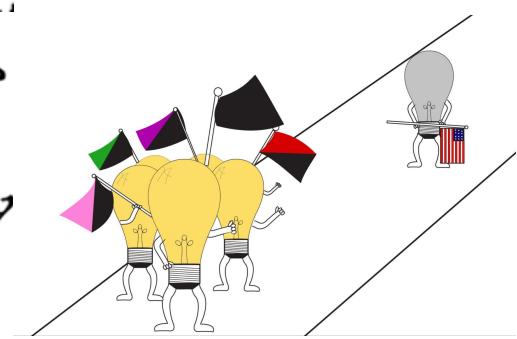


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patriot (n): One to whom the interests of a part seem superior to those of the whole. The dupe of statesmen and the tool of conquerors.
—Ambrose Bierce

THE BIG IDEA

A Semi-Monthly Publication



Goals or Lies?

On the eve of pride month, my precocious stepdaughter of nine stepped off the school bus and with barely a greeting told me she had just learned about the rainbow flag (from other kids; her teachers are not so progressive). “When was the first pride?” she asked. I summarized the Stonewall Riots in 1969 and explained that pride parades had begun a year later to remember and resist.

“But why were LGBTQ people repressed? Isn’t that against the Constitution?”

“Yes, yes, in theory it was. Remember though that at the very beginning of this country, everyone was repressed except—”

“Oh yeah...white men.” “Wealthy,” I add and she nods. She mentions the imminent overturning of *Roe*—something we had talked about extensively (including at her first protest).

“Right, so there are at least two views of the Constitution.” I am amazed I still have her undivided attention at this point. “The first is that the Constitution was written like a set of goals. And Americans have been working on them ever since.”

“Oh... What’s the second?”

“That, from the very beginning, it was a lie.”

Simple a summation as this is, it has been the dissident’s job to point out over and again the chasm between heady principles in the document and deplorable outcomes, the presence of counterrevolution alongside movements agitating for something better. What is left for radicals to do in the face of mindless patriotism is to sift through the debris of failed revolutionary fits and starts—of which there are many in this country’s history and which ought to be liberated from any nationalist sentiments—and chuck the rest for the lies that they are.

Scientific Evidence for National Reliance on *Roe*

By Aubrey Thompson

Roe v. Wade was officially overturned on Friday, June 24, but the threat loomed large for nearly two months since the court’s decision draft, written by Samuel Alito, was leaked. There are too many inaccurate and contemptible points in this document to address in detail, but one particularly defies reason. In the argument against the idea that folks who can get pregnant rely on *Roe* (which would imply that its standing is necessary for constitutionally “protected” “liberty”), Alito says the court is “ill-equipped to assess ‘generalized assertions about the national psyche.’” Indeed, perhaps no governing body is equipped to make generalized assertions about the national psyche, especially in the bloated governance of the United States. But, when a nation’s constitution boasts the protection of liberty of its people, such attempts need to be (and are often) made, and one could argue that the most well-equipped professionals that we have to assess the national psyche are psychologists.

Unsurprisingly, until recently maternal outcomes of having—or lacking—abortion access have been understudied in academic research. The most popularly-cited is the Turnaway study, a five year evaluation of the mental, physical, and socioeconomic consequences of receiving or being denied a wanted abortion for roughly 1,000 people across 30 states. Like many psychological studies, it mostly serves to confirm with data what is intuitively true: that having an unwanted child consistently puts socioeconomic burden on those who seek termination of pregnancy. Being denied the procedure left participants four times more likely to be below the poverty line than folks who had received an abortion, lowered their credit scores, left them with more debt, and increased their odds of evictions and bankruptcies.¹

Not only are people who have forced births endangered by poverty, they are put in direct physical danger. Being denied an abortion is dangerous in and of itself; the risk of death is 30 times higher for carrying a baby to term than having an abortion. A near-complete abortion ban (as has been enacted in 26 states with *Roe* being overturned, concentrated in the US Southeast and Plains area) would further exacerbate the shockingly high disparity of Black maternal mortality rates, which are already 3 times higher than that of their

white counterparts. A study that modeled a full abortion ban estimated that maternal deaths would increase by 21% nationwide and 33% among Black populations, based on the risk of being pregnant alone, and not accounting for pregnant people seeking alternative methods of ending a pregnancy.²

It should be acknowledged that while it seems that pregnant people do rely on *Roe* to prevent economic and physical harm, *Roe* is not reliable enough for everyone. The Turnaway study found that most women who received an abortion paid for it out of pocket. This of course puts socioeconomically vulnerable people at yet another disadvantage. Southeastern US states in particular have enacted stricter bans, have fewer facilities, and do not cover abortion under public healthcare. These states are also less likely to have support systems in place for the consequential humans created by these restrictions. Right-wing groups who so vehemently tout “family values” also direct their resources to billboards and protests instead of offering support. The disproportionate impact on Black and Indigenous people of restricted abortion access is consistent with the many health disadvantages they experience, maintained by oppressive policies since the foundation of the US. A study of callers to an abortion fund in the Southeast US found that 81% of requests were made by folks who identify as non-hispanic Black.³ If there was any hope of these disadvantaged populations receiving an abortion while *Roe* was in place, it has been dashed with its overturning, leaving them sentenced to the economic, physical, and mental harms that the most current academic studies prove all but inevitable.

