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**ISSUE 84  
NUMBER 4  
VOLUME 26**



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# AMASS

## **EDITOR:**

JOHN O'KANE

## **MANAGING EDITOR:**

DAN MARCUS

## **EDITORIAL CONSULTANT:**

ALEXIS MANNING

## **ASSISTANT EDITORS:**

DAVID GORDON

ASHLEY GREEN

## **DESIGNER:**

HELI SWENSSON

## **INTERN:**

CINDY THAYER

## **CONTRIBUTORS:**

SPARKY BALDWIN

WILLIAM BLUM

ELLEN BROWN

NOAM CHOMSKY

ROBBIE CONAL

MARC COOPER

SLOBODAN DIMITROV

S.A. GRIFFIN

TOM HAYDEN

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON

JAMES KUNSTLER

NOMI PRINS

PETER DALE SCOTT

SANDRA TSING-LOH

DAVE ZIRIN

## **COVER:**

“COINING A NEW LEAF”

HELI SWENSSON



“Coining a New Leaf”

Cover Design by Heli Swensson.

A confluence of crises—lockdowns and business closures, mandates and worker shortages, supply chain disruptions and inflation, sanctions and war—have compounded to trigger food shortages; and we have been warned that they may last longer than the food stored in our pantries. What to do? Jim Gale, founder of Food Forest Abundance, pointed out in a recent interview with Del Bigtree that in the United States there are 40 million acres of lawn. Lawns are the most destructive monoculture on the planet, absorbing more resources and pesticides than any other crop, without providing any yield. If we were to turn 30% of that lawn into permaculture-based food gardens, says Gale, we could be food self-sufficient without relying on imports or chemicals. Permaculture is a gardening technique that “uses the inherent qualities of plants and animals combined with the natural characteristics of landscapes and structures to produce a life-supporting system for city and country, using the smallest practical area.”

- Ellen Brown

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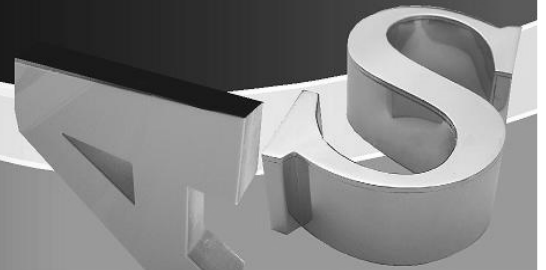


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# FOOD SHORTAGE SOLUTION IN YOUR OWN BACKYARD

E L L E N B R O W N

A confluence of crises—lockdowns and business closures, mandates and worker shortages, supply chain disruptions and inflation, sanctions and war—have compounded to trigger food shortages; and we have been warned that they may last longer than the food stored in our pantries. What to do?

Jim Gale, founder of Food Forest Abundance, pointed out in a recent interview with Del Bigtree that in the United States there are 40 million acres of lawn. Lawns are the most destructive monoculture on the planet, absorbing more resources and pesticides than any other crop, without providing any yield. If we were to turn 30% of that lawn into permaculture-based food gardens, says Gale, we could be food self-sufficient without relying on imports or chemicals.

Permaculture is a gardening technique that “uses the inherent qualities of plants and animals combined with the natural characteristics of landscapes and structures to produce a life-supporting system for city and country, using the smallest practical area.”

Russian families have shown the possibilities, using permaculture methods on simple cottage gardens or allotments called dachas. As Dr. Leon Sharashkin, a Russian translator and editor with a PhD in forestry from the University of Missouri, explains:

“Essentially, what Russian gardeners do is demonstrate that gardeners can feed the world – and you do not need any GMOs, industrial farms, or any other technological gimmicks to guarantee everybody’s got enough food to eat. Bear in mind that Russia only has 110 days of growing season per year – so in the US, for example, gardeners’ output could be substantially greater. Today, however, the area taken up by lawns in the US is two times greater than that of Russia’s gardens – and it produces nothing but a multi-billion-dollar lawn care industry.”

