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[advocate@cunydisc.org](mailto:advocate@cunydisc.org)

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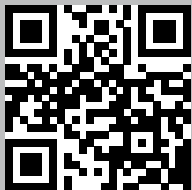
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<b>Editor in Chief</b>	Dadland Maye
<b>Managing Editor</b>	Bhargav Rani
<b>Layout Editor</b>	Alessandro Zammataro

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## Trump, Brexit, and the Abject Poverty of Liberalism

Gordon Barnes

Two seemingly monumental and world-historic events occurred in two of the most powerful imperialist countries this year. On 23 June, the United Kingdom held a referendum on its membership in the European Union, resulting in a “leave” vote. On the other side of the Atlantic, Donald Trump, the Republican candidate for President of the United States, was victorious in his electoral campaign against Democratic rival Hillary Clinton. The Leave Campaign won the “Brexit” referendum with 17.4 million ballots, or 51.9 percent of the

votes, whereas Donald Trump won the US presidency with 62.3 million votes, amounting to 46.5 percent of the ballots cast (note that Clinton won the popular vote with 64.4 million ballots cast in her name, or 48.1 percent, though she failed to secure enough electoral votes for a win, with Trump gaining 306 to her 232). In both cases, the results led to widespread protests. In Britain, pro-European Union and “remain” voters clamored for a recount. Some in London went so far as to propose an asinine plan for the capital to remain



Source: <http://samwhiteout.com/2015/08/03/baltimore-riots/>



as part of the EU whilst the remainder of Britain would extricate itself from the inter-imperialist bloc. Similarly, in the United States, disaffected voters across the country joined protests against the nearly assured ascendancy of Trump to the office of the Presidency.

Many commentators from varied political perspectives have claimed either one or both the processes as paradigm shifts for the extant world political order. While Brexit and the ascendancy of Donald Trump to the United States presidency are indeed substantive political changes for both the United Kingdom and the United States, they do not represent a reorganization of the world capitalist order. Rather, the phenomena of these electoral results are part of a liberal political trajectory and the logical conclusion of liberal politics. Said another way, Brexit and Trump's victory are not ruptures, they are perpetuations of the existing political order albeit through different means. Specifically, both Brexit and Trump's rise are political deviations within the same socio-economic structure which produced the possibilities and subsequent realization of each. While Trump and the leaders of the Leave Campaign in the United Kingdom are neither classically nor in contemporary terms defined as liberal, it was liberal politics which led to their triumph.

To say that Trump and Brexit are the logical outgrowth of liberal

politics may seem confounding on the surface. When one examines the processes of each of these events, however, it becomes clear that the results are not the result of a global rise of some fascistic

of both British and American society amount to crocodile tears for all but the most politically myopic and those lacking any sort of social consciousness. That both the US presidential race and the Brexit

of political power by liberal currents was nonetheless entirely within the framework set forth by the seemingly more unsavory political forces, Trump's campaign in the United States, and the Leave

it offer in the wake of these ostensibly shocking victories? Such politics proffer very little in the way of ameliorating extant social reality, evidence of this abounds when one considers Obama's presidency

referendum, and likewise Trump's electoral victory, should in fact not come as a shock to anyone with a modicum of political understanding or aptitude. These "shock" victories did not come to pass as a matter of some new politics which is anathema and alien to the status quo. Rather, these victories were set in motion by a variety of forces, most notably the poverty of liberal politics and ideology, to present a viable solution to the endemic socio-economic crises which are not only a facet of imperialist capitalist society, but integral to its very functionality.

**Fallacies of Liberal Democracy  
in the  
USA and Britain**

So what then is liberalism as politics and as ideology? It is a nebulous term, no doubt, with varied definitions contingent upon temporal and spatial realities. What is meant by liberalism as it relates to Brexit and Trump's electoral success is the organizing socio-political philosophies which have largely governed the western world, and Britain and the United States more specifically. These philosophies – and it's important to note that there are multiple, liberalism is not a singular ideology or political formation – stress freedom from tyranny and despotism on the one hand, and unfettered economic exchange on the other. The dictionary definition of this typology



Source: [https://usercontent1.hubstatic.com/13160062\\_f1024](https://usercontent1.hubstatic.com/13160062_f1024)

tendency. And while such victories represent a rightward shift for the stewards of western capitalism and imperialism, the acrimony flaunted by centrist and liberal sectors

referendum were predicated on xenophobic, and at times overtly racist politics, should be clear to anyone who was paying attention. The answer to these contestations

Campaign in Britain.

What then did liberal ideology and politics offer the vast majority of people affected by these historic outcomes, and what does

in the United States or the Labour Party's leadership under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown over the preceding decade in the United Kingdom. The success of the Brexit





Statue of Hugo Grotius, Rotterdam (The Netherlands) - Coolsingel - Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/roosebjorn/28145656785>

would be summed up as follows: liberalism favors individual liberties and freedoms, laissez-faire economics and is open to modest amounts of socio-political reform. It is through this understanding of liberalism that one can begin to see how and why such seemingly socially regressive processes as the election of Donald Trump and the success of the Leave campaign have taken place.

But before one can examine how liberal politics and ideology not only failed to stem the tide of right-wing populism but ushered it in, it is imperative to understand the origins of liberalism. Liberal politics have not degenerated overtime, rather, their very origins in the cauldron of slavery juxtaposed with freedom demonstrate the grotesque and contorted birth of an ideology which so many so-called progressives champion in today's times. Where then lie the origins of liberal ideologies and politics? This is a massive historical-cum-political question devoid of any singular or concise answer. Be that as it may, an understanding of these origins, albeit in a truncated and piecemeal form, are vital not only to understanding how such politics are rooted not in freedom but oppression, and why liberal politics from its geneses to its more contemporaneous formulations fail to remedy the crises associated with bourgeois class rule in western society.

A sound point of departure to interrogate the historical fallacies of liberalism are the liberal revolutions in each of the countries in question, the Glorious Revolution of 1688 in Britain, and the American War of Independence (1776-1783). The former saw William of Orange (of the Dutch Republic) in alliance with English parliamentarians oust James II, effectively ending absolutist rule in the British Isles and instituting a constitutional monarchy. The American War of Independence took the struggle of liberalism – that is, a struggle for liberty and freedom against tyrannical political rule – to a new level, doing away with the monarchy all together and establishing a bourgeois republic. Thus, both these political processes resulted in a re-

formulation of the political status quo. It is important to realize, however, that both the Glorious Revolution and the American War of Independence were not social revolutions in that they did not alter the material basis of society and merely proffered novel political solutions.

Central to both these revolutions was the issue of slavery, both chattel and political. The former was allowed to persist, and was in fact championed and defended by the majority of intellectuals and governmental elites (there were of course outliers). We need to only consider Hugo Grotius' thinking on slavery and political freedom. Grotius, a Dutch jurist, produced various philosophical works on the problem of political freedom which were used as the ideological drapery for William of Orange's seizure of the throne in England some decades after Grotius' death. Political slavery, in this instantiation, was represented by the absolutist regime in England, hence the alliance between William of Orange and English parliamentarians to bring into existence a constitutional monarchy. Chattel slavery, on the other hand, was for Grotius perfectly permissible, and was warranted for those he considered of lesser stock, namely non-Europeans. Likewise, as it relates to the British colonies in North America, John Locke's philosophical musings were later used by the "founding fathers" of the United States to simultaneously point to the problem of political slavery – no representation in British parliament – and expound on the ostensible "naturalness" of chattel slavery. Granted, there is a plethora of other thinkers who motivated liberal thought and politics. Locke and Grotius, however, represent the lineages of thought which initially won over political revolutionaries in Colonial America, and earlier, in the British Isles.

The dual birth of liberal thought and subsequent politics – a vociferous opposition to political subjugation of the individual in one aspect, and a staunch support of chattel slavery – can thus be understood as Janus-faced. Contradictory in its origin, and conse-



quently, contradictory in its political application. This origin is part of the reason why liberal politics have ebbed and flowed, not just over long expanses of time, but at acute moments of political difference. For it was liberalism which initially offered the ideological bulwark upon which the rationality of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade was established. And in the British context, when the slave trade was made illicit in 1807 and slavery (officially) abolished in 1834, it was the most stalwart of liberal poli-

ticians who advanced the cause of abolition throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. And in the aftermath of abolition, it was the heirs of the abolitionists who sought to colonize the African continent wholesale under the pretext of propping up so-called “legitimate trade” as counter to internal slave trading amongst African polities and social groups. Therefore, this abolitionist paradigm, the origins of which are deeply rooted in liberalism, was the central ideological

cog which fit into the machinery of late-nineteenth century British imperialism. The contradictions of liberalism are also evident in American political history. Granted the Second American Revolution (the US Civil War) and the subsequent era of Radical Reconstruction was a social revolution, the culmination of the American bourgeois revolution, but liberalism eventually triumphed with the defeat of Radical Reconstruction in 1877 and has continued to this day in

rebooting a system of racialized and gendered oppression. And much like the outgrowth of British imperialism after slavery, American imperial ventures too began in earnest after the liberal regime had ossified and secured its place at the forefront of the bourgeois social order. The histories of Britain and the United States demonstrate that since the eighteenth century and up to this present moment, liberal governance has dominated socio-political life. The varied dislocations and deviations

which have occurred over time are merely the vagaries of divergent political currents, all under the auspices of liberal ideology. While it is important to maintain a nuanced understanding of the differences between US and British politics (both historically and contemporaneously), the central thread that binds the political experiences of both places is that of liberalism. What then do we make of the current political moment? Given the aforementioned definition of liberalism, Donald

Trump and the acolytes to the British withdrawal from the European Union can, and must, be construed as part of the problem inherent to liberalism. Their counterparts in Hillary Clinton and the Remain Campaign, respectively, are likewise part of this political malignancy which needs excising. In both cases the option of the lesser evil was what motivated the politics at hand. The lesser evil in each case, as espoused by the epigones of liberal politics and ideology, were Hillary Clinton and



Source: <http://www.inquisitr.com/3709739/donald-trump-wall-mexico-border-fence-extension/>



the Remain camp in the US and Britain, respectively. This “lesser evilism” was posited in a way that stressed, in the case of the United States, that in spite of Clinton’s abhorrent record as a Senator, Secretary of State, and as First Lady alongside Bill Clinton, she was still a markedly better candidate than Trump. She is less overtly racist for sure, but to think that she isn’t part and parcel to the maintenance of racialized and gendered oppression in the United States is

a deeply troubling position. Like her Republican counterpart, Clinton too represents a sector of the ruling elite, and her role as president would not have been to serve any nebulous conceptualization of “the people,” but rather, as is Trump’s role, to be an agent for proprietary interests domestically and expand access to markets internationally, likely via imperialist ventures. Therefore, whereas Trump alleges he will deport all so-called “illegal” im-

migrants, Clinton could only offer tepid rebuffs to Trump’s platform of mass deportation with a more managed immigration policy. In other words, Clinton would likely have continued the policy of deportations practiced under the current regime of Barack Obama. Given Trump’s xenophobic and truly draconian immigration platform, Clinton may have very well seemed like a lesser evil. To present her as such, however, is erroneous, as she represents an equal-