The case is clear that Americans that can get pregnant rely on *Roe* and would rely on abortion access if it were more available. Of course, the rights of those people are historically under-prioritized. Especially taking precedent are the lives of “innocent” (simply because they have not been given the opportunity to be otherwise) “unborn humans.” This favoritism of fetuses over existing pregnant people is so stark that in some areas, women have been criminalized for having a trauma-induced miscarriage, a practice that is likely to become even more common with the striking down of *Roe*.⁴ Alito claims that the

court's decision is not sex-based discrimination (which is reasoned with, as far as I can tell, "because it isn't"); he paints himself as a champion for women's right to decide (for other pregnant people at the ballot box) and even argues—in direct opposition to the most comprehensive abortion study we have—that SCOTUS is acting for "the protection of maternal health."⁵ But these are barely-there attempts to conceal what ("who") anti-abortion rhetoric is most concerned with.

If we accept the devastating truth that Alito and the court majority prioritize the unborn's right to life (which no non-living person ever asked for) over the right of an existing pregnant person to have any say over whether their life takes a dramatic, time-consuming, dangerous, expensive turn, we can also provide promising evidence that children and the unborn rely on abortion access as well. The existing children (which most people who seek an abortion have) and resulting children from forced birth are obviously transitively much more likely to be impoverished and suffer the economic consequences described above. Their parent is also more likely to stay with a violent partner, or be raising them alone. They report slower development, and the parent reports more feelings of entrapment or resentment toward the child than towards those that were born of an intentional pregnancy after receiving an abortion.¹

1 https://www.ansirh.org/sites/default/files/publications/files/the_harms_of_denying_a_woman_a_wanted_abortion_4-16-2020.pdf

2 <https://www.colorado.edu/today/2021/09/08/study-banning-abortion-would-boost-maternal-mortality-double-digits>

3 https://mdpi-res.com/d_attachment/ijerph/ijerph-18-03813/article_deploy/ijerph-18-03813-v2.pdf?version=1617940715

4 <https://www.cnn.com/2022/06/01/opinions/fetal-personhood-abortion-miscarriage-roe-thomas/index.html>

5 <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2022/05/the-most-extreme-lines-from-justice-samuel-alitos-leaked-opinion-on-roe.html>

6 <https://secure.actblue.com/donate/newvoicesjsaveroe>

Times of crises such as these can seem hopeless, but can also provide the spark needed to ignite a long-needed fire. If you are looking to be a part of that energetic wave, and have the time or funds to give, New Voices for Reproductive Rights is a Pittsburgh-based, Black women-led organization which is all too familiar with the arguments put forth in this article, and many others. From their website: "The leak of this draft decision expedites our strategy to protect bodily autonomy," Executive Director Kelly Davis says. "However, those of us within the Reproductive Justice movement recognize that sexual and reproductive liberation extends well beyond the constraints of preserving *Roe v. Wade*. We will be organizing within the community, growing our political power, and asserting our human rights. We will also be galvanizing towards a future wherein Black women and gender expansive people enjoy lives devoid of violence, abuse and neglect in all sectors of society."⁶



1-800-230-PLAN

By Halsey Hyer

[AUTOMATED SYSTEM]: Thank you for calling Planned Parenthood! Para continuar en español oprima el dos.

To help us connect you to the Planned Parenthood center in your area, please enter a five-digit zip code for the area you are interested in.

I dial 15224.

Please hold, and you will be transferred to the Planned Parenthood center nearest to you. Thank you!

[WESTERN PA PLANNED PARENTHOOD RECORDED MESSAGE]: This recording is for Monday, February 24, 2020 to Monday, March 2, 2020. Thank you for calling Planned Parenthood of Western Pennsylvania. If you have a medical emergency, please press nine. If you know your party's extension, you may dial it at any time. You can make an appointment online at ppwp.org, that's ppwp.org. Please note that abortion services are only provided at the Pittsburgh location.

[AUTOMATED SYSTEM]: To speak to someone about abortion services, press 2. To speak to someone about an appointment for birth control, an exam, or emergency consu—

I press 2.

* * *

Down Euler Way I go, toward the CVS on Forbes Ave, passing a sparrow pecking at the mounds of tied-off plastic bags in the overflow of some Fifth Ave restaurant dumpster. My white knuckles tucked in the pockets of my green canvas jacket, I jaywalk across Forbes Ave, darting through the flow of the four lane one way rush hour traffic and through the automated bi-fold doors of the pharmacy. I know how to get to the end of this maze: turn left and go down the middle aisle and turn right, then immediately left. The sign overhead: *FAMILY PLANNING*. I read online that the blue dye tests (CVS generic-brand *Early Result*) provide evaporation lines more often than pink dye (*First Response Test & Confirm Pregnancy Test*)—I decide to get both.

* * *

All services at Planned Parenthood are confidential. We look forward to assisting you as soon as possible. All calls could be monitored and recorded.