## The Dachas Model

Dachas are small wooden houses on a small plot

of land, typically just 600 meters (656 yards) in size. In Soviet Russia, they were allocated free of charge on the theory that the land belonged to the people. They were given to many public servants; and families not given a dacha could get access to a plot of land in an allotment association, where they could grow vegetables, visit regularly to tend their kitchen gardens and gather crops.

Dachas were originally used mainly as country vacation getaways. But in the 1990s, they evolved from a place of rest into a major means of survival. That was when the Russian economy suffered from what journalist Anne Williamson called in congressional testimony the “rape of Russia.” The economy was destroyed and then plundered by financial oligarchs, who swooped in to buy assets at fire sale prices.

Stripped of other resources, Russian families turned to their dachas to grow food. Dr. Sharashkin observed that the share of food gardening in national agriculture increased from 32% in 1990 to over 50% by 2000. In 2004, food gardens accounted for 51% of the total agricultural output of the Russian Federation – greater than the contribution of the whole electric power generation industry; greater than all of the forestry, wood-processing and pulp and paper industries; and significantly greater than the coal, natural gas and oil refining industries taken together.

Dachas are now a codified right of Russian citizens. In 2003, the government signed the Private Garden Plot Act into law, granting citizens free plots of land ranging from 1 to 3 hectares each. (A hectare is about 2.5 acres.) Dr. Sharashkin opined in 2009 that “with 35 million families (70% of Russia’s population) ... producing more than 40% of Russia’s agricultural output, this is in all likelihood the

most extensive microscale food production practice in any industrially developed nation.”

In a 2014 article titled “Dacha Gardens—Russia’s Amazing Model for Urban Agriculture”, Sara Pool wrote that Russia obtains “over 50% agricultural products from family garden plots. The backyard gardening model uses around 3% arable land, and accounts for roughly 92% of all Russian potatoes, 87% of all fruit, 77% vegetables, and 59% all Russian meat according to the Russian Federal State Statistic Service.”

## Our Beautiful but Toxic and Wasteful Green Lawns

Rather than dachas, we in the West have pristine green lawns, which not only produce no food but involve chemical and mechanical maintenance that is a major contributor to water and air pollution. Lawns are the

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– Ellen Brown





single largest irrigated crop in the U.S., covering nearly 32 million acres. This is a problem particularly in the western U.S. states, which are currently suffering from reduced food production due to drought. Data compiled by Urban Plantations from the EPA, the Public Policy Institute of California, and the Alliance for Water Efficiency suggests that gardens use 66% less water than lawns. In the U.S., fruits and vegetables are grown on only about 10 million acres. In theory, then, if the space occupied by American lawns were converted to food gardens, the country could produce four times as many fruits and vegetables as it does now.

A study from NASA scientists in collaboration with researchers in the Mountain West estimated that American lawns cover an area that is about the size of Texas and is three times larger than that used for any other irrigated crop in the United States. The study was not, however, about the growth of lawns but about their impact on the environment and water resources. It found that “maintaining a well-manicured lawn uses up to 900 liters of water per person per day and reduces [carbon] sequestration effectiveness by up to 35 percent by adding emissions from fertilization and the operation of mowing equipment.” To combat water and pollution problems, some cities have advocated abandoning the great green lawn in favor of vegetable gardens, local native plants, meadows or just letting the grass die. But well-manicured lawns are an established U.S. cultural tradition; and some municipalities have banned front-yard gardens as not meeting neighborhood standards of aesthetics. Some homeowners, however, have fought back. Florida ended up passing a law in July 2019 that prohibits towns from banning edible gardens for aesthetic reasons; and in California, a bill was passed in 2014 that allows yard use for “personal agriculture” (defined as “use of land where an individual cultivates edible plant crops for personal use or donation”). As noted in a *Los Angeles Times* op-ed:

“The Legislature recognized that lawn care is resource intensive, with lawns being the largest irrigated crop in the United States offering no nutritional gain. Finding that 30% to 60% of residential water is used for watering lawns, the Legislature believes these resources could be allocated to more productive activities, including growing food, thus increasing access to healthy options for low-income individuals.”



