bends the space-time continuum, transforming the room into a portal. West African griots appear—playing, drumming, dancing—their sound threading across centuries. Then Sammie's blues music opens a

conjuring spirits from the past and the future. This gift can bring healing to their communities—but it also attracts evil.”

Clarksdale is haunted—not only by the specter of the Ku Klux Klan, but by another terror that does not simply want to take Black life but devour Black creativity. It is Sammie's extraordinary gift for the blues that cracks open the veil between worlds and entices evil, drawing the cunning, complex, and sometimes sympathetic vampire Remmick (Jack O'Connell) and his followers to the juke joint—setting the stage for a night where music, history, and horror collide.

As the community resists the vampire attack, they turn to Annie (the magnetic Wunmi Mosaku), a hoodoo matriarch whose knowledge of rootwork and ancestral protection is needed in the struggle to save Black lives and Black culture.



In the process, he also discovered that the ancestors of the legendary bluesman J. B. Lenoir were likely enslaved on that same plantation.

That news bent me like a blue note on a National guitar.

I've spent much of my life devoted to the blues—I play harmonica in the band The Blue Tide—and this discovery was a revelation that bound me to the music's tradition of protest and truth-telling in a way words can scarcely capture. After several trips there with my dad and brother, I brought my kids to Jayess, Mississippi, where we dedicated a headstone to my great-great-grandparents, Thomas and Laura Lenoir, who had been enslaved nearby.

At the ceremony, a woman in her 90s approached and told me she had once been friends with my great-great-grandmother Laura. The fact that I was talking to someone who had been friends with a person who had once been enslaved was stunning.

This history isn't distant. It's breathing right beside us.

Then she told us a story I will never forget. During Jim Crow, the Ku Klux Klan burned down the preschool that Black families in Jayess had built for their chil-

a way of watching films critically, aware of how Hollywood has long distorted or erased Black life. Instead of forcing Black viewers to watch themselves through a white lens, *Sinners* centers Black memory, Black defiance, and Black love.

In doing so, the film also understands something the writer Amiri Baraka captured in his landmark study *Blues People*: “Blues means a Negro experience.” He understood that the blues is not merely music but the historical expression of Black life in America. *Sinners* takes that insight seriously.

The Blues Summons Monsters and Opens Portals

Set in 1932 Clarksdale, Mississippi, *Sinners* follows Smoke and Stack (both portrayed by Michael B. Jordan), twin brothers who, after years working in Al Capone's criminal empire, return home from Chicago to open a juke joint.

They recruit a band of extraordinary musicians, including their cousin Sammie “Preacher Boy” Moore (played with electrifying grace by actor-musician Miles Caton in his film debut), a blues guitar-

portal to the future that ushers in an electric guitarist in the tradition of Jimi Hendrix or Parliament, followed by a hip-hop DJ scratching a record, a break dancer, and Black women twerking that echo the African women also on the dance floor. Even the dancing Chinese ancestors of Grace Chow (Li Jun Li) and her husband Bo (Yao)—immigrant shopkeepers in Clarksdale who help with supplies for the juke joint—are summoned into the space, showing that this musical connection has no borders.

The sequence becomes one of the great scenes in cinematic history and one of the greatest tributes to Black musical genius ever expressed. In a few electrifying minutes, the film does something that has rarely been accomplished: It makes visible the living genealogy of Black music—from African rhythms to the blues to rock to hip-hop—revealing it not as a series of separate genres but as a single river of creativity flowing through centuries of struggle and survival.

But sanctuaries can attract predators.

As the film's opening narration proclaims, “There are legends of people born with the gift of making music so true it can pierce the veil between life and death,

Remmick, an Irish musician who also knows the sting of colonization and discrimination, goes to the juke joint seeking entry so he can harness the power of Sammie's blues to reunite him with beloved ancestors he could not save centuries ago. There he makes a passionate case for the Black musicians to join his side.

When the Black people in the juke joint refuse to trust Remmick and deny him entry, the scene could be read as a rejection of multiracial unity—an argument that Black culture must remain separate and that alliances across race are doomed to betrayal. But that is not the film's message. The price of joining Remmick's “family” and gaining immortality is that Black people relinquish the power of the blues, their memory, and their roots. It is “colorblind” racism in its most seductive form: a system that claims to see “no race” while devouring everything that makes a people distinct, powerful, and whole. Remmick's offer is not genuine solidarity; it is a form of erasure. True solidarity—one capable of liberating everyone, *Sinners* suggests—cannot be built on colorblind fantasies. It must be forged through an uncompromis-

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