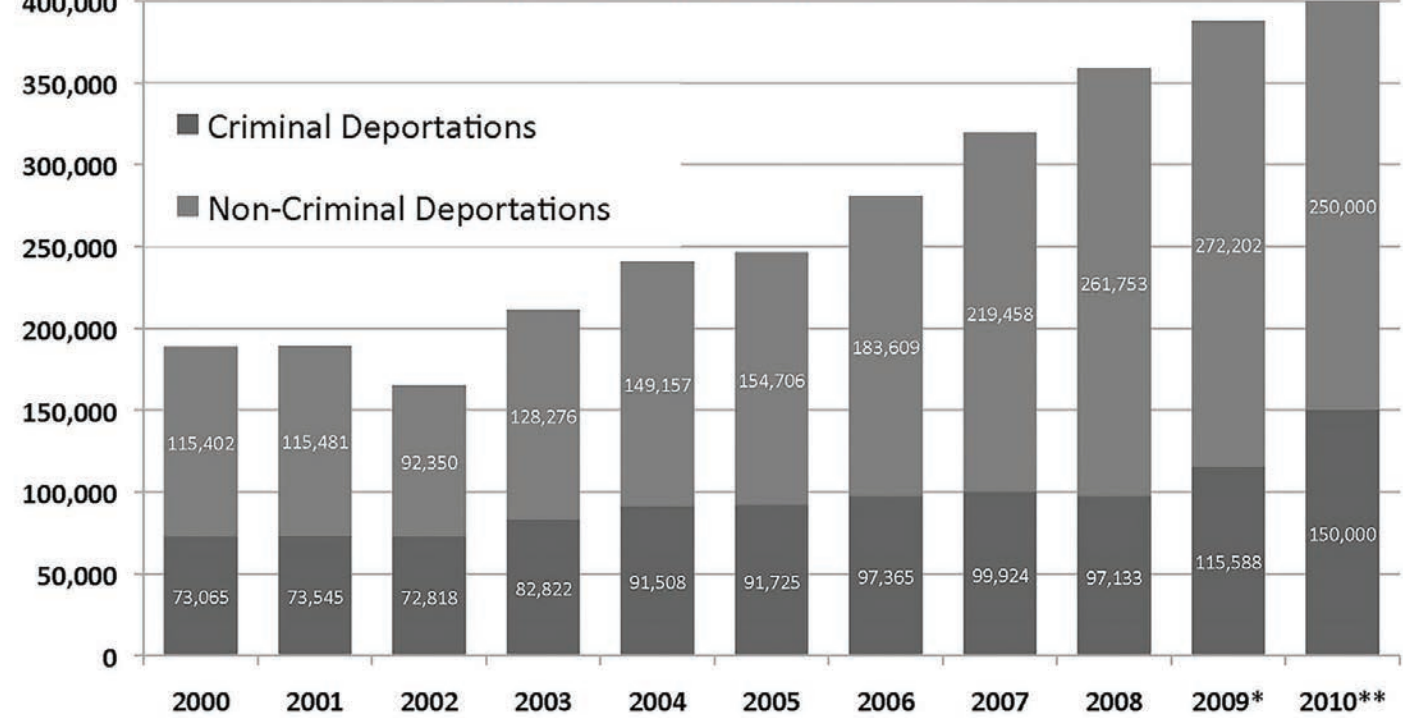
ly malevolent social process who is cut from the same cloth as Trump. If we recall that under Obama, more undocumented workers have been deported than under the previous Bush administration, and furthermore, under the auspices of Obama and the Democratic Party, more undocumented migrants have been deported than the entirety of deportations from the preceding century (Immigration and Customs Enforcement estimates approximately 2.5 million deportations under Obama from 2008-2015, though other estimates reach as high as 5 million). It would be foolish to think that a Clinton presidency would have seen the cessation of such policies. Neither candidate calls for the wholesale granting of citizenship rights to all immigrants “legal” or otherwise, and neither can, for their roles as the stewards of US capital is to ensure there exists a reserve army of labor, one which can be tapped into during times of crisis and discarded once economic stabilization is achieved. Trump’s political platform stressed the building of a border wall along the United States’ southern border with Mexico. Clinton’s pious claims that “we need bridges, not walls” is pure political gamesmanship. The wall already exists, and has been expanded since the presidency of Bill Clinton, and has continued under

the subsequent administrations of George Bush and Barack Obama. Trump wants to “complete” the wall, adding to the nearly six-hundred miles already in place. Clinton does not want the wall removed but intact as it is. Her and Trump’s plans regarding immigration are not contrasting options, but two divergent methods to the same end, that of creating an immigration policy wherein only certain “types” of migrants would be welcome, those which are needed for US capitalism to flourish unabated. The vacuity of Clinton’s political principles is further evidenced when one scrutinizes her conduct abroad. Examples abound from the Clinton Foundation siphoning earthquake relief funds in Haiti to set up sweatshops in “free trade” zones outside of Port-au-Prince to the blatant disregard for national self-determination for the peoples of Libya. Clinton’s liberalism is not only noxious and unsavory, its material manifestations result in death, destruction, and oppression. The laundry list of dirty deeds doesn’t stop with the exploitation of Haitian workers (most of whom are women) or the arbitrary ousting of Mummar Gaddafi, these are simply two of the most egregious. One may make the claim that despite all these negatives, Clinton still supports a woman’s right to choose abortion. This is true. What she doesn’t sup-

port, however, is free abortion, on demand and in a hospital. And she never will, for it isn’t in her, or her socio-political backers’ interest. It would also be apt to remember that the current intensification of the “war on women” and both the physical and rhetorical attacks on Planned Parenthood have only escalated with a Democratic president, and it would have persisted with a Clinton presidency as it will with Trump’s. So, when Trump labeled Clinton with the moniker “Crooked Hillary,” he wasn’t wrong. She is indeed crooked, just not in the ways articulated by the Trump campaign. And it must be noted, Trump too is a liberal. Yes, he is a disgusting right-wing populist, but his liberalism is easily discerned. He is supportive of transgender individuals using whichever bathroom they feel comfortable with. He is also less likely to commit ground troops abroad, whereas Clinton has proven she has no qualms about such undertakings (rest assured that Trump will continue and intensify Obama’s tactics of drone strikes and Special Forces operations). Trump likely isn’t as opposed to abortion as his oscillations on the question may lead one to believe; he frankly doesn’t care and only advocated for jailing those women who seek abortions in order to pander to a certain voting bloc. His tax plan was the most

DEPORTATIONS BY FISCAL YEAR

Bush and Obama Administrations



Data from FY 2000-FY 2008 from DHS' Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2008.  
\*From the Washington Post, 3/19/10.  
\*\*ICE goals for FY 2010, according to a 2/22/10 internal memo released by the Washington Post. The memo said that as of February 15th, ICE was on track to deport 310,000, and outlined steps ICE would be taking in order to "meet or exceed" the goal of 400,000.



progressive out of any US presidential candidate, with the exception of the pseudo-socialist Bernie Sanders, and while he wants to gut “Obamacare,” he still maintains that he wants a public option for health insurance for all American citizens (however opaque it may currently be). All this is not to defend Trump, but rather to demonstrate that in spite of his more horrifying politics and rhetoric, he can be construed as a liberal, just the other side of the coin to Clinton’s liberalism.

So, as it concerns the US presidential election, the contest boiled down to a choice between a misogynistic, openly racist, xenophobic, demagogic, sexual predator and an unabashedly pro-imperialist, bellicose, covert racist whose only desire is to maintain the status quo. The dichotomy presumed between these two “choices” is largely fallacious, they are merely two different heads on the same hydra. The false dichotomy of the lesser evil was not unique to the American political sphere, and was evident during the Brexit referendum as well, albeit with the lines a bit more nuanced. The Leave Campaign was represented by a faction of the Conservative Party, embodied by now Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson and then Secretary of State for Justice, Michael Gove. Additionally, the United Kingdom Independence Party, headed by the incipient fascist



Source:[http://www.anglonauts.eu/english%20words/vocabulary\\_politics\\_main/voc\\_politics\\_uk\\_main/voc\\_politics\\_uk\\_parties\\_ukip\\_1/voc\\_politics\\_uk\\_parties\\_ukip\\_1.htm](http://www.anglonauts.eu/english%20words/vocabulary_politics_main/voc_politics_uk_main/voc_politics_uk_parties_ukip_1/voc_politics_uk_parties_ukip_1.htm)

Nigel Farage, threw its full weight behind the campaign. Quite a few far-left parties also endorsed the Leave Campaign. The Remain campaign was led by a separate

faction of the Tories, but primarily by Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party (and to a much less visible extent, the Liberal Democrats headed by Nick Clegg in a politi-

cal alliance with then Tory Prime Minister David Cameron). At this juncture, it is important to note that if there exists a qualitative difference between US and British

politics, it is the existence of the Labour Party. The Labour party is a working-class party, albeit extremely reformist and capitulatory in nature. The existence of a

party based in the working class as opposed to the US paradigm in which both major parties represent different factions of the proprietary elite, is not a minor difference (even in light of the trend towards more traditional bourgeois politics under the premierships of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown in the first decade of this century). With this caveat in mind, if we consider that the entire referendum was predicated on xenophobia and racism, not to mention the problematic existence of an inter-imperialist bloc such as the EU, it becomes clear that both sides, Leave as well as Remain, did not present viable solutions to the migrant crisis in particular and the problem of the European Union more generally.

The “evil” faction, that of Leave, harangued the electorate about what they dubbed “project fear.” Project fear was the apparent position of the lesser evil, that of the Remain camp, which was, according to some Tories such as Boris Johnson, and UKIP more generally, that the Remain camp proposed that the passing of the referendum would precipitate a calamitous economic event. In reality, the architects of any such “project fear” were the mainstream Leave campaigners themselves. Basing the entire referendum upon xenophobia, the specter of unrestrained masses of migrants “flooding” Britain was



mobilized by these demagogues to convince voters to cast their ballot in favor of leaving the European Union. Nigel Farage smugly standing in front of a truck with text reading “Breaking Point” alongside the image of migrants fleeing the imperialist carnage in the Middle East emblazoned upon its side is just one example of this. Boris Johnson’s campaign bus dubiously claimed that the hundreds of millions of pound sterling paid into the coffers in Brussels would be re-directed to the National Health Service if a Leave vote was successful (unsurprisingly, both he and Farage backtracked on this once the victory had been secured). The “fear” of Turkey joining the EU was also used to sway voters, as was the scapegoating of immigrants, particularly those from Eastern Europe.

These scare tactics do not absolve the lesser evil – the Remain camp – in this case. For on the one hand, a substantial number of Tories, including the current Prime Minister, Theresa May, who superseded Cameron after his resignation in the wake of the vote, supported remaining within the EU. This was largely due to the fact the Britain was not part of the Schengen Area (EU states which allow freedom of movement without passports) and the “problem” of immigration could be managed under the auspices of the EU. Additionally, various sectors of the financial oligarchs in London want-

ed to remain to preserve and allow for the continuation of capital exports. And for all the “socially progressive” credentials the Tories claim unto themselves (having the only women prime ministers in British history in May and Margaret Thatcher as well as legalizing wedlock between homosexual couples), any thinking individual would see through this to their decidedly backwards politics, demonstrated by the bedroom tax, migrant taxes, and the closing down of centers for the survivors of domestic abuse, to name but a few, the latter two having been part of Labour’s program as well.

Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party, while presenting a public image that they wanted to protect immigrants from the xenophobic assaults waged by the Leave camp, were themselves embroiled in the racist demagoguery of the whole referendum vote. Rather than express solidarity with migrants, Labour put forth a plan of management, one which would allow, much like in the United States, for the selective admittance of certain types of immigrants. Furthermore, their “critical” stance on the EU was facile and impotent. Remain campaigners offered not a single iota of criticism of the bloc which allows German, French, and British imperialism to lord over weaker states via austerity – Spain, Greece, and Portugal for example – but rather proffered lukewarm reproaches

about how the European Union is problematic but could be reformed under British influence. It really doesn’t matter if British imperialism exists onto itself, or if it exists in conjunction with German and French imperialism. The EU is not some panacea which it is often trumpeted as. It is a bloc which attempts to more efficiently organize capitalist competition and cooperation. And its dissolution would be a good thing for the vast majority who live under threat of austerity measures emanating from Brussels. However, playing into the claptrap of bourgeois parliamentary politics only subjugates any and all social forces opposed to capitalist society to the vagaries of mainstream political solutions, all of which are stale if not outright rotten.