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Despite how large they loom in the American imagination, immaculate green lawns maintained by pesticides, herbicides and electric lawnmowers are a relatively recent cultural phenomenon in the United States. In the 1930s, chemicals were not recommended. Weeds were controlled either by pulling them by hand or by keeping chickens. Chemical use became popular only after World War II, and it has grown significantly since. According to the EPA, close to 80 million U.S. households spray 90 million pounds of pesticides and herbicides on their lawns each year. A 1999 study by the United States Geological Survey found that 99% of urban water streams contain pesticides, which pollute our drinking water and create serious health risks for wildlife, pets, and humans. Among other disorders, these chemicals are correlated with an increased risk of cancers, nervous system disorders, and a seven-fold increased risk of childhood leukemia.

That's just the pollution in our water supply. Other problems with our lawn fetish are air and noise pollution generated by gas-powered lawn and garden equipment. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that this equipment is responsible for 5% of U.S. air pollution. Americans use about 800 million gallons of gas per year just mowing their lawns.

Yet even people who recognize the downsides of lawnmowers and chemicals continue to use them, under pressure to keep up appearances for the sake of the neighborhood. That cultural bias could change, however, in the face of serious food shortages. And while yards left to dirt and weeds may be unsightly, well-maintained permaculture gardens are aesthetically appealing without the use of chemicals or mowing.

**Homegrown Food: Organic, Non-GMO, and No Fossil Fuels Required**

Local garden farming does not need chemical fertilizers or gas-guzzling machinery to thrive, as the Russian dacha farmers demonstrated. Dr. Sharashkin wrote in his 2008 doctoral thesis:

“[T]he Soviet government had the policy of allowing dacha gardening only on marginal, unproductive, or overexploited lands that could not be used in state-run agriculture. And it is on exactly these lands that gardeners have consistently been producing large crops of vegetables and fruits ever since private gardens were re-authorized in 1941....[M]ost of the gardeners grow their produce without chemical fertilizers. When the practice [of industrial chemical use] subsided in the 1990s as the output of collective farming dwindled and was replaced by household production, significant abatement of environmental pollution with agrochemicals (especially that of watersheds) was observed. [Emphasis added.]”

Most of Russia's garden produce is grown not only without agrochemicals but without genetically modified seeds, which were banned in Russia in 2016. As Mitchel Cohen reports in *Covert Action Magazine*, some GMO use has crept back in, but a bill for a full ban on the cultivation of genetically modified crops is currently making its way

through the Duma (the ruling Russian assembly).

Growing your own food conserves petroleum resources not only because it requires no tractors or other machinery but because it needn't be hauled over long distances in trucks, trains or ships. Food travels 1,500 miles on average before it gets to your dinner table, and nutrients are lost in the process. Families who cannot afford the healthy but pricey organic food in the supermarket can grow their own.

Prof. Sharaskin noted that gardens also have psychological benefits. He cited studies showing that personal interaction with plants can reduce stress, fear and fatigue, and can lower blood pressure and muscle tension. Gardening also reconnects us with our neighbors and the earth. Sharaskin quotes Leo Tolstoy:

“One of the first and universally acknowledged preconditions for happiness is living in close contact with nature, i.e., living under the open sky, in the light of the sun, in the fresh air; interacting with the earth, plants, and animals.”

**From Crisis to Opportunity**

Today, people in the West are undergoing something similar to the “rape of Russia” at the hands of financial oligarchs. Oligarchical giants like BlackRock and Blackstone come to mind, along with “the Davos crowd” – that exclusive cartel of international bankers, big businessmen, media, and politicians meeting annually at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland.