The line rings only once.

I don't want to see the same cashier who's seen me buy several boxes (at least five) in the last six months. I don't want to read: *Hello, how can I help?* ANITA Management Team Member CVS Pharmacy on her name tag pinned to her blood red t-shirt. I don't want to hear the beep! as she glides the cellophane wrapped box's barcode across the infrared and says, "\$38.27" in that I-just-started-my-shift-but-I'll-be-damned-if-I-got-to-talk-in-that-high-pitch-customer-service-rester-until-midnight kind of voice. I always imagine her wondering (anticipating, even) when I'll come in maternity jeans and an oversized tee, with some make-believe partner she's dreamed up for me, perusing the aisles with my hands clasped over my rounded-out belly, purchasing the Snickers and Pepperoni Hot Pockets to satisfy my cravings. I shove the tests in my backpack and walk out.

* * *

[PLANNED PARENTHOOD OPERATOR]: So, um, it's a little bit difficult to say how much they cover when they do—so, I can't really answer *that* more specifically because it, it just varies so much, but it is \$435 before 12 weeks.

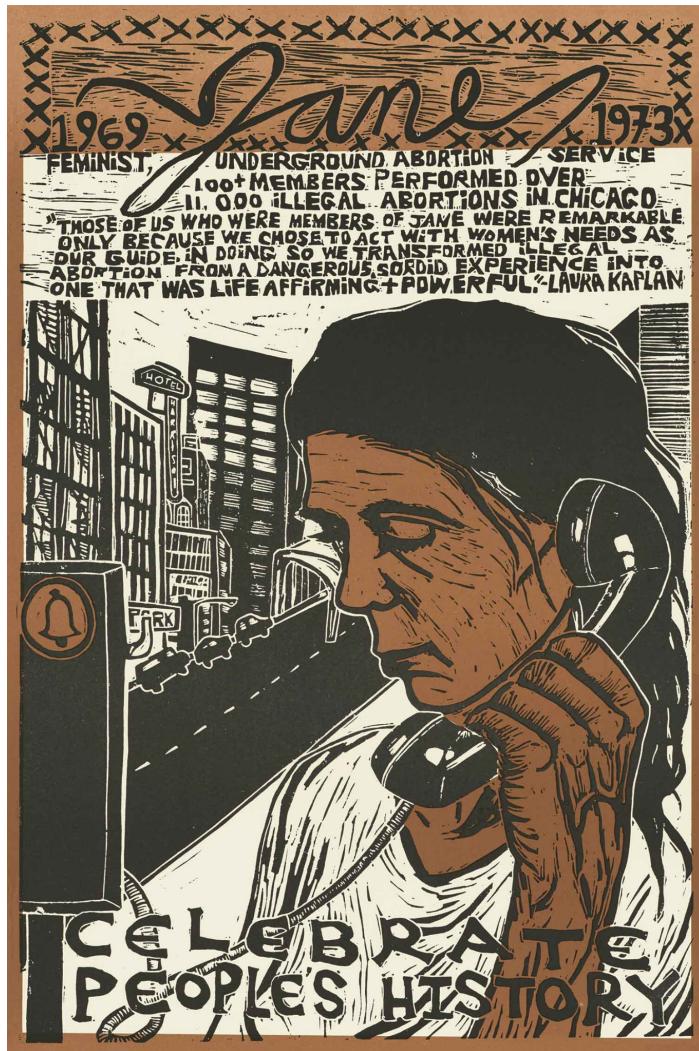


Image by Meredith Stern, justseeds.org

[ME]: Okay, and then um, if I tell you a specific insurance plan are you able to give me like, a general ballpark of whether or not you think it would cover it?

[PLANNED PARENTHOOD OPERATOR]: Mm, yes I can do my best. Sometimes, you know, I, the answer might be, I don't know until we call. But, yeah, let me know the name of your insurance.

[ME]: Right—it's uh, Cigna.

[PLANNED PARENTHOOD OPERATOR]: Is it through the state, an employer, or a family member?

[ME]: Oh, a family member.

[PLANNED PARENTHOOD OPERATOR]: Mm. Okay, so that's one of the ones we wouldn't know until we called.

[ME]: Okay, uh—

[PLANNED PARENTHOOD OPERATOR]: We wouldn't really know until we called and looked into your policy for that one.

[ME]: And then, my other question is, is if you were to contact the insurance company, would it appear, like would the person who has the insurance be able to see that Planned Parenthood was inquiring with the insurance company about abortion services?

[PLANNED PARENTHOOD OPERATOR]: For an inquiry, no. For billing, there—it really depends on the company, because some insurance companies don't name the service. They just put a code and others do. But inquiries, no they would not be notified if we inquired.