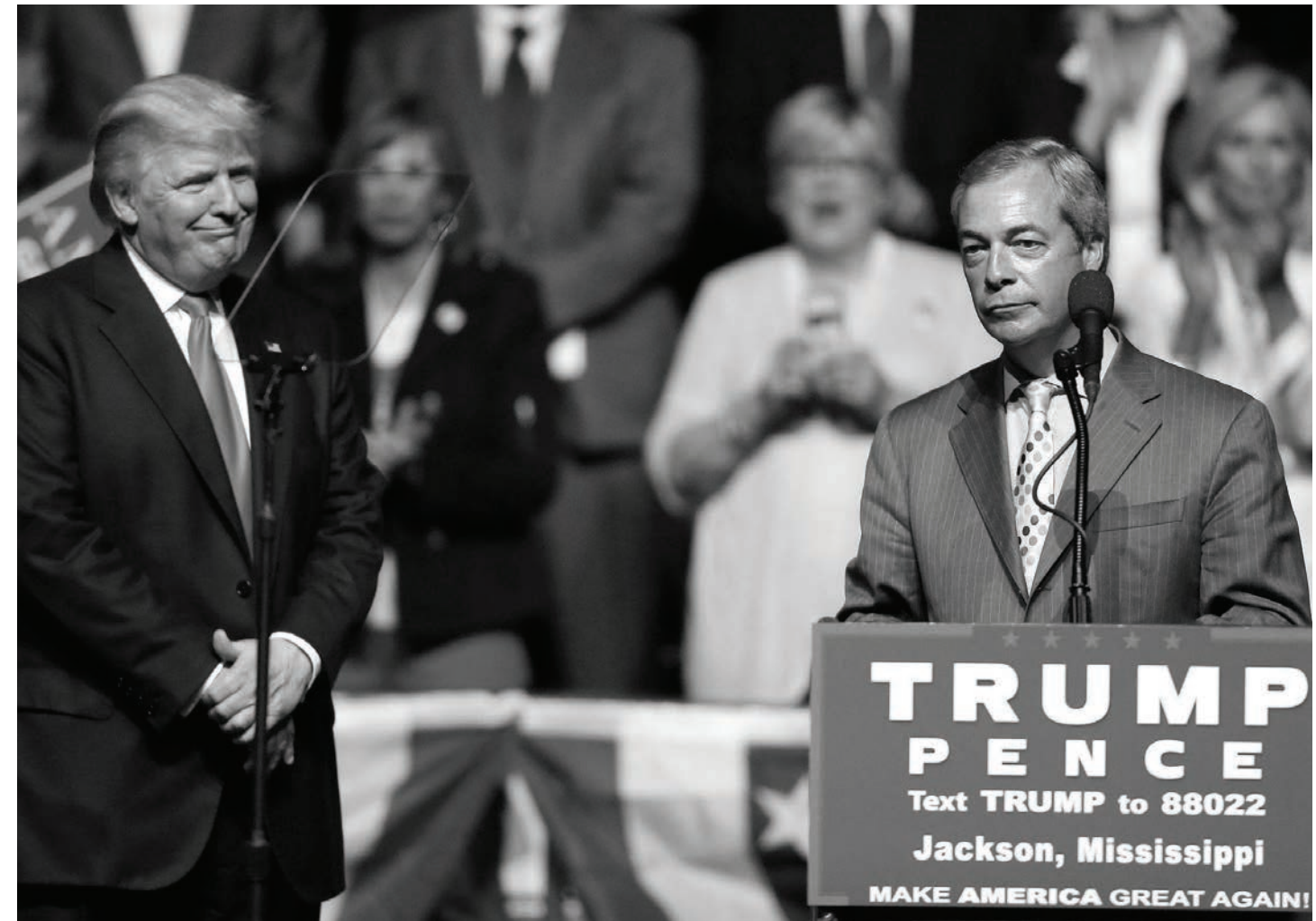
The only politically cogent action in regards to the Brexit vote was to divest. And not out of apathy, but in conjunction with action. Actions such as solidarizing with the then ongoing transit strikes against austerity measures – imposed by a “socialist” government – across the channel in France (going on strike as well), or taking over the tunnel and allowing through migrants who are effectively jailed in the disgustingly nicknamed “Jungle” migrant camp in Calais. These options were never put forward because like the Democrats, the Labour Party, despite its divergent social base, is fettered by the

liberal politics of reformism. They offer nothing in the way of ending the avarice and oppression bred by capitalism, and only feign to assuage the negative social externalities foisted upon workers and other oppressed social groups under this socio-economic system. How then did liberalism fail to forestall both Brexit and the election of Donald Trump? Simply enough, in the British case, it offered nothing by way of diverting those opposed to such racist and xenopho-

bic attacks to actions which could have directly confronted the social forces motivating such a process. In the United States, as mentioned before, liberalism put forth two equally despicable candidates. But none of this should come as a surprise, as such seemingly backwards politics can and will continue to arise from and in opposition to the more “progressive” elements within liberal ideology. But where does support for this apparent backwardness stem from?

### The Success of Brexit and the Rise of Trump: A Working-Class Revolt?

Myriad political pundits and news outlets have articulated both the triumph of Brexit and Trump as some evidence of a working-class revolt. In the British situation, this is very much the case for a number of far-left political organizations and parties, as it was for some of the more traditional right-wing forces. In the United States, the



Source: <https://static.independent.co.uk/s3fs-public/thumbnails/image/2016/08/24/23/nigel-farage-donald-trump.jpg>



election of Trump has either been hailed as a working-class revolt by some of his supporters, or decried by liberals as the result of a white working-class backlash to eight years of Democratic Party rule. All of these interpretations are systematically flawed in their logic, and are rebuffed by extant data.

In neither case did the working class, white or otherwise, constitute the social force which afforded the opportunity for such electoral victories. It is also important to consider the question of voter turnout. In Britain, 72.2 percent of the eligible voters cast a ballot during the referendum. This means that some 20 million people did not vote, with the bulk of them likely coming from working-class backgrounds, as is the case in the overwhelming majority of countries which have a marked lack of voter participation. Additionally, approximately 2 million EU immigrants, again mainly from the working class, were barred from voting (though Irish and Commonwealth residents in the United Kingdom were allowed to cast ballots). During the US Presidential Election, only 54 percent of the electorate voted, or said another way, over 100 million eligible voters did not vote, and again, these people are more often than not in the ranks of the working class. The anti-democratic nature of bourgeois republicanism aside, it is at the very least suggestive that the recent electoral processes in Britain and the United States do not represent the will and desire of the working classes of those countries.

To be clear, the most politically backward workers on both sides of the Atlantic voted for Brexit or Trump. This was evident in the industrial cities of Newcastle and Sunderland in the North of England, as workers who traditionally voted Tory were won over by UKIP, and in some of the so-called “rust belt” states in the United States which have had historically strong ties to the Democratic Party. In spite of this, it wasn’t the working class which heralded in the eventuality of a Brexit or Donald Trump Presidency, but rather the disaffected petty-bourgeoisie. Exit polls in Britain suggest that while some workers in the areas mentioned

above did vote leave, many in other urban areas voted to remain. Approximately 64 percent of Labour voters chose to remain (though this did little to stave off Corbyn’s more right-wing challengers for leadership of the party in the aftermath of the vote). According to



Source: <http://www.internationalist.org/brexit supporters celebrated 160624.jpg>

some analyses (by the British elite, no less), the final tally of working-class voters who opted to leave the EU is 24 percent. Whereas middle-class Leave voters constituted nearly 60 percent of the 17.4 million who voted leave.

Likewise, in the United States if one looks at data relative to income, it is clear that it was the white petty-bourgeoisie where Trump found his base of support, not in the white working class. Exit polls suggest that of the most economically oppressed – those mak-

ing less than \$30k USD per year – the trend was towards voting for Clinton (53 percent versus Trump’s 40 percent). And the same with the next wage bracket of \$30k-49,999 USD per annum (52 percent to 41 percent). It is with the middling layers that Trump did

best, with those making \$50k-99,999 USD (46 percent for Clinton against 49 percent for Trump) and those making between \$100k and \$199,999 USD (47 percent to 48 percent). The mainstream candidates were largely even amongst those making over \$250,000 USD (46 percent each) whereas Clinton had a three-percentage point victory for those making \$200k-249,999 USD. Boiled down even further, those making under \$50k USD tended towards Clinton, those whose income was between \$50k and \$100k USD tended towards Trump, and it was a fairly even contest for those raking in over \$100k USD per year. Thus, the social group that did herald the victories of Trump and Brexit was the middle class. Scared of being absorbed into the working class below and unable to see a way upward, the election of Trump and the Brexit referendum were not in fact proletarian revolts, but a mutiny of the estranged and disenchanted petty-bourgeoisie.

Those members of the working class who did vote for Brexit and Trump did so out of a combination of nationalist appeal, fear mongering, and the fact that more traditional avenues of liberalism have seen them consistently under the jackboot of capitalist cupidity. The Barack Obama administration did nothing to ameliorate the deteriorating conditions for workers and oppressed peoples in the United States. His presidential terms were effectively a continuity of the George W. Bush era with slightly different methodologies for achieving the same goal, that of propping up business interests at the expense of labor and the socially oppressed and ostracized. Even his hallmark legislation, the Affordable Care Act, played into the hands of insurance companies and fomented deleterious effects upon those without the means to purchase health insurance. Similarly, in Britain, both Labour and Tory governments have offered little in the way of remedying the decaying and decrepit material realities of large sections of the population. Rather, their interests lie with maintaining the business interests preferential to British capital.





Source: <https://redyouthuk.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/bristol-eu-grim-reaper-street-art.jpg?w=1200>

### The Left and the Future of Liberalism

As mentioned before, a spate of leftist organizations in Britain supported Brexit on the grounds that the European Union is a nefarious imperialist project and should be abandoned. This is certainly true. The problem with their support for Brexit is that the entire referendum campaign, on both the Leave and Remain sides, was predicated on racism and xenophobia, not the inherent problems with an inter-imperialist bloc. Many were actually won over by this drivel of “Brit-

ish jobs for British workers,” very much akin to the right-wing populism of Donald Trump, as well as the left-leaning populism of former Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders. In one formulation or another, the more visible left-wing organizations in Britain which advocated to Leave fell into the political blind alley of a decidedly liberal program of bourgeois electoralism. Of course, those left groups which advanced a political line to remain are even more compromised and would have done well to bare in mind Karl Kautsky’s theory of “Ultra Imperialism,” which has

consistently and roundly been proven to be a pipe dream.

The Socialist Workers Party (UK) stated that a vote to leave was a vote against NATO, against the IMF, against the EU more generally, and against the ruling elite. The last part of this formulation is deeply flawed. Now that the elite faction agitating for the leave vote has won, Prime Minister Theresa May and Foreign Minister Boris Johnson are set to begin Brexit by March 2017 (and while they still face opposition from Labour and the Liberal-Democrats, Brexit will likely go ahead as planned). A vote to leave was not a vote against the domestic ruling class, it was a vote against an ill-defined European elite. The national chauvinist character of the referendum was not only a non-issue for many left organizations in Britain, but they advanced their politics on the coattails of such venomous and divisive rhetoric. The Socialist Party of England and Wales went so far as to advocate leaving the EU on the basis that the few social benefits British labor has gotten capital to concede (the NHS for example, which incidentally is under attack by rampant privatization) would be diverted away from (white) British workers. SPEW went even further along this grotesque line, arguing that if Eastern Europeans were to be barred from entering Britain, then the capitalist class in those countries would have a much stronger working class to deal with. Is this not national chauvinism at the expense of internationalist solidarity?

Similarly, the British section of the International Communist League railed against the capitalists in Brussels, as they very well should and must, but like the majority of other left organizations, the domestic capitalist class remained unchallenged and foreign workers not brought into the fold. And how could they, what with political considerations being routed through the dominant discourse of leaving the EU based on xenophobia? These politics are the result of collusion with and subservience to liberal bourgeois politics, that of the vote as a means of politics. As in

Britain, the US elections and US left-wing politics more generally are imbued with idea that the liberal project of voting will result in social transformation. This is a myth, save unless one is willing to wait decades if not centuries for social transformations. It is only a revolutionary politics – which would under certain circumstances advocate for voting, but not as the sole or most important method of political engagement – that can bring alternative social relations into fruition.

In the United States, the liberal paradigm is so strong that some have argued, as the old maxim goes, when one does not vote they have no right to complain or criticize. This sentiment truly is the zenith of liberal idiocy. And during the recent election, it was put forth by some that to not vote for Hillary Clinton constituted some sort of privileged status in society. The identity politics behind this rehashing of an old adage is not only nauseating, it is a liberal fiction, one which can only be swallowed wholeheartedly if one truly believes that this is indeed the end of history, that only voting matters as a form of politics. Liberalism serves to not only obfuscate how an individual as repugnant as Donald Trump could conceivably become head-of-state but effectively inhibits any form of acute struggle against such forces. This is seen in the varied support for the so-called non-establishment candidates (Trump being one of them, of course).

Left-wing support of Jill Stein, and to a much greater extent, Bernie Sanders, helped in part to pave the way to Trump’s victory. Stein, seemingly the perennial presidential candidate for the Green Party, campaigned on the slogan of a “Green New Deal.” The central platform alone leads one to the conclusion that the Green Party isn’t anything but an offshoot of the Democrats. It exists not as a space for independent politics, but is rather very much subsumed by the liberalism of American politics. It operates as a pressure group on the Democrats (they are effectively the left-wing of the Democratic Party, so very centrist in nature) and offers a home to disillusioned and capitulatory radicals. So



instead of combating the neoliberal variant of capitalism, Greens seek to reform capitalism in such a way that the natural environment and human relations to it are the central concern. The stewardship of nature, if the negative effects of climate change are to be overcome and reversed, must fall to the working class. Carbon offsetting (speculation of fictitious capital related to how much carbon a given country emits) and the propping of “green” business models may provide a mediocre solution to the environmental problem, but does nil in regard to the socio-economic dislocation and division caused by capitalism. In essence, the Green Party would retool capitalism to be less aggressive, they would not do away with it, nor do they want to.