WEF founder Klaus Schwab has declared the current confluence of crises to be “a rare but narrow window of opportunity to reflect, reimagine, and reset our world.” It is also a rare but narrow opportunity for us, the disenfranchised, to reclaim our plundered assets and the power to issue our own money, upgrading the economy in the service of the people and reimagining food systems and our own patches of land, however small.

For food sustainability, we can take a lesson from the successful Russian dachas by forming our own family and community food gardens. Russia has also seen the burgeoning growth of eco-villages – subsistence communities made up of multiple family cottages, typically including community areas with a school, clinic, theater, and festival grounds. Forming self-sufficient communities and “going local” is a popular movement in the West today as well.

A corollary is the independent cryptocurrency movement. We can combine these two movements to fund our local food gardens with food-backed community currencies or cryptocurrencies. Crypto “coins” bought now would act like forward contracts, serving as an advance against future productivity, redeemable at harvest time in agricultural produce.

Ellen Brown is an attorney, chair of the Public Banking Institute, and author of thirteen books including *Web of Debt*, *The Public Bank Solution*, and *Banking on the People: Democratizing Money in the Digital Age*. She also co-hosts a radio program on PRN.FM called “It's Our Money.” Her 300+ blog articles are posted at [EllenBrown.com](http://EllenBrown.com).



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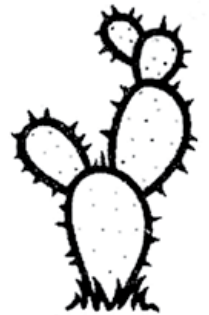
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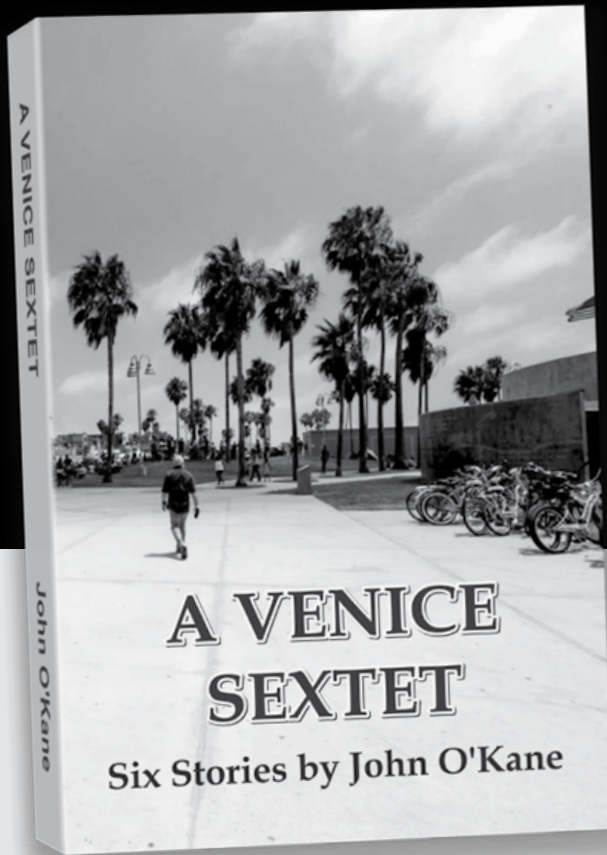


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Thanks, I just picked it up.

“One Adam 12,  
See the Woman.”

A toast (clink)

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never be again.

LA lost her promise:

She ran out of room.

– James O’Kane

James O’Kane is a poet and Iowa Legislator Emeritus



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# THE SECOND AMENDMENT FRAUD

J O N S C H W A R Z

**T**wenty-four hours before the Supreme Court eliminated the constitutional right to an abortion, it significantly expanded gun rights with its decision in *New York State Rifle & Pistol Association, Inc. v. Bruen*. In the Thursday ruling, the same six conservative justices who struck down *Roe v. Wade* voided an 111-year-old New York law that required applicants for a concealed carry permit to demonstrate that they had a special, specific need for self-defense.

This in turn will require other states with significant gun regulations — California, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Hawaii — to change their laws. Other restrictions on guns will likely fall to lawsuits.