[ME]: Okay, perfect—

* * *

On the bus everyone happens all at once: A woman stands, one hand on the metal rail attached to the ceiling, a pink hijab worn on her head and a biology book in her hand, mouthing words to herself with intermittent pauses as if she was reciting them again in her head; an old couple in matching 2017 Pittsburgh Marathon t-shirts bicker over whether Danny DeVito is married to Dee from It's Always Sunny or the waitress from Cheers. A ten-year-old boy in a catholic school uniform plays his Nintendo Switch. A man in a pinstripe suit and

leather briefcase, Air Jordan's with red accents to complete the outfit talks on his iPhone. My body sways into sickness—passengers pressed up against me with nowhere to move, nowhere to puke. I swallow. The pregnancy tests tucked into my JanSport backpack between chapbooks and loose papers. Once the bus makes it past Craig St and down Centre Ave, its metal body begins to clear out the way I hope my body doesn't have to.

* * *

[PLANNED PARENTHOOD OPERATOR]: There's no harm in looking into it, it's billing where they might be notified.

[ME]: Okay, that's totally good. I did have one other question, so let's say I were to pursue—this, what is the process of, you know, getting an abortion, like from me having this phone call, to the end—if I were to go with not the pill, but with the actual procedure.

[PLANNED PARENTHOOD OPERATOR]: Okay—so, all you need in order to schedule an abortion appointment is to report a positive pregnancy test. You just need to report that you had one. We would use the first day of your last period to get an estimate of how far along you are—do you happen to know the first day of your last period?

[ME]: Not at all, no.

* * *

I take a switchblade to the cellophane of the *First Response Test & Confirm Pregnancy Test* box and tear off its glued flaps. The contents lay on the linoleum tile floor of my Sharpsburg duplex bathroom: one pink dye test, one digital test, the insert with English and Spanish instructions. I know the drill: sit on the toilet and get into position; remove the plastic cap from the tip of the test; begin peeing; midstream, dip the tip of the test in for five Mississippi-seconds; place the plastic cap back on the tip of the test; place on a flat surface; set a timer for two minutes; chug a glass of water; repeat as many times as needed. I held the test up to the light fixture to embolden the results: there is no missing that baby pink line.

* * *

[PLANNED PARENTHOOD OPERATOR]: Okay, so if you weren't sure, like let's say you have an irregular period or you just really did not remember we would do an ultrasound ahead of time. But if you know, or you could figure it out, then we would use that to get an estimate. You would schedule for two appointments.

You would schedule for the appointment to come in and receive the service, and you would also need to schedule for a phone call appointment with our doctor, because in Pennsylvania there is a law that says you need to speak with one of our doctors at least twenty-four hours before your appointment in order for you to be seen by a doctor. So, you would schedule a phone appointment with a doctor, and you would schedule an appointment to receive the service. The day that you came in to receive the service, uh you would have an ultrasound first, and then you would do pre-procedure charting and vitals.

The appointment would be about three to four hours. The procedure itself is only about five to eight minutes. You would receive 800mg of ibuprofen and local numbing medication on the cervix, and afterwards you'd be in the recovery room for about twenty-five minutes. And for the in-clinic, there is no follow-up required because there's really no failure rate. So, you would just have some bleeding and cramping for a few days—maybe a week or two, and then you would get a normal period in about four to six weeks.

[ME]: Okay—this has all been really helpful—and I—I think that—I think that, yeah, I'm just gonna talk things over and then maybe give you all a call back. So, thank you so much for all of the information, I really appreciate your time.

[PLANNED PARENTHOOD OPERATOR]: Yeah! Our phone lines are open until four today.

[ME]: Okay, thank you. All right, bye-bye.

[PLANNED PARENTHOOD OPERATOR]: Take care now.

ER Visit After My Non-Medical Abortion

(Magee Women's Hospital, Pittsburgh, PA)

By Halsey Hyer

Clots gush out
the sides of my underwear

in the hospital
where I was born

stains the white sheets
& my plastic gown

strangers rush me
on a gurney

transfer my limp body
onto an exam table

my feet in the stirrups
ultrasound wand

with a condom lubed up inserted—
more pleasurable than how I got here.

Everybody can see me
my half naked body

when the screen showed nothing
a nurse asks me

Why're you crying?
as I thanked the god I don't believe in

the god I was raised with
that my punches to the gut shattered

the not-yet body
(un)wanted

Don't Listen To Liberals Lesson #350: A Review of *The Solutions Are Already Here*

By Jack Read

After decades of marches and speeches, many people in the United States want action on climate change, but they know their government won't do anything about it. The dream that liberals have (and which they often share) is that they will somehow use an incredibly corrupt political system to fund the United States' transition into a sustainable, climate-friendly industrial society. This utopian vision has captured the hearts of many on the Left who see the Green New Deal, or at least some version of it, as the answer to the crisis.

Peter Gelderloos, with his new book *The Solutions Are Already Here: Strategies For Ecological Revolution From Below* shows us why the liberals are wrong. Gelderloos roots his critique in liberal misunderstandings of the present ecological crisis. He begins by taking the reader on a *Desert*-esque* journey through Earth's environment in the 21st century. From garbage filling the oceans to forests being consumed by land developers to insecticides killing the bugs our food web depends on, Gelderloos lists the many things other than climate change that are destroying the biosphere.