Various left groups in the United States backed Stein, particularly after Bernie Sanders failed to secure the Democratic nomination – at a convention where chants of “USA, USA, USA!” and the glorification of the imperialist military were commonplace. Most notable of the groups who supported Stein after were Socialist Alternative and the International Socialist Organization, both of which had previously backed Sanders to varying degrees, with the former very much integrated into his campaign and the latter bemoaning the fact

that he opted to run as a Democrat (which he very much is, despite his personal positioning as an independent and a “socialist”). From the outset, both these candidates presented incontrovertible evidence that they were merely bourgeois candidates of different flavor. Yes they challenged the status quo in Washington, but not in any social or material sense. Rather, their mildly divergent politics were presented as ostensible evidence of a radical break from the current socio-economic system. This was simply a veneer which these left organizations willfully failed to consider. And as predicted, once Sanders lost, for all the biting attacks he waged on Clinton, he ultimately funneled his voters right into the Democratic Party, a party of big business and oppression at “home” as well as abroad. SA and the ISO, as two of the most prominent left-wing political organizations in the United States, utterly failed to stay out of the political death trap that is electoralism. The capitulation to liberalism by these organizations therefore forecloses any possibility of charting an independent political course in opposition to capitalism and in the interest of the vast majority of workers, small farmers, oppressed nationalities and genders, and so on. In the final analysis, they halfheart-

edly attempted to stay outside the politics of lesser evilism, but ended up on the field of play nonetheless.

At the very least, one can credit SA and the ISO for not supporting the war hawk, Hillary Clinton. Though these organizations didn’t, many self-professed radicals did, a significant number of who were funneled towards her via the faux socialism of Bernie Sanders. The backing of Hillary Clinton by many was the most distilled formulation of lesser evilism in recent American history. The logic that even though Clinton is a poor choice of candidate, she is markedly better than Trump is not only untrue, its deadly to believe as such. Clinton, whose response to Trump’s slogan of “Make America Great Again,” was that “America already is great.” This should’ve been enough to suggest to anyone supporting Clinton, willfully or as the lesser evil, that her politics and her potential role as president would have resulted in the continuity of oppression and social subjugation as it has under Obama, indeed as it has since the founding of the United States. Did Obama preside over a post-racial America? Most certainly not. So it baffles the mind when people advance the line that Clinton would represent some sort of advancement for women. Just like it was a historic event that a black man was



elected president in a deeply racist country, so too would it have been a monumental historic event had Clinton won the election. Unfortunately, Obama is not the right type of black person, and Clinton the wrong woman. The liberal politics of identity played deeply into the support of Clinton, she was widely being voted for because she was

a woman and not due to her actual politics. The former is largely inconsequential at this level of politics – at least for those of us outside of it – and the latter is what actually matters. Her ideas and political positions, at least on the left, were not being as nearly scrutinized as Trump’s, and when one votes (or engages in any polit-

ical activity for that matter) based along the fault line of identity, the fallacy of doing so becomes relatively apparent in short order. This was the case with Obama, particularly in regards to race, and it would have been the case with Clinton had she won, specifically in regards to gender rights.

This uncritical and unthinking

*Green party nominee Jill Stein speaks during a campaign rally at the Hostos Center for the Arts & Culture on Oct. 12, 2016 in New York City*  
Source: <http://www.ibtimes.com/jill-stein-gary-johnson-news-ahead-hillary-clinton-donald-trump-final-debate-third-2434151>





Source: <http://www.palo-mayombe.cvom/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/multiracial.jpg>

support for Clinton is the direct outgrowth of the recent resurgence in identity politics. That is, that one's socio-cultural identity inherently places them on some plane along the political spectrum. This is evident in the growth of political correctness, not only amongst traditional liberals, but those who identify as radicals as well. No wonder Trump's victory was so shocking to so many. A wide range of politically active people operate in an echo chamber where their own facile views are reinforced by likeminded people. The days of polemics has given way to "safe spaces" where to challenge a prevailing view or to vociferously dissent against normative left politics is not only uncouth but actively shunned. This is yet another example of liberalism's hold over many supposed leftists. It only serves to obscure reality in order to make individuals feel better that they are on some sort of righteous political path. This divorcing of reality from politics was all too evident in the aftermath of Trump's election. The massive protests – and it's a good thing there were massive protests – largely amounted to anti-Trump Pro-Clinton orgies of acrimony. One cannot forget that equally stringent protests would have been waged had Clinton won, as they should have if she did. With utterly pacifistic and reformist slogans such as "Love Trumps Hate" and "Not My President" – the latter of which

was deployed by organized racists against Obama – these post-election protests amounted to nothing more than alienated liberals voicing their discontent. Trump and Clinton deserve the same level of rhetorical attack, as does the entire socio-economic apparatus in the United States, but because of the liberal paradigm which holds sway over US politics, this is not possible at this juncture in history.

So which way forward? The simple answer is a divestment from the politics of liberalism and all that it entails – a reliance on the ballot as a means of politics, class collaboration and capitulatory political culture, a focus on identity as a primary political signifier rather than that of class position, to name but a few. The more complicated answer to this query entails a rethinking and reevaluation of what sort of world we want to inhabit. If it is one where there are small spaces carved out for oppressed and marginalized peoples, then nothing needs to change. Under liberalism such spaces are allowed to exist, even if they are whittled away slowly or brought into the increasingly manifold halls of elite power. The other option is not reformist in nature but revolutionary. Liberalism tolerates such small spaces of tepid opposition, but to unreservedly do away with the world which liberal ideologies and politics have created, these sparse socio-cultural spaces offer little by the way of wielding social

power. A complete rupture from liberal bourgeois politics is what is needed. This necessitates dispelling the liberal myths swallowed gleefully by a wide array of leftists and organizing not to make piecemeal reforms, but to turn the social pyramid on its head, making the most oppressed and marginalized the curators of a new social order. In sum, the way out of the liberal claptrap which led to the election of Trump in the United States and the involvement in a referendum predicated on racism and xenophobia in the United Kingdom, is either through the *longue durée* or via revolutionary action geared towards immediate social emancipation as well as the destruction of capitalist civilization and the bringing about of a drastically different social order.

Lastly, it should also be noted that the rise of Trump and the Brexit vote, while predicated on racism and xenophobia, are largely economic in their character. Notwithstanding the so-called "Alt-Right" movement, and out-and-out fascist and white nationalist support for Trump (and to a lesser extent Brexit), the majority of people who voted for them did so out of lack of viable alternatives to an already wretched economic situation. The status-quo of bourgeois politics has certainly shifted, but Brexit and Trumps ascendancy do not signify the death knell of bourgeois democracy, but simply a shifting liberalism.



### “Brexit Plus, Plus, Plus”: What Brexit and Trump’s Victories Signify

When Nigel Farage made a stop at a Trump rally preceding the election, the latter predicted his election to be “Brexit plus, plus, plus.” Indeed, it seems that this has come to pass. The break up of the EU seems possible – which, devoid of the concomitant politics, is a positive – and the next global inter-imperialist war is plausible within the next century. On the other side of the Atlantic, the United States has not necessarily become more xenophobic or repressive, but these malicious forces are now more clearly articulated and presented with little or no political subterfuge. Revolutionarily minded people must continue to organize and mobilize, not in the fashion of liberalism, but militantly, to combat the new alignment of political forces, all whilst baring in mind that it is not just the traditional liberal right-wing which needs to be defeated, but the entire capitalist social and economic system, which in the West more generally, and Britain and the United States specifically, is permeated with liberal politics and ideology. These victories, which amount to defeats for anyone opposed to capitalism (as would a Clinton presidency or a Britain nominally committed to the European Union), are yet the next obstacle facing the oppressed and toiling majority.

Given the decrepit state of both the British and American left, infected and deformed by years of pandering to the whims of liberal

quo (i.e. the social order) will persist for some time. Politically, it is clearly quite different. Racist and xenophobic attacks have been on

room to operate and more of a voice. But it is not as if Trump or the architects of Brexit will allow fascists to come to power. The

ny, Spain, and Portugal). Endorsements to Trump by the Ku Klux Klan and Neo-Nazi groups as well as a host of others from the white

the National Front, and English Defence League (and to a lesser extent UKIP) have been emboldened, but they are a long way off from the halls of power. This is true even for the American case, where Trump has appointed an open racist and white supremacist in Stephen Bannon as his counselor. If anything, the sheer audacity of his appointment (as opposed to Richard Nixon and Barry Goldwater’s “Southern Strategy”) just further proves that white supremacy is alive and well in the United States, it hasn’t been resuscitated but has always been an integral component. Though, it is also important to note the near immediate rapprochement between the Trump campaign and his detractors in the Democratic and Republican Parties.

Rather than a new world order or tocsin preceding fascism, Brexit and Trump represent a shifting liberalism, one which is more deadly for more people. In neither case did the rhetoric foment any sort of reactionary movement but these forces have always existed on the fringes of liberal bourgeois democracy. It’s just that now they have been reinvigorated. The task of the left is to defeat not just these enemies but the political organizations which allow them to exist. Eschewing and disavowing liberalism in politics and ideology is fundamental to achieving this.

**Advocate**



politics, where does that leave the imperialist world in the aftermath of Brexit and Trump’s soon-to-be presidency? Materially, the status

the rise in both countries since the votes have come in, and the reactionary right, including actual fascists, now feel they have more

bourgeoisie only turns to fascism when the left is powerful enough or on the cusp of seizing power (as evinced by the histories of Germa-

nationalist milieu changes very little as to who Trump represents. Likewise, in Britain, fascism in the form of the British National Party,

A child looks up as demonstrators carry placards denouncing xenophobia and racism during a protest march - Source: [http://66.media.tumblr.com/a7ab299e13d565daa9b4e3599d416975/tumblr\\_o6btqsHXDu1rcf4reo1\\_540.jpg](http://66.media.tumblr.com/a7ab299e13d565daa9b4e3599d416975/tumblr_o6btqsHXDu1rcf4reo1_540.jpg)



# Demonetization in India: The Political Economy of Waiting Time

Bhargav Rani

Everybody in this country remembers what they were doing on the evening of November 8. It is a day that not only etched itself into the annals of “world history” as a critical disjuncture in the political life of its hegemon but also crystallized our experiences of it as ineffaceable memories of a precarious time. Millions in the US and millions more around the world acutely registered the wave of emotions that overcame them as they witnessed an electoral rebellion unfold on their television sets. But for the billion odd citizens of India, November 8 brought with it its own parallel brand of historical consciousness, so much so that

November 15, 2016. (Altaf Qadri, Ap/Ansa) New Delhi inhabitants in line to exchange currency - Source: <http://www.internazionale.it/notizie/2016/11/17/india-ritiro-rupie>



one couldn't reasonably be expected to care about a Trump presidency continents away, whatever its implications be. The whole population of a nation woke up to find the very monetary basis of their everyday existence usurped – Prime Minister Narendra Modi of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) announced that from midnight, currency notes of Rs.500 and Rs.1000 (approximately \$7 and \$14 USD) would no longer be accepted as legal tender. That is, 86 percent of the Indian currency was to be demonetized, turned into useless tokens of a misplaced economic vision, to allegedly crack down on black money. As the economist Amartya Sen succinctly puts it, “At one stroke the move declares all Indians — indeed all holders of Indian currency — as possibly crooks, unless they can establish they are not.”

The rhetoric informing this brash economic (political) decision was clearly laid out by the Prime Minister in his address to the nation that fated evening. The move is a concerted attack on “black money” and “terrorism” in India; it is a “war against corruption.” This rhetoric, however, while also feeding squarely into the Prime Minister's fetish for a cashless economy, fails to contend with the profound economic and material implications of the move. Many economists and scholars have questioned the economic logic of a policy that presumes black money

to be a stock of currency stuffed away in cushions and mattresses when only six percent of what constitutes black money in India exists in cash. Some have criticized the inadequacy of this measure in dealing with the economic processes generating black income or with the piles of black money in off-shore accounts, while others have questioned the legality of the policy's implementation. While this article is not a study in the economics of the policy, it bears mentioning for context that India's economy is predominantly cash driven, where around 45 percent of its GDP is produced in the informal sector providing employment to 80 percent of its workforce. Only 53 percent of the population even has a bank account, let alone credit cards. In effect, the Modi government is sawing at the neck to cure a headache.