President Joe Biden then released a milquetoast statement: “I am deeply disappointed by the Supreme Court’s ruling ... the Second Amendment is not absolute.” New York Gov. Kathy Hochul said, “I’m sorry this dark day has come — that we’re supposed to go back to what was in place since 1788 when the Constitution of the United States America was ratified. And I would like to point out to the Supreme Court justices that the only weapons at that time were muskets.”

These responses should drive anyone concerned about America’s horrifying gun violence berserk with frustration — because they concede nearly the entire argument to the right before they begin. It is not the case that the Second Amendment was intended to grant individuals the right to carry arms, and thus present-day supporters of gun control now have to figure a way around that. On the contrary: The Second Amendment was never meant to have anything to do with individual gun rights. (It’s also distressing that Hochul, who graduated from law school, does not seem to know that while the U.S. Constitution was ratified in 1788, the Bill of Rights wasn’t until 1791.)

The Second Amendment was never meant to have anything to do with individual gun rights.

The right argument for politicians to make on this issue — what’s both factually accurate and politically important — is that of Warren Burger. Burger was a Republican who was appointed chief justice of the Supreme Court by President Richard Nixon in 1969 and served for 17 years until 1986. In retirement in 1991, Burger said that the Second Amendment “has been the subject of one of the greatest pieces of fraud, I repeat the word fraud, on the American public by special interest groups that I have ever seen in my lifetime.”

“The very language of the Second Amendment,” wrote Burger, “refutes any argument that it was intended to guarantee every citizen an unfettered right to any kind of weapon he or she desires. ... The Framers clearly intended to secure the right to bear arms essentially for military purposes.”

Understanding this requires some knowledge of U.S. history, but not that much.

The 13 original U.S. states were first bound together by the Articles of Confederation, which were ratified in 1781 just as the American Revolution effectively ended. But the system didn’t work well, with the central government so weak that the “united” part of the United States was largely a joke.

An effort began, led by James Madison, to create a new governing structure. This eventually became the Constitution, which was drafted in Philadelphia in 1787. But then it had to be ratified by the states.

This was by no means a sure thing. One key point of contention between the Federalists who supported the Constitution and the Anti-Federalists who opposed it were concerns over a standing army. “Standing armies are dangerous to the liberties of a people,” the Anti-Federalists stated. “The truth of the position might be confirmed by the history of almost every nation in the world.” And the Constitution gave the prospective new federal Congress the power “to raise and support Armies.”

Madison did not claim this was not an issue. However, he argued in *Federalist No. 46*:

“The State governments, with the people on their side, would be able to repel the danger ... citizens with arms in their hands, officered by men chosen from among

**The final language of the Second Amendment was, of course, “A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.”**

– Jon Schwarz



# ABOUT BEYOND BAROQUE

Beyond Baroque Literary Arts Center is one of the nation's most successful and influential grassroots incubators of literary art. Founded in 1968, and housed in the original Venice City Hall building in Venice, California, it is a nonprofit public space dedicated to cultivating new writing and expanding the public's knowledge of poetry, fiction, literature, and art through cultural events and community interaction. The Center offers a diverse variety of liter-ary and arts programming, including readings, workshops, art exhibits, and education. The Center also houses a bookstore with the largest collection of new poetry books on the west side of Los Angeles; the Mike Kelley Gallery, which specializes in text and language-focused visual art; and a 50,000 vol-ume archive of small press and limited-edition publications that chronicles the history of poetry movements in Los Angeles and beyond.

Few literary spaces have done more to cultivate innovative art from cultural outsiders, or to shape emerging artistic movements. Across five decades Be-yond Baroque has nurtured the Venice Beats, cradled the Los Angeles punk scene, and provided crucial support to a series of seminal experimental writ-ers and artists that include Dennis Cooper, Wanda Coleman, Mike Kelley, and Will Alexander.