The irony, he points out, is that the failure to address all this in building a sustainable society means humanity will be even more vulnerable to the coming storm. An example Gelderloos provides is the amount of mining and manufacturing a Green New Deal transition would require. The activities necessary to produce solar panels, batteries, hydroelectric dams, wind turbines, geothermal facilities, and other alternatives can be both hazardous to the habitats in which they take place while perpetuating the climate crisis with massive greenhouse gas emissions of their own. What Gelderloos forces the reader to acknowledge is that we must let go of a mass consumption society. Any solutions that don't require some sort of sacrifice should be called into question.

In creating a different path forward, Gelderloos points to indigenous communities in places like Brazil, Canada, Indonesia, and Northern Europe who not only have a proven track record of fighting industrial development, but who also understand the techniques of land

stewardship that we need to weather the climate crisis. At times Gelderloos gives in to a very Western tendency to celebrate indigenous communities to the point of fetishization. However, his general advice is good. Basic ideas like not treating trees as crops or not hunting and displacing animals to extinction don't need advanced technology to be implemented. But perhaps the most important lesson these communities have to share is a rejection of the ethic of endless growth at the heart of capitalism. They don't operate on an illusion that their environment can be abused and disrespected without consequence.

The biggest flaw in this book is that it is too short for the subject it seeks to cover. It makes bold assertions that require rigorous scholarship and an anticipation of counterarguments. Gelderloos is not unique in the anarchist scene for doing this (we are, after all, the socialist subculture that loves zines). It isn't as bad as writing a book called *How to Blow Up A Pipeline* without actually saying how to blow up a fucking pipeline, but it comes close in places. The saving grace comes in the last chapter where Gelderloos describes a society that embraces the principles of decentralized sustainability and degrowth hinted at in previous sections. In this ideal world, parking lots are dug up to create farms and forests, cities are barricaded off to no longer allow cars, energy consumption is reduced to enable renewable alternatives to actually meet demand. Adding to the flavor, other anarchist dreams are also realized such as police abolition, federated neighborhood assemblies, encrypted communication platforms, and the marginalization of racist voices. Some might say such a society is impossible, especially given the apocalyptic potential of climate change. But Gelderloos at least makes an effort to tell us what he wants, which is far more than the typical doomer books getting cranked out at the moment. So if you don't agree with Gelderloos' vision, *The Solutions Are Already Here* is still a good book to explore non-state solutions to the climate crisis. But by no means should the exploration end there.

* The book *Desert*, anonymously written, is fast becoming a classic anarchist response to the climate crisis. It projects a future where desertification has claimed many areas of the globe, with civilization receding. A future without the possibility of the revolution (as if there ever was one) but with ample opportunity for stateless freedom and struggle.

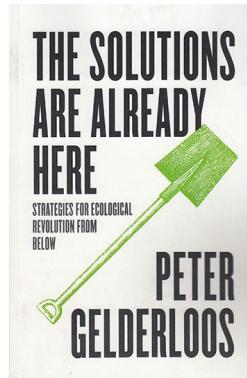
Capitalism: Defining it Properly

In our quest to articulate—for ourselves and others—what all is wrong with society, how we got here, and how it continues to operate, basic definitions often get muddy. To novices of the term *capitalism*, here is a brief exposition. To adepts at using the word, we hope to give some helpful nuisance.

We begin with the capitalist fable, told in nearly every economics textbook (including my own for ECON 101 many years ago), and then retold as a kind of everyday common sense. Once upon a time... These storytellers never can say precisely when or where this occurred because it never happened... Once upon a time, everyone bartered. Markets, such as there were, could not have been more inefficient and chaotic. If you wanted to buy a cow in exchange for shoes, say, haggling over the exact value of one commodity compared to the other was exhausting. Eventually you might walk away with the cow at the cost of, I don't know, seven pairs of shoes. With a pint of cherries as change. At some point, societies stumbled on

money as a perfect medium of exchange. Inherently of no practical use, money had an agreed upon social value and thus gave all goods for sale an independent point of reference. Infinitely more efficient than barter, money allowed societies to develop capitalism's crowning tool: credit. Now people could trade with money that would be forthcoming, with interest. The fable is powerful because it explains the efficiency of capitalist markets, their complete lack of historical violence, and the total absence of state power. Put this way, capitalism appears reasonable and right neighborly: a set of principles, happily agreed to long ago by groups of villagers and transmitted to us through the ages as inherited wisdom. It appears superbly fair. Note for later that absent from this fable is any account of how goods are actually made.

In fact, the folklore's sequence of trade tools—barter, money, and credit—historically occurred (and sometimes reoccurs) in the exact reverse. Until very recently, most people lived and died within a handful



of miles of where they were born. Trading was an intimate thing that bound communities in reciprocal debts. If you wanted a cow from the village farmer, you as the local cobbler would say, "Friend, if you give me a cow now, later when I fatten and butcher it I'll take the leather and make you some shoes." You would receive the cow on credit and you would square up later. No money need change hands, and there was no urgency to justify bartering—neither of you were going anywhere. There is historical evidence of villages as late as 17th century England where everyone kept mental tallies of their reciprocal debts; every six months villagers would gather to meetings called "reckonings" and settle accounts with each other.