This vast abyss separating the utopian presumptions of the policy and the economic realities of the people has been palpable in the immense havoc that it has wreaked across the country. Millions of people have flooded the banks and ATMs to exchange their old notes or to withdraw cash, resulting in aggravated crowds and serpentine queues running over a mile long in many places. Moreover, the new Rs.2000 note that the government has introduced into circulation, supposedly embedded with security features that deter counterfeiting more

effectively, remain incompatible with the existing ATM technology, rendering over half the 202,000 ATMs in the country incapable of dispensing money. The recalibration of the ATMs is presumed to take over three weeks. Meanwhile, the agricultural sector has taken a serious hit, and over eight million workers and daily-wage laborers who earn their incomes in cash have not been paid in a month. Many small business owners have been compelled to shut shop, the domestic transport industry for goods and manufactures which runs entirely on cash has come to standstill thus affecting trade, millions are left without money for their daily expenses, and the entire cash-driven economy totters on the brink of collapse. Eighty two people have been reported dead either directly or indirectly due to the government's brash economic move, some suffering from heart attacks while some committing suicide when faced with the prospect of losing their entire life's savings. Whatever colors history may paint this fiasco in, perhaps the most enduring image of the demonetization move will be the endless queues of people caught in the precarious inbetweenness of an indefinite waiting.

In response to the brimming anger and resentment among the people, the government has resorted to a rhetorical maneuver that seems straight out of a morality textbook and which has



Source: <http://qz.com/843872/indias-rupee-demonetization-could-spark-a-new-digital-economy-in-the-cash-reliant-country/>.jpg

gained surprising currency even among large sections of the working population immediately and adversely affected by the policy. There is no gain without pain. That the short-term hassles must be willingly borne to reap the long-term benefits to the economy. And the most scathing of the rhetorical response, the endemic condition of waiting that the move has pro-

duced across the nation is but a minor “inconvenience.” How could any self-respecting, patriotic citizen of this country dare complain about having to wait a few extra hours at the bank when what is at stake is the general good of the nation? So goes the argument. Journalists and activists have been quick and diligent to point out the willful ignorance of this rhetoric,

that what the government strives to pass off as the “inconvenience” of the wait obscures the loss of lives, the loss of livelihoods, and the profound material impact that the policy continues to have on the people. However, this article stems from the perceived need to critique the state's rhetoric of the “inconvenience” of the wait on its own terms as well, even while we



remain acutely aware of its elisions and silences.

The implicit assumption in the state's rhetoric that dismisses the everyday travails of the poor and the working classes as an "inconvenience" is that waiting is innocuous, that it is insignificant, worthy of neither value nor attention. This nonchalant dismissal of waiting as worthless is not surprising, for waiting, in its definition itself, pronounces its own insignificance. Waiting is always waiting for something or someone. To wait is to participate in a particular temporal relation, one that posits the meaning of the present as entirely dependent on the realization of an anticipated future. It is, thus, to deplete the present of any significance of its own and locate the possibility of its redemption in a future time outside of itself. Waiting can assume any meaningful significance only in retrospect, only if the waited-for comes to pass. Else it would be a pointless, unfulfilled wait. In that sense, waiting, in the present, always hinges on the brink of meaninglessness. And in histories composed primarily as a progression of



Source: <http://www.abplive.in/photos/in-pics-after-demonetization-of-rs-500-and-rs-1000-india-starts-living-in-a-line-447415#image6>

events, the inbetweenness of waiting for the events has no place and no value.

But this dismissal of waiting as insignificant, while not surprising, patently ignores the politics of waiting and the labor inherent in waiting. The distinctive perception of waiting in our time is informed largely by the capitalist mode of production which has historically waged an unremitting war against waiting time. This is testified by the long history of technological advancements geared specifically towards facilitating faster methods of production, faster modes of circulation of goods and capital, faster returns on investments, and ultimately less time spent waiting for the realization of capital. And the "just-in-time" capitalism pioneered by the Japanese automobile industry in the twentieth century may be deemed as the apotheosis of this history. This cultivated antipathy towards waiting is internalized in our very mode of existence, distilled into our sinews as the capitalist "guilt" of wasted time, and it manifests in our own crusade against waiting time in everyday life. For in the relentless division and organization of our everyday lives in the service of efficiency, "time management" as we call it, waiting time is precisely that excess time, the time that remains, that which fails to be put to productive use. We have come to view time spent waiting as time wasted and we have come to regard our experience of it as irredeemably dreary. We strive feverishly to avoid any prolonged subjection to waiting, and if inescapable, we endeavor as best we can to wait on our own terms. In a society intimately attuned to the demands of capital, waiting is the curse of the wretched.

While, on the one hand, the distinctively oppressive quality of waiting, the mind-numbing boredom that it threatens us with, seems to have assumed a chronic stature in our time, on the other, the ability to escape waiting remains the sole prerogative of a dominant few, with the rest biting down the grind of the mechanized, dehumanized everyday in the hope of transcending into that few someday. In a capitalist, neoliberal world, if waiting time is a waste of time,



An elderly Indian muslim rests in between as he stands in the queue to exchange his money.

Source: <http://www.abplive.in/photos/in-pics-after-demonetization-of-rs-500-and-rs-1000-india-starts-living-in-a-line-447415#image9>

the ability to escape waiting is not just privilege but power. It is an affirmation and fortification of class distinctions. Even in its most mundane manifestations, like the morning commute to work, waiting is steeped in networks of power. Some hop into their chauffeur-driven cars and dash across the city; some snap their fingers and hail a cab; while still some others wait patiently on the platform for the train to glide in. Some find their paycheck waiting for them in their bank accounts, some wait desperately for the next paycheck.

Be it at the airport or the bus station or the pension office, how long a person must wait more often than not bears a broad correlation to her social standing, the power she wields in society.

At the same time, it must also be noted that the time of waiting is not merely an innocuous reflection of prevalent power differentials but is actively complicit in the ritualistic reinforcement of social and political demarcations and is itself a tool in the production of subjectivity in a capitalist society. That is, it is not only





Queues outside ATMs and banks are getting longer.

Source: [http://www.standard.net/image/2016/11/16/970xa16-9\\_b0\\_q100\\_p1/India-Living-in-Line-2.jpg](http://www.standard.net/image/2016/11/16/970xa16-9_b0_q100_p1/India-Living-in-Line-2.jpg)



a mere consequence of capitalism that the poor will wait longer than the rich, but the mere fact that someone is made to wait longer is itself a violent assertion, a putting in place so to speak, that the person is poor and powerless in the system. In a society that disdains the time of waiting as wasted time and glorifies the ability to escape waiting as a marker of power, the ritual subjection of a vast majority of the masses to the ordeal of the wait is an everyday affirmation of their powerlessness. When this fact is appraised against the context of what the sociologist Henri Lefebvre called the concerted violation of the proletariat's "right to the city," where an increasing number of workers are pushed farther

away into the suburbs due to the appropriation of the city by capital and its gated communities, the experience of the morning commute and the institutionalized ways of waiting that it perpetuates evince as the oppressive temporalities of everyday life.

And yet this everyday ordeal of the wait is an inescapable imposition, a necessary labor, that one cannot do away with. Without the labor of the morning commute and the subjection of the self to the oppressive experience of the wait, there can be no job, no productive labor, no wages. In a society where the worker has no ownership of the means of production, where the participation in the production process, however exploitative, is

the only means of livelihood, waiting is a labor that must necessarily be undertaken and endured. For the vast majority of the poor and the working classes, waiting for the bus, waiting for the train, waiting for the paycheck, for the pension, are all everyday realities of life. But it is crucial to remember here that insofar as the labor power of the workers is also the ultimate source of profit for the capitalists, the waiting time necessarily endured for procuring wages is also a waiting time endured by the worker to enrich the capitalist. It is the waiting that is the inevitable labor that goes into bringing oneself to work every day, to produce the goods or perform the services that lead to the accumulation of capital. And

Source: <http://www.abplive.in/photos/in-pics-after-demonetization-of-rs-500-and-rs-1000-india-starts-living-in-a-line-447415#image6>



yet, it is the time that is not compensated for by the capitalist. The labor of waiting is something the worker must undertake at her own expense. It is a cost that she must incur from her own disposable time. If we are to go by Marx’s assertion that wealth rests on the creation of disposable time, then waiting time is a taxation on the little to nothing disposable time of the already impoverished worker.

Thus, for Modi and his entourage to characterize the ordeal of millions of people queuing up for hours every day outside banks and ATMs in the hope that they may withdraw their own money as an “inconvenience” is, to put it mildly, a perverse distortion of reality. It not only belies the establishment’s contemptuous disregard for the labor that goes into the everyday lives of the country’s working classes but also ritualistically reinforces their perceived impotence by subjecting them to the most insidious of all forms of waiting

– a waiting whose realization is incessantly deferred. Every day, innumerable people flock to the banks for hours in desperation, unable to go to work or open shop, only to be sent back at the end of the day deprived of their own money because of a banking establishment that is hopelessly unprepared for the responsibility thrust on them. What demonetization has brought about is a world that threatens to devolve into a Beckettian nightmare, as people find themselves inextricably suspended in a meaningless wait. But most importantly, at a material level, demonetization must be viewed for what it really is. Insofar as every hour that a worker spends waiting in queue is a cost that she must incur from her own hardly disposable time and is paid for by the now inflated labor needed to sustain herself in everyday life, what demonetization essentially amounts to is an indiscriminate taxation of the poor. Modi’s quixotic crusade against a specter of

black money and his pipe dream of a cashless economy are being paid for by the precious valuable time, money, of the working poor.

Perhaps the most insulting aspect of the government’s cursory dismissal of the people’s costly labor of waiting as an “inconvenience” is its patronizing, aphoristic call for patience. There is no virtue in patience if it means a jaded apathy towards the state’s uncompromising assault on its people. Nor there is any virtue in it if what it requires is tacit complicity in refusing the poor access to their own property, in refusing them a means to live. In the parlance of our time, patience is just a watchword for political docility. But the Modi government seems to have bitten off more than it can chew this time. In its cavalier dismissal of the endemic waiting of the masses as an “inconvenience,” it also fails to discern the incubation of its own undoing in

these very mundane experiences of everyday waiting. For the apparent nothingness of waiting, its meaningless inbetweenness, when allowed to be made conscious of itself, is also the kernel of revolutionary possibility, the rumblings of which we hear in the simmering anger and resentment of the masses in India today. A waiting that recognizes itself, that becomes aware of its own precarity of meaning, holds out a possibility, however minute, of distilling into a revolutionary consciousness that no platitudes on patience can suppress. If the whole demonetization fiasco is not quelled soon, the people’s patience for their Beckettian misery is bound to evaporate, and the Modi government, by forcing vast congregations of disgruntled masses out on the streets, has effectively organized its own opposition.



Source: <https://static01.nyt.com/images/2016/11/19/world/INDIA-CALLOUT/INDIA-CALLOUT-videoSixteenByNineJumbo1600.jpg>



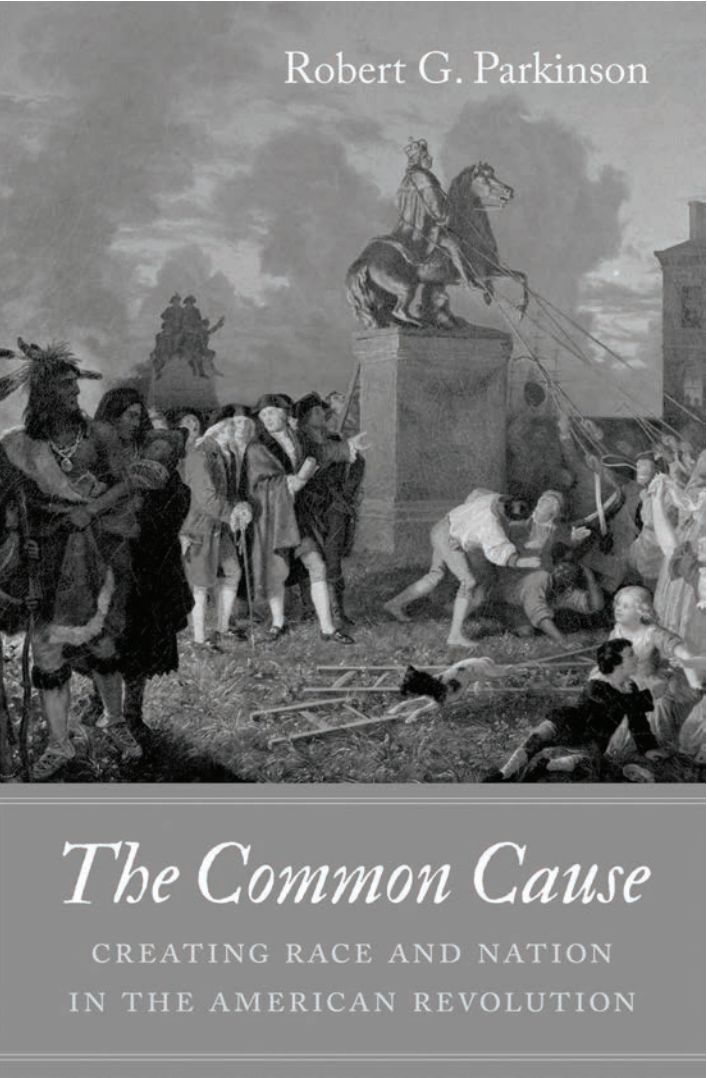
# The Dark Side of the American Revolution: A Review of Robert Parkinson's

## *The Common Cause: Creating Race and Nation in the American Revolution*

Evan Turiano

Civics curricula in the United States teach us a particular narrative about the American Revolution in terms of its origins and motivations. This prevailing story is that the ideas of liberty, property, and equality unified thirteen diverse colonies under what was known as the “common cause.” This process was supposedly an organic one, and was founded in the people’s belief in democratic values.