Crucial sidenote: oddly enough, debt fostered among friends has an extraordinary power to create community. (Consider at this moment how many outstanding debts you have with loved ones: books you've leant out, cigarettes you owe a smoking buddy, the next round of drinks or restaurant check you've promised to pick up. These link you together and express reciprocity, with the promise of an ongoing friendship.) Exchange through currency is disruptive to this community precisely because it has the ethic of immediately discharging all debts; you pay up at the register because the grocery store has no enduring relationship with you. Money exists precisely because of mistrust. The perniciousness of modern debts contracted at, say, a bank is that they are stipulated strictly in dollars and cents—not favors owed, not neighborly help. There is no community here, no rough equality between you and the bank. It is a relationship of known hostility: you will pay up or else.

Back to how capitalism actually arose: villages long existed with a kind of communal debt system, which people would discharge periodically. No

one was going anywhere, they were neighbors, there was a basis of trust. The appearance of systems of money arose with two phenomena: the rise of city-states—empires later—and their frequent wars. The state, not the

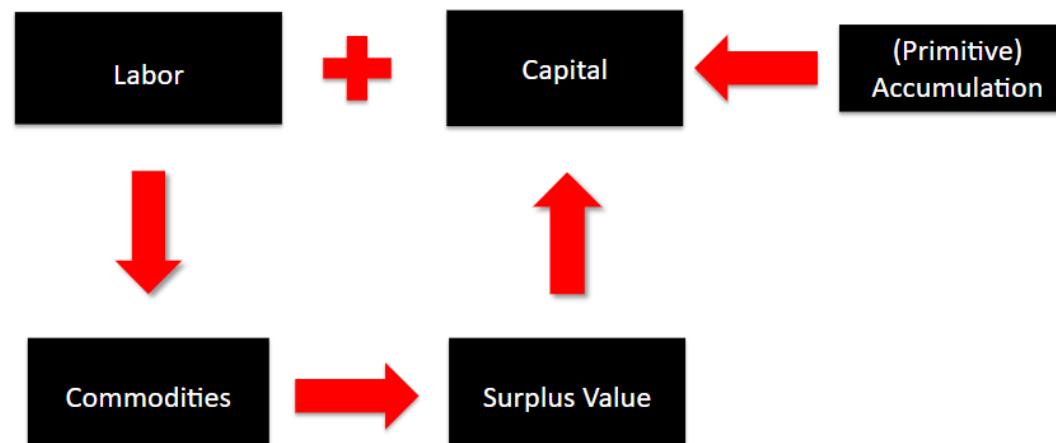
quaint market of fairy tales, is fully responsible for coinage in an interrelated set of processes. Governments declared wars and marched soldiers far from their places of birth that, among other things, seized from the enemy beautiful things wrought with gold and silver and jewels. When soldiers traveled through a village they were passersby—no one would willingly give them something on credit, but they would accept some of their shiny plunder in return. States then cemented this system of currency by demanding taxes not in kind but in cash—a currency they stamped using a precious metal.

States then paid soldiers with their coins, soldiers took these coins to market, and merchants completed the circle by paying taxes in coins. Which permanently linked capitalism with states, armies, taxes, and the violence inherent in each. Thus capitalism has existed in at least

certain places around the world for several thousand years. (And barter? This kind of system is actually very rare and usually occurs whenever an established system of currency breaks down. Like in war-torn countries or in ones experiencing economic turmoil where a nation's currency can no longer be trusted.)



David Graeber's *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* is the primary source for this capitalist fable and sets the record straight (historically and anthropologically) on the intimate and inextricable link between states, war, and taxes. But you will also find germs as diverse as the materialist origins of world religions, social and cosmic debts and how the notion of a debt jumped to dollars and cents, gift economies, etc. It's a whirlwind of a book and highly approachable.



Modern capitalism as a world-system is, of course, far more recent but bears all the features described above with only a change in scale. Described systemically, modern capitalism began through what is often referred to as **primitive accumulation**, which is to say some gruesome wrong. It is the result of some party sequestering land, kidnapping people, or plundering a society through brute force, which amasses some kind of economic resources. When indigenous people were expelled from their lands in Africa, East and South Asia, and the Americas; when black and native peoples were enslaved; when common land was enclosed all over Europe for private gain; when states created extractive mechanisms in the form of colonies—all this was primitive accumulation. To say *primitive* is a misnomer in that this extra-legal accumulation is a continual process. Accumulators create extraordinary conditions, which they often later inscribe into law and thus normalize. Every time a neighborhood gentrifies, begetting aggressive police patrols, evictions, and shady investments; whenever a piece of heretofore open territory becomes privatized through sale of public lands, satellite trajectories in orbit or, soon, parcels of land claimed and commercialized on the Moon and Mars; every time an indigenous community living relatively independent of formal commerce falls prey to microlending; when through patenting a genetically modified seed is deemed private property—these are current examples of accumulation. They create new markets from something otherwise held in common, jumpstarting in a new way the flow of capital.