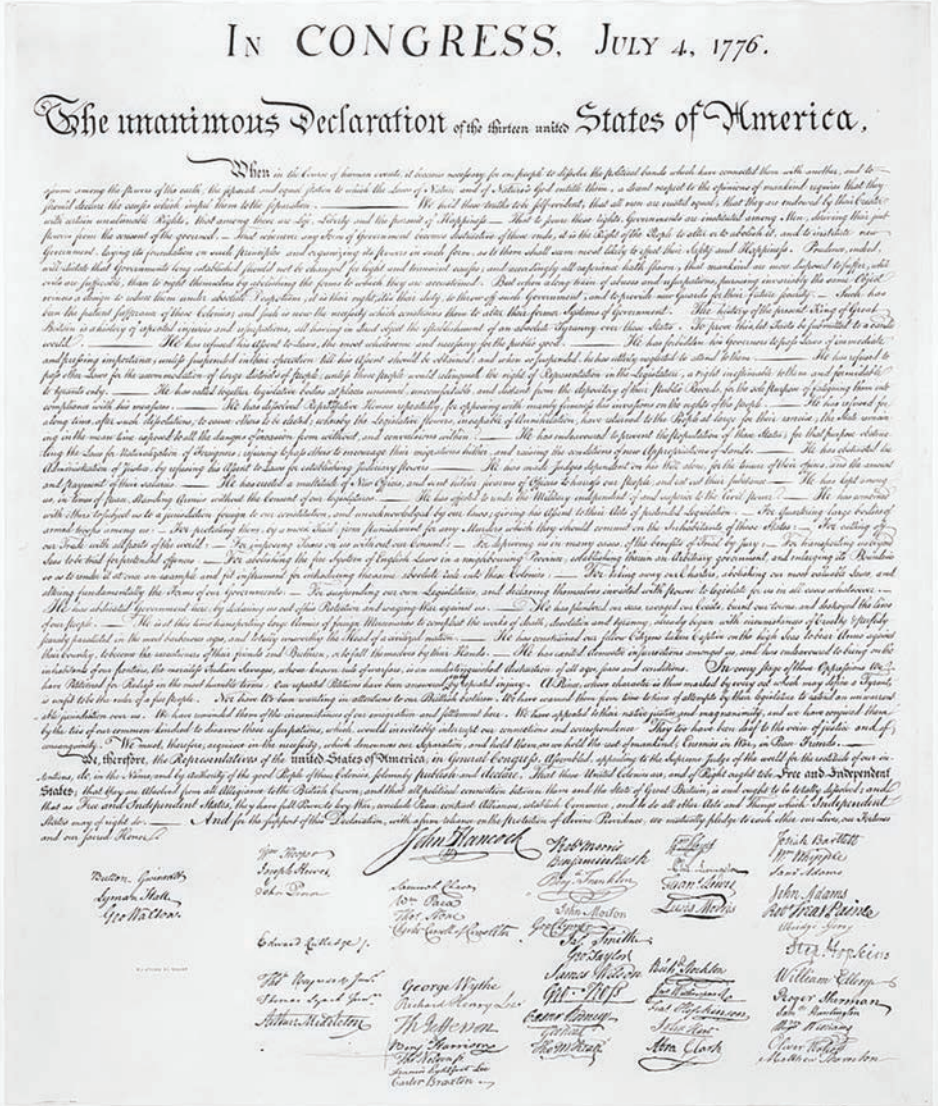
Robert Parkinson, an Assistant Professor of History at Binghamton University, provides a radical departure from this narrative in *The Common Cause: Creating Race and Class in the American Revolution*, published this past May by the University of North Carolina Press. Parkinson shows that — for the patriots at the fore of the Revolution — turning colonists against their cultural and ancestral cousins was no easy task, and certainly was no accident. The essence of his argument is that the patriot coalition consciously and proactively used newspapers to



propagate and disseminate revolutionary ideas. Furthermore, he argues that the ideals of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness were only partially responsible for the fervor of the revolution, with racial fears resting at the heart of the discourse.

Parkinson makes exhaustive use of evidence from well over fifty different newspapers from across the colonies to present his thesis that the patriots, in their pro-revolutionary newspaper propaganda campaigns, participated in race-making that would come to define citizenship and liberty in the United States for decades to follow. Patriots capitalized on latent fears of slave insurrections and of Native American hostility, painting both groups as dangerous agents of the crown. In November of 1775, the Earl of Dunmore, who was the last of Virginia’s royal governor, issued a proclamation that promised to free slaves whose enslavers were rebelling against the crown and who were willing to fight for the British.

Dunmore’s Proclamation proved to be a spark for this racially-charged Patriot propaganda. Stories of imperially sanctioned violence by these groups spread like wildfire through colonial presses. Parkinson argues that these fears, perhaps even more so than the positive good offered by republi-



can democracy, united the colonies around the “common cause.” More importantly, he points out the collateral effect of this propagation — as the subjects of these depictions, Blacks and Native Americans were excluded from the “common cause” and from the

liberty that it promised. Parkinson’s work is, in many ways, a masterful achievement. With *The Common Cause*, he’s crafted a text that is both accessible and comprehensive. It is truly rare for a book that fundamentally reframes the historiography on

Source:[https://dwkcommentaries.files.wordpress.com/2016/07/united\\_states\\_declaration\\_of\\_independence.jpg](https://dwkcommentaries.files.wordpress.com/2016/07/united_states_declaration_of_independence.jpg)

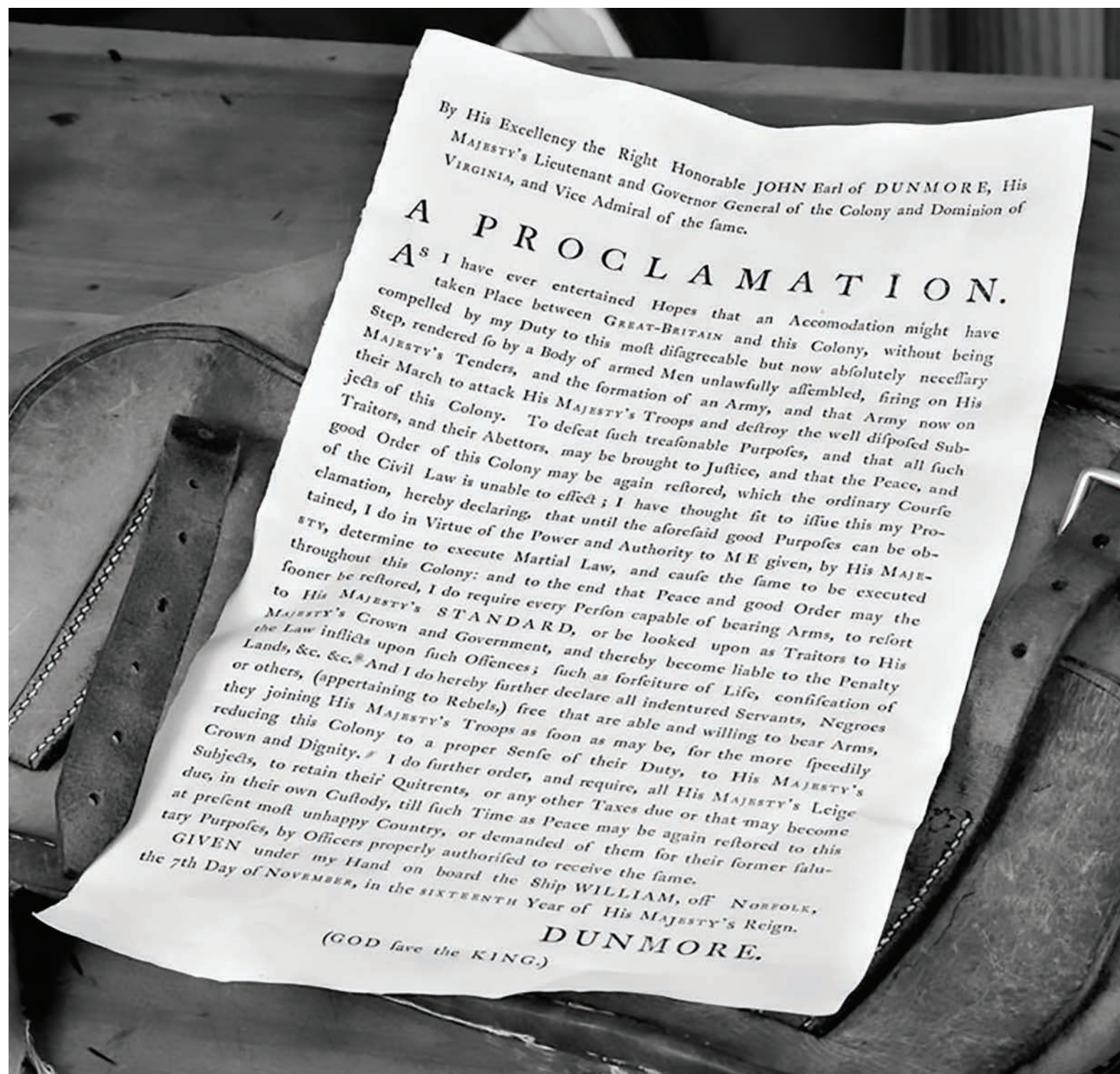


the Revolution to be accessible to such a broad readership. This text is an important contribution to many different historiographical strains: the places of race and class in the Revolutionary struggle, the long history of media propagation towards political ends, and the disparities between memory and reality in our nation's founding.

Likewise, the shortcomings of this text are few and far between. Parkinson misses an opportunity in not taking a firm stance on the role that the Revolution ultimately played in the long history of slavery and abolition. There is a debate within the historiography on the post-Revolutionary trajectory of slavery in the North, and Parkinson perhaps over-emphasizes the gradualism of northern abolition in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. While he acknowledges recent work on abolition and the Revolution, much of which has come out of the Graduate Center History Department in the last few years, perhaps he is lacking a complete exposure to and understanding of that scholarship.

This misstep on the part of Parkinson is pervasive in scholarship on the Revolution. His work is more nuanced than many others, but in some ways falls into the trap of "racial consensus"—the assumption that Whites in early America were essentially in agreement about the inferiority of African Americans. This leaves several questions unanswered: How did the abolition of slavery come about in Northern states so quickly after the war? How did we find ourselves at the Emancipation Proclamation less than a century after the Revolution? It cannot be denied that the Revolution established the status of the "free African American," and this reality warrants further interrogation.

Another miscalculation of this text that stems from the same framework is the conflation of the myriad issues and debates surrounding African Americans in the early republic. Parkinson's evi-



*Dunmore's Proclamation*, Source: <http://www.history.org/almanack/people/african/aadunpro.cfm#almanack/people/african/images/proclamation.jpg>

dence does a good job showing how the "common cause" by and large excluded Blacks from citizenship. It further shows that the Revolution further stoked fears of slave rebellion among Whites. Neither of these things necessarily tell us a great deal about what the Revolution did for sentiments about abolition and emancipation, and yet Parkinson conflates them all into a singular issue. This oversimplification of debates around race in early America is just one of many reasons why much of the scholarship has missed Northern antislavery sentiment after the Revolution.