Capital is created when some kind of accumulation is invested to produce yet more wealth. These ventures can be purely speculative (like a bet on the stock market that a company's value will go up), productive (the creation of a good or a service), or something in between (such as buying up a dilapidated house in an up-and-coming neighborhood to fix up and flip). Capital includes means to produce—the locale, the raw materials, and the tools. But without **labor**, capital is inert—baking ovens sit cool, goods remain on store shelves, coffee beans lay unground, cement bags unopened, phones unanswered, and a great so on.

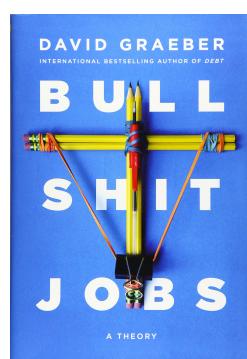
Capital's prerogative over labor—the reason legally and morally people believe capitalists have a right to take from the bulk of a product's value and return to workers a small share through wages—has a complicated, maybe unknowable, origin. One plausible explanation for this idea, that risk deserves outsized reward, can be found in the logic of war. To vanquish an opponent, who had risked their life as you had yours, entitled the victor to deprive the other of everything—freedom, property,

livelihood. It is a violent logic, a piece of which resides in our relations of production. Whatever its roots, the state protects the owners of capital in their ability to despoil those who work for them. It should go without saying that capitalists' outsized social weight also gives them the power to shape society writ large. Therefore, so long as society remains constituted in this way, every person's ability to have an equal say over the institutions that structure their lives (this is the meaning of democracy, is it not?) will perforce be compromised.

While the notion that a *thing* may be exploited—be it a mineral vein, a piece of uncultivated land, or a forest—Karl Marx was perhaps the first to say that a *person*, as a worker, could also be exploited. But he meant it exactly in the same way that one would exploit a natural resource. To Marx, exploitation was a matter of precise measurement in dollars and cents. In the course of laboring, a worker produces **commodities**, articles of finished goods or services. Said worker is then alienated from this commodity—they usually have no say over how it is used or sold, and have no claim over profits made. Let's pause for a specific example. In 2021, Starbucks made a net profit, a **surplus value** of \$4.87 billion, every cent of which was made by a legion of baristas. But this army of workers, 383,000 worldwide, had no claim to that net profit—it was exploited from them and went into the unworthy pocketbooks of Starbucks speculators (*shareholders*, that is). If \$4.87 billion had been distributed to the 383,000 workers which produced it, every single employee would have made an extra \$12,715 for that year alone! (Keep in mind that the average salary of a full-time Starbucks barista last year was \$24,211 *before taxes*.) This also ignores the disproportionate split of the treasure *within* the company. Starbucks CEO Kevin Johnson received \$20.7 million last year (an astounding 39% raise from 2020). If his salary alone were split, every worker would have received an extra \$54—the equivalent of a tank of gas today. Instead, much of those ill-gotten gains were reinvested, becoming another cache of capital; the cycle begins anew.

The inescapable logic of Marx's notion of expropriation is that there have never, been nor ever will be, so-called self-made rich people. They might have clawed their way up to a commanding height—accumulating enough capital by working for others that they managed to escape wage labor. But once in such a position they task others (employees, contractors, employees of contractors) to do the real work, skimming a portion of the wealth these underlings produce.

But the non-material forms of exploitation—which is how we use the term colloquially—are no less important to appreciating capitalism's destructiveness. Among other things we may list: a grueling pace of work, insufficient breaks, wear and tear on the body, inconsistent schedules, petty tyrannies, hetero-sexist and racial discrimination (some very material such as pay gaps), sexual harassment, heavy surveillance, and a long *et cetera*. To all this we might add a recent phenomenon described by



David Graeber: the bifurcation between what he calls *shit jobs*—socially necessary but tedious and, curiously, poorly compensated (hairdressing, sanitation work, farming, truck driving, food service)—and *bullshit jobs*—completely unnecessary if not inherently damaging, usually white collar, and often demoralizing (corporate lawyering, asset management, human resources, most lobbying, public relations, investing). Another taxing aspect of work particularly noteworthy in the service industry: emotional labor. In her landmark book

The Managed Heart: The Commercialization of Human Feeling (1983), Arlie Russell Hochchild interviewed airline attendants and debt collectors, occupations that she called the “toe and heel of capitalism,” respectively. Attendants are the toe because they are expected to embody the company face, its best foot forward. Most of their job is to manage the emotions of scores of fearful, tired, angry, hungry passengers, which requires them to suppress all feelings

Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism by Eve Illouz and Hochchild's *The Managed Heart* are excellent entry points a study of capitalism's impact on our sentiments. In *Cold Intimacies*, Illouz illustrates how the “emotional style,” as she calls it, took hold as the language of business, with the effect that our psychologies have been harnessed and possibly forever changed by it.

of their own and don the false smile, an air of helpfulness and cheer. Meanwhile, debt collectors—the heel, the firm stance—must respond to stressed, harassed, sick, and/or outraged consumers behind on their bills by manipulating, projecting threats, and heaping unkindness. The question that Hochchild asks, and with which all emotional laborers must grapple: What happens if the suppression of feeling or a disposition toward hostility follows you home, infects your private life?