When one thinks of media-wielding elites affecting political change by exacerbating fears of racial "others," their minds are far more likely to be drawn toward 2016 than 1775. By turning a foundational American narrative on its head, Parkinson provides stunning evidence of the long history of propaganda and fear in the political dialogues of the United States. His work can perhaps help to contextualize our modern abundance of fear-based politics in the media, and their effectiveness within populist movements.

Historians once approached an understanding similar to Parkinson's; there are multiple texts from the 1930s and 1940s regarding the American Revolution that feature the word "propaganda" in their titles. However, encounters with fascism and the rise of the Frankfurt School momentarily shifted how we understood media propagation, and this historiographical strain was lost. While attempting to not be overly cynical, I highly doubt that many elements of Parkinson's alternative narrative of the Founding Fathers and the Revolution—one of media power and racial fears—will replace the origin story presently found in public school classrooms. However, I look forward to seeing how scholars build upon Parkinson's book, and how other narratives that flow from the Revolution will be reframed to account for his work.



# Writing Resistance in the Age of Surveillance:

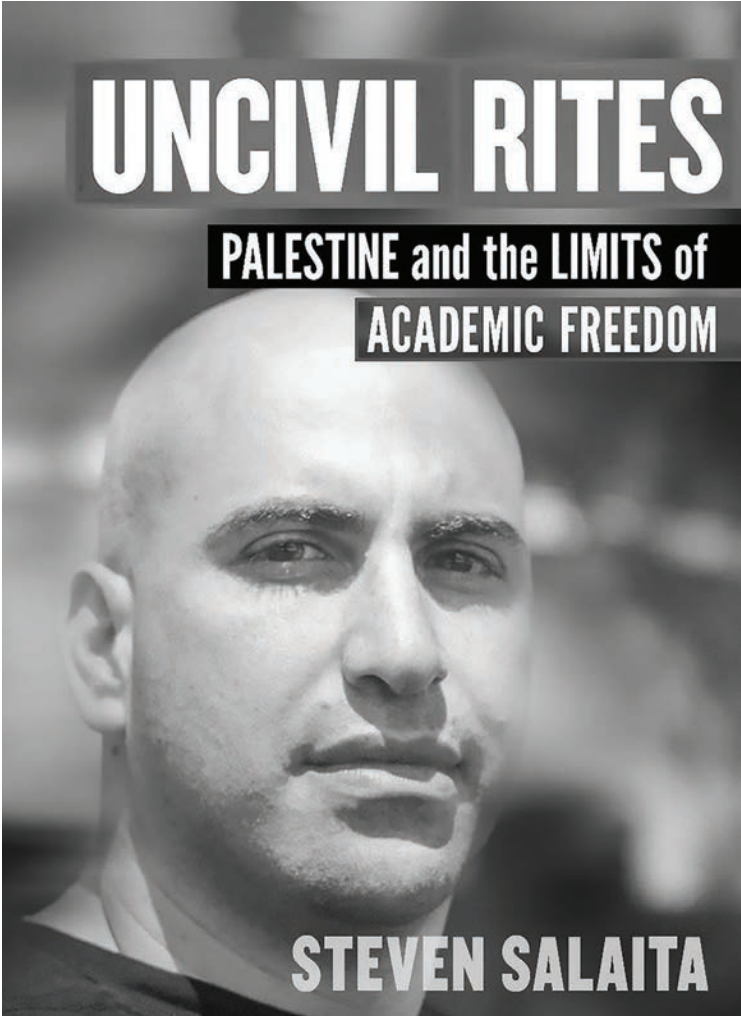
## A Comparative Review of Steven Salaita *Uncivil Rites* and Moustafa Bayoumi *This Muslim American Life*

Erik Wallenberg

Moustafa Bayoumi, *This Muslim American Life: Dispatches from the war on Terror* (New York: New York University Press, 2015)

Steven Salaita, *Uncivil Rites: Palestine and the Limits of Academic Freedom* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2015)

The recent report on allegations of anti-Semitism within the CUNY system acknowledges that Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) has had nothing to do with anti-Semitism on CUNY campuses. While this is a welcome finding, the existence of the report itself exemplifies the profound Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism pervasive in the CUNY system and embedded in our society more broadly. The now routine attacks on SJP coming from the likes of the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), politicians from New York City and throughout the state, and the CUNY administration itself have created a hostile environment for Arab and Muslim students and in particular for supporters of justice for Palestinians. These attacks have come mostly in response to the growing movement for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) against Israeli apartheid, including the resolution in support of BDS passed last year by the Doctoral Students' Council at the Graduate Center, and similar resolutions passed by other unions and student groups at New York University, UMASS Amherst,



and many more.

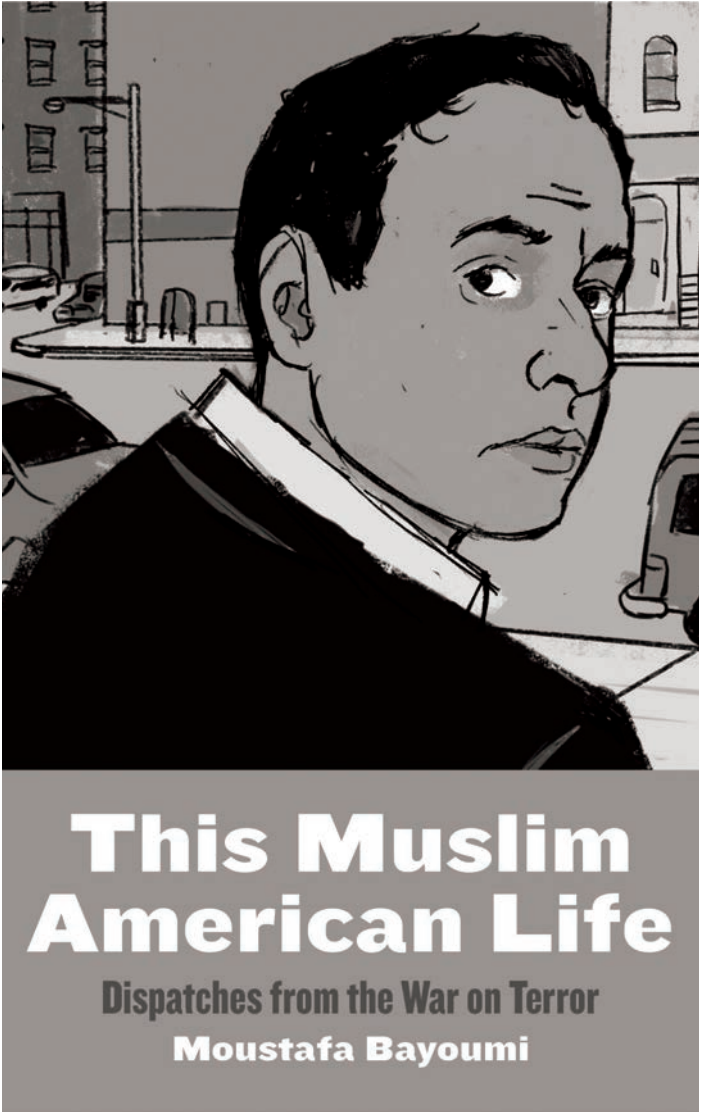
Moustafa Bayoumi and Steven Salaita have each written books that put these events into the broader context of anti-Arab racism and Islamophobia that has become so common in US society today. While Bayoumi focuses on the creation of a broader 'War on Terror' culture promoted in the media and popular entertainment, driven by a paranoid state, Salaita's focus is on the struggle for academic freedom and free speech especially around the question of advocating for justice for Palestinians.

As Salaita notes, his book is one of both personal and analytical essays. Thrust into a national discussion about 'civility' and academic freedom after being fired from a tenure track job that he had yet to start, *Uncivil Rites* is not only Salaita's defense, but a full-blown argument for the right to dissent in the face of injustice. He wants his readers to understand that "oppressive institutions can never subdue the agility of mind and spirit. Humans can be disciplined, but humanity comprises a tremendous antidisciplinary force."

Salaita draws attention to the absurdity of being fired for "incivility" for tweeting his outrage at the wholly uncivilized act of bombing an entire people, namely the 2014 Israeli siege of Gaza. He asks the obvious question of what is uncivil. In the chapter that gives the book its title, Salaita documents the process whereby he was alerted through email to the fact of his firing. And while Salaita reveals the uncivil rites he was forced to endure, he shows the far greater uncivil rites that Palestinians and others suffering under colonial occupation have borne for much longer.

Being a professor of global indigenous studies and the author of a half-dozen books on American Indians, colonialism, nationalism and more, he has a wealth of knowledge that he employs throughout the book.

Though Salaita's book is built around the question of academic freedom, the heart of *Uncivil Rites* is a broader discussion about fighting for a just society. Salaita gives us a brilliant example of how the former illuminates the later. In 1960, an assistant professor



of biology named Leo Koch was fired from his job for writing a letter to the school newspaper challenging repressive sexual mores. Salaita sheds light on the similarities to his case where the university president and board acted arbitrarily and against faculty governance, pressured by outside organizations and individuals, to take his job away after he tweeted critical remarks about the state of Israel's siege on Gaza. The comparison between his case and that of Koch (among many others he discusses) turns attention to the com-



mon violation of academic freedom such that, Salaita argues, “academic freedom and free speech both inform the mythologies of the liberal state.”

Salaita exposes the struggles in the broader society that administrators and politicians are policing when they use the shibboleth of “civility” to regularly undermine academic freedom. “Ironically,” he notes, “had Koch criticized Is-

rael in 1960, and had I condemned sexual puritanism in 2014, neither of us would have been fired.” Depending on the political moment, the state and the academy end up determining the bounds of what is acceptable to say. This is of course unacceptable to Salaita.

In the end, even though Steven Salaita won his case, received monetary restitution, and a temporary gig at American University of Bei-

rut, his permanent appointment at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign was stopped. He was blacklisted. Supporting Palestinian liberation has been deemed out of bounds. One can find similar attacks across the academy, including the campaign against Sarah Schulman at CUNY’s College of Staten Island.

Salaita both digs into histories of academic freedom and free

speech struggles while also telling a personal story of how these attacks turn lives upside down, create immense hardships, and destroy careers and lives. It is painful to hear his stories of people combing through every word he’s ever written looking for something to hold against him, dealing with the shame of being fired, and of detractors calling his friends, family, and colleagues to regularly harass them for information.

Salaita gives us an intimate picture of how he lived through this ordeal and had his life scoured and scrutinized. It’s hard to imagine not falling apart in the face of so much turmoil. Salaita’s done an invaluable service by giving us this inside story and showing how to take a stand against political attacks on academic appointments.

Moustafa Bayoumi achieves similar depths of insight and feeling in *This Muslim American Life*. About halfway through the book, we get Bayoumi’s reaction to the events of September 11, 2001. “What sustained me through it all...” he writes, “was my lecturing. I would give talks to audiences across the country on civil liberties during wartime, about torture, about Islam, about the war, and the audiences were full of people who didn’t want a murderous clash of civilizations but needed and wanted a lens through which they could understand this complicated world that they felt they had sud-

denly been thrust into.”

In a subtle and usefully disorienting move, Bayoumi tells us of his travels to the Arab world and having to explain that not all Americans are ignorant of or uncaring about the rest of the world. He takes on the role of showing a moderate America. “The Americans I have encountered, and continue to meet, throughout my travels have always been curious and generous.” It’s a wonderful inversion of the liberal proclamation that says ‘not all Arabs are bad people.’ It also shows how his activism sustains Bayoumi through the most difficult of moments.

But the thrust of *This Muslim American Life* is spent showing how the American state began policing the everyday lives of Muslims in America. Bayoumi highlights “what happens when ordinary life becomes grounds for suspicion without a hint of wrongdoing, when law enforcement premises its work on spying on the quotidian and policing the unremarkable, and when the everyday affairs of American Muslim life can so easily be transformed into nefarious intent.” The exposure of this kind of surveillance of American Muslims forced the FBI to change its training manuals, removing nearly 900 pages. It’s also the kind of spying that CUNY has supported or turned a blind eye to in the case of the Muslim Student Association and the more recent revelations of

spying on the Islamic Student Organization and SJP at Brooklyn College.