A personal anecdote that sums up capitalism as we most experience it. In the mid-tens I found myself stuck at a highly-exploitative—meant colloquially and in the marxist sense—coffee shop that had been advertised as low pace, fun, and lucrative. It was on the campus of an elite university, the pay \$10.15 *without* tips (heaven forbid rich kids have to drop more crumbs). It was a chain eager to point out that it was *local, locally roasted, all fair trade*. The owner was a devout Christian; a copy of *God in a Cup* graced his office bookshelf—a book about ruthless coffee entrepreneurship and, somehow, also doing good. He'd pall around with us and occasionally even work a shift along our side (too full of a grating pizzazz). Eventually he recruited another investor. For an entire day both sat at some tables nearby or stood in a corner behind the counter, watching us and the line of customers, making notes, cataloging our every move, speaking of but never to us. They were attempting to Taylorize* our operation but without much success; we were already working at peak efficiency. From open to close we endured a virtually permanent line of highly entitled trust-funded student-customers, around whom we were

always to keep our cool. (Like the person that threw a full cup of hot coffee at us. Or the guy that haughtily and regularly ordered a six-shot of espresso over ice twice daily until my manager cut him off, fearing he'd have a heart attack. We listened to him twice loudly chew out his dad over the phone about not depositing more money into his account.). The six of us on staff labored continuously over the two espresso machines, coffee makers, sandwich and pastry counter, and cash register. It was a grueling scramble that left me exhausted, my legs and feet in pain, and after three months, 15 pounds lighter.

As the semester came to a close, we were invited to a Christmas party. The owner had splurged on some catering. He gushed over our performance, particularly at our location which had experienced a 25% increase in sales and volume over the past semester. (The old guard was well aware that the pace had significantly quickened and had been grumbling about it constantly.) Foolishly I calculated a 10%, 15%, dare to dream 20%, raise in my head. Maybe a sizable year-end bonus? If the boss was making a quarter more money, surely we who made those profits possible at all deserved something more. But no. Apart from profuse *thank yous*, the boss had gotten us this nice holiday spread and one additional week's furlow, unpaid of course, because he had gotten it wrong and the university would be virtually empty for two weeks, not one. Which amounted to \$304 less than I had counted on netting after taxes. Merry Christmas. Jesus died for your sins, not your student loans. The next day, I took over the register—the least liked job station—and exacted my revenge. For most of my eight-hour shift, at the point-of-sale for that permanent line, I undercharged every drink, gave away pastries, conceded espresso shots into coffee, and so on. I kept a mental tally, which I would discretely update on a pad next to the register. I turned it into a game (which is how work ought to be). With half an hour left to my shift, I turned the register over to a colleague with a satisfied smile, having cost the boss over \$600 in lost sales—the very amount I stood to lose from two weeks' furlow. It was my most enjoyable day at work there. As soon as the cafe reopened in January, like a dutiful employee I put in my two weeks' notice. I was immediately removed from the schedule. And headed off to what was in some ways an even worse coffee shop job.

Exploitation lies on a great continuum, from 1% to 99% of profits created, from worst to best conditions for work. To win more rest, better wages, and agreeable working environments (which is to say, less exploitation) are laudable and inevitable goals for any laborer. But until workers receive 100% of what their work creates (at which point they would cease to be employees); until workers are able to decide the conditions of their toil; until this cycle depicted above of brute accumulation begetting capital to create surplus value (and on again), under the auspices of the state; in short, until capitalism is put down, no matter how better off we are individually or collectively, we will always be at risk. The gauge of more or less exploitation is constantly shifting and is the stuff of day-to-day politics. We may slap bandages on society but in the end, we must do surgery.

* **Taylorize** (n): Also known as Scientific Management, this technique was developed by Fredrick Winslow Taylor as a way to speed up, rationalize, and make the productive process more efficient. This involved stealing craft knowledge and practice from workers and giving it to management, enabling it to develop systems of mass production. Taylor accomplished this by capturing every single human movement (every turn of a screw, every swivel in a work bench, every hammer stroke) involved in creating something by using cameras and stopwatches. This, of course, deprived laborers of power and created soul-crushing work conditions that reduced people to automatons. Of critical note, Lenin and Stalin (state capitalists) were as fond of Taylorism as was Henry Ford.

A Fable on Usury

One day Nasruddin's neighbor, a notorious miser, came by to announce he was throwing a party for some friends. Could he borrow some of Nasruddin's pots? Nasruddin didn't have many but said he was happy to lend him whatever he had. The next day the miser returned, carrying Nasruddin's three pots, and one tiny additional one.

“What's that?” asked Nasruddin.

“Oh, that's the offspring of the pots. They reproduced during the time they were with me.”

Nasruddin shrugged and accepted them, and the miser left happy that he had established the principle of interest. A month later Nasruddin was throwing a party, and he went over to borrow a dozen pieces of his neighbor's much more luxurious crockery. The miser complied. Then he waited a day. And then another. On the third day, the miser came by and asked what had happened to his pots.

“Oh them?” Nasruddin said sadly. “It was a terrible tragedy. They died.”

—Nasruddin, 13th century Sufi (quoted in David Graeber's *Debt*)