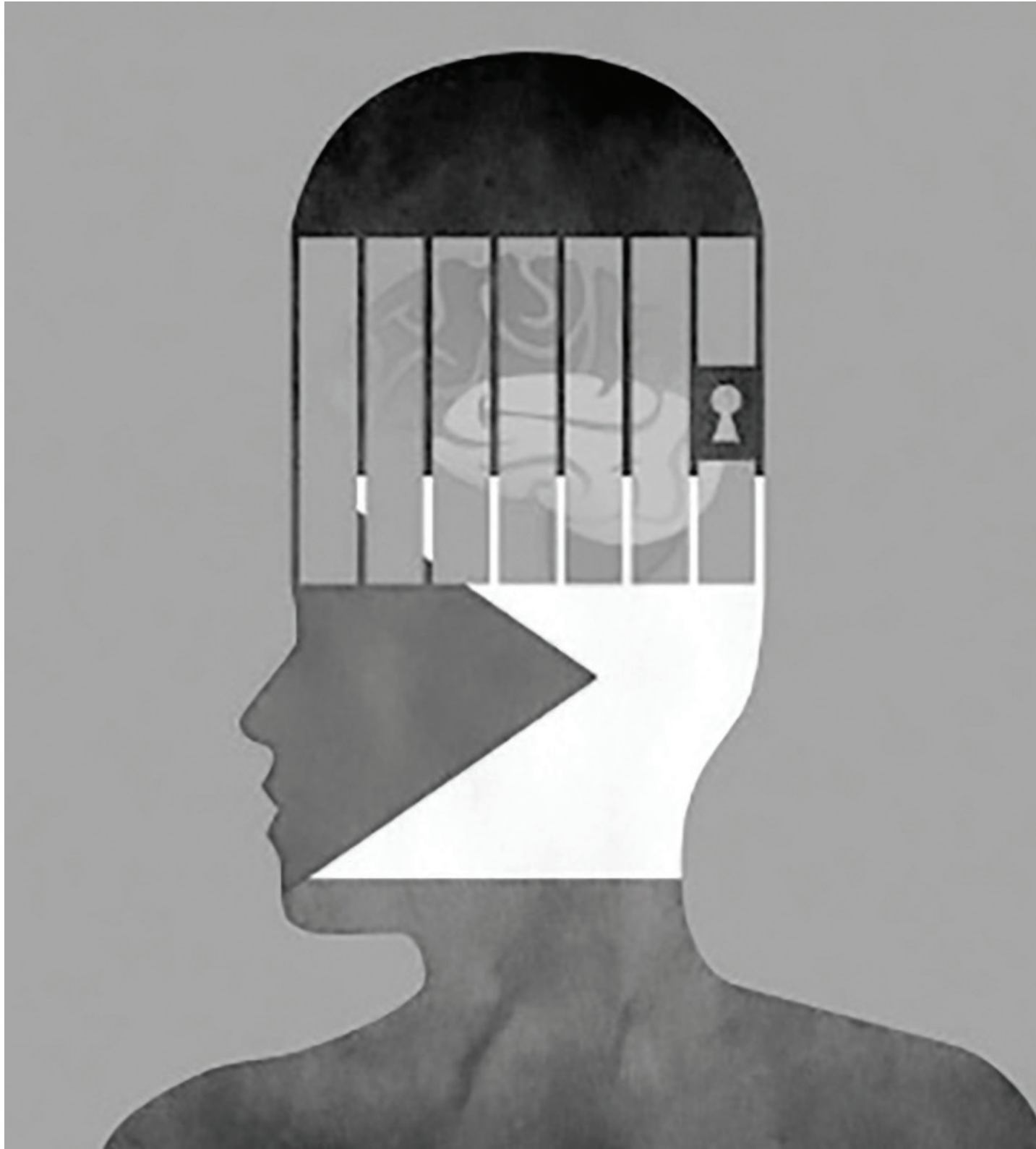
This era of entrapment, carried out by Obama’s FBI spies, is centrally important for ramping up fear, specifically of brown-skinned people who may ‘appear’ to be Arab or Muslim. Bayoumi gives us the example of the top federal immigration official in Montana, Bruce Norum, who in 2011 forwarded an email chain that read “I want you to leave. I want you to go back to your desert sandpit where women are treated like rats and dogs. I want you to take your religion, your friends, and your family back to your Islamic extremists, and STAY THERE!” Bayoumi notes “this is the man who holds the power to arrest, detain, and deport immigrants in Montana.”

More centrally, there’s Michael Bloomberg who, when mayor of New York City, used the NYPD in a massive spying campaign against Muslim Americans. Bayoumi notes that we “need to recognize...that the hatred, fear, and suspicion of Muslims has seeped so effortlessly into our culture. Under the guise of common sense, the vilification of Muslims is normalized and neutralized by a broad swath of the population, including leading politicians, law enforcement officials, petty bureaucrats, and the media.” Bayoumi argues that this Islamophobia is part of the mainstream now. This is not the exception of a



*Undercover: Melike Ser was not a student and had no apparent connections to the school, but befriended a number of students who were excited at her conversion. She was an NYPD officer. Source: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3298583/NYPD-officer-converted-Islam-order-undercover-spy-Brooklyn-College-students-led-arrest-two-women-accused-building-bomb-planning-wage-jihad-New-York.html>*





[http://pcp.gc.cuny.edu/wp-content/blogs.dir/1109/files/2014/03/BDS\\_GC.jpg](http://pcp.gc.cuny.edu/wp-content/blogs.dir/1109/files/2014/03/BDS_GC.jpg)

once fringe character like Donald Trump, but the everyday policies of the Obama administration.

Bayoumi takes us through the Bush era brashness that informed such blatantly Islamophobic shows as *24* and the justifications embedded in them for the use of torture. He compares them to the Obama era dramas exemplified by movies like *Argo* and others. He writes that they “illustrate in their focus on procedure an Obama doctrine of prosecuting the War on Terror in a fashion dangerously similar to that of George W. Bush but with a seemingly lighter rhetoric and a

(falsely) progressive face.”

And while Bayoumi exposes how mainstream political culture justifies the building of an empire, he also shows the history of resistance to it. In particular, he’s interested in the solidarity that can be generated by those historically oppressed in the United States. Thinking of how to build resistance to US empire abroad and its attendant Islamophobia at home, Bayoumi looks to the history of black opposition to US empire. He quotes Frederick Douglass’s opposition to the US war on Mexico, which Douglass called “disgraceful, cruel and

iniquitous.”

Black opposition to the Spanish American War saw one black editor of a magazine write, “We recognize in the spirit of Imperialism, inaugurated and fostered by the administration of President McKinley, the same violation of Human Rights, which is being practiced by the Democratic Party in the recently reconstructed States, to wit, the wholesale disenfranchisement of the Negro.” Empire building abroad it seems, has always been accompanied by the denial of rights and attacks on citizens at home.



Source: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3298583/NYPD-officer-converted-Islam-order-undercover-spy-Brooklyn-College-students-led-arrest-two-women-accused-building-bomb-planning-wage-jihad-New-York.html.jpg>



Bayoumi argues that “War on Terror culture has meant that we [Muslims] are now regularly seen as dangerous outsiders, that our daily actions are constantly viewed with suspicion, that our complex histories in this country are neglected or occluded, and that our very presence and our houses of worship have become issues of local, regional, and national politics.” This is certainly obvious as we see Trump’s rise to national political prominence, with its attendant Islamophobia, calls for registration, detention, deportation, immigration restrictions, and turning away refugees (despite the crisis the US political class created by backing dictators and bombing its way through the Middle East and North Africa), right down to the local examples of the CUNY administration’s attacks on the MSA and SJP and the attendant Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism.

This war on terror culture is as Bayoumi states, “corrosive, not just to the legal profession but also to the national psyche. As a nation we had previously considered illegal (even if we condoned) such things as targeted killings, indefinite detention without trial, and torture. Now these actions are not only condoned but generally accepted as necessary and prudent, and they are frequently portrayed as such on television and in the movies.”

In an interview with political science professor Corey Robin, Bay-

oumi drew parallels to another era of state-generated fear. “Cold War culture changed the legal landscape of the country. It stoked our paranoia and drove our foreign policy. It influenced our novelists, painters, poets and filmmakers. And all of these fields—legal, political, entertainment—fed off of each other to create a broader Cold War

culture. I think we see something similar operating right now, which we haven’t come to terms with.”

*This Muslim American Life* is inspiring and chilling in equal measure and gives a broader picture of popular culture where Islamophobia is a standard ingredient. Throughout, Bayoumi uses personal narrative to show how

an Islamophobic society impinges on his daily life and how he reacts, sometimes with outrage, but just as often with humor. *Uncivil Rites* is similarly personal, includes a wide-ranging discussion of colonialism and racism, and is a book of intellectual history as much as a book about the attack on a life and scholarship dedicated to justice.

Both books are central to understanding our current world, where those seeking to build a movement for justice for Palestine are silenced, fired, and worse, while those promoting apartheid and Islamophobia claim to be victims. *The New York Post* has called for not allowing SJP groups on CUNY campus’s and the ZOA pushed hard

to declare anti-Zionism the same as anti-Semitism. The ZOA was able to trigger the months-long investigation on anti-Semitism at CUNY. Chancellor Millikin, in his cover letter to the report on allegations of anti-Semitism, states that “CUNY takes seriously our commitment to creating an environment that is inclusive, free of discrimination.” Meanwhile spying, surveillance, and infiltration of student groups at CUNY—which has clearly created a hostile environment for Arab and Muslim students—has been ignored by the CUNY administration. This can hardly be reconciled with Millikin’s statement.

Unfortunately, *Uncivil Rites* and *This Muslim American Life* are becoming even more essential reading with each passing day. Salaita and Bayoumi have delivered work we need in order to better understand this world. The hope is that both of these books can become—instead of handbooks for activists today and arguments for how to change society and what needs to be changed (books of current events, as Bayoumi says of his other book, *How Does it Feel to be a Problem?*)—books of history. Of course hope without action is part of the problem. With *Uncivil Rites* and *This Muslim American Life*, both authors give us hope with a sense of what needs to be done and undone in order to bring another world into being.



Source: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3298583/NYPD-officer-converted-Islam-order-undercover-spy-Brooklyn-College-students-led-arrest-two-women-accused-building-bomb-planning-wage-jihad-New-York.html>



PLEASE KNOW THAT THE DOCTORAL STUDENTS' COUNCIL IS HERE FOR YOU WITH MANY RESOURCES INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING:

## 1. SPACE TO GATHER AND ORGANIZE:

The DSC has reservable rooms for student events. You can use these spaces as a gathering point to organize further. [More info](#). The DSC's student lounge, Room 5495, has coffee, tea, snacks, and space for all students.

## 2. PRAYER & MEDITATION SPACE

If you need some alone time, Room 9201 is available for students to meditate or pray in. [More info](#).

## 3. LEGAL CONSULTATIONS

Consultations are for informational purposes only, and may include such issues as lease agreements, divorce, domestic partnerships, child custody, and debt. Email [ccb@cunydsc.org](mailto:ccb@cunydsc.org) for more info.

## 4. DSC LISTSERV

Communication is key to organizing. All students are welcome to sign-up for and post on the DSC listserv. Email [ccc@cunydsc.org](mailto:ccc@cunydsc.org) to sign up.

## 5. DSC GRANTS FOR STUDENT EVENTS

Thinking of putting on an event about the consequences of the election? You can apply for DSC funding for it. [More info](#).

## 6. THE ADVOCATE

Feeling compelled to write something about this moment? Contribute to GC's student publication. [More info](#).

## 7. OPENCUNY

Want to start a WordPress blog to organize digitally? [Join OpenCUNY](#).

## 8. THE ADJUNCT PROJECTV

The Adjunct Project continues to advocate for precarious labor. Join their listserv. [More info](#).

## 9. CHARTERED ORGANIZATIONS

The DSC funds many chartered organizations where students with similar interests can get together and build community. Join some.

In addition to the above resources, the DSC will continue to fight to retain free speech and expression on campus, push for a tuition-free university, advocate for inclusive bathrooms, and raise awareness about the lack of diversity at the GC. The DSC is also aware of the divisions that have arisen due to the recent elections. It has consequently been engaging discussions and activities to ensure that all members of our community will continue to feel at home. Times like these call for re-thinking how we organize and protect those who will be hurt most.

Stay tuned for DSC-sponsored events around healing and teaching, but also direct action and self-defense. If you are organizing events, particularly in DSC rooms, and would like to advertise to the larger student body, please feel free to post on the DSC listserv or email us directly at [dsc@cunydsc.org](mailto:dsc@cunydsc.org).