It's legendary free workshops have profoundly shaped Los Angeles literature by helping to launch a number of influential careers, including those of Kate Braverman, Tom Waits, Leland Hickman, Bob Flanagan, Eloise Klein Healy, David Trinidad, Jim Krusoe, Exene Cervenkova, Amy Gerstler, Paul Vange-listi, Michael Ondaatje, Harry Northup, Brendan Constantine, Jenny Factor, and Sarah Maclay.

It's reading and performance series have exposed L.A. audiences to some of the world's most notable writers and artists, often at early stages in their ca-reers, including Allen Ginsberg, Amiri Baraka, Raymond Carver, X, Patti Smith, Viggo Mortensen, Paul Auster, Chris Kraus, Eileen Myles, Luis J. Ro-driguez, Dana Gioia, Hector Tobar, David St. John, Robin Coste Lewis, and Maggie Nelson.

Today the Center continues to provide a vital cultural forum through it's free workshops, reading series, youth programming, and artistic gatherings.

## **Beyond Baroque's Mission**

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## SECOND AMENDMENT

themselves, fighting for their common liberties, and united and conducted by governments possessing their affections and confidence. It may well be doubted, whether a militia thus circumstanced could ever be conquered by such a proportion of regular troops.”

Madison then pointed to the success of the American Revolution itself as proof of the effectiveness of militias against a regular army.

To assuage the concerns of those on the fence about the Constitution, Federalists in various states proposed that its ratification be linked to the adoption of amendments limiting the power of the federal government. This was crucial: As the National Archives explains it, “The Constitution might never have been ratified if the framers hadn’t promised to add a Bill of Rights.”

This was the context for the writing of the Second Amendment. The Bill of Rights was partially based on the 1776 Virginia Declaration of Rights. As the Library of Congress says, the Virginia Declaration was “uniquely influential” and “used by James Madison in drawing up the Bill of Rights.” Section XIII of the Declaration read: “That a well-regulated militia, composed of the body of the people, trained to arms, is the proper, natural, and safe defense of a free state; that standing armies, in time of peace, should be avoided as dangerous to liberty; and that, in all cases, the military should be under strict subordination to, and be governed by, the civil power.”

The final language of the Second Amendment was, of course, “A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.”

A straightforward interpretation of this history was generally observed for a long time. In a key 1939 Supreme Court case, *United States v. Miller*, two men had traveled across state lines with an unregistered shotgun with a shortened barrel in violation of the National Firearms Act of 1934. A lower court held that part of the Act was an unconstitutional violation of the Second Amendment. In refuting this, the court declared that the “obvious purpose” of the Second Amendment was “to assure the continuation and render possible the effectiveness of [state militia] forces. ... It must be interpreted and applied with that end in view.”

In the legal world more generally, no law review article from 1888 (when they were first indexed) through 1959 ever concluded the Second Amendment guaranteed an individual right to a gun.

It’s only recently that the Supreme Court has veered toward its current view. In a key 2008 case, the court held that the meaning of “a well-regulated Militia” was “all able-bodied men.” Hence it was unconstitutional for the government to prevent an individual from possessing a weapon even if it was “unconnected with militia service.”


This perspective clearly requires bizarre mental gymnastics and a resolute commitment to ignoring basic historical facts. But that’s the bread and butter of the current Supreme Court. To get a sense of where they fall on the political spectrum, it’s useful to compare their perspective

to that of Jay Bybee, a judge on the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. In a recent decision, Bybee wrote, “Our review of more than 700 years of English and American legal history reveals a strong theme: government has the power to regulate arms in the public square. ... Indeed, we can find no general right to carry arms into the public square for self-defense.” Bybee is best known for signing off on the George W. Bush administration’s memos authorizing torture.

Meanwhile, away from the Supreme Court’s dense opinions, the case for eliminating limits on gun rights is simpler. On the wall of the lobby at the National Rifle Association’s headquarters in Virginia, you will read the stirring words “... the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.” I.e., the inconvenient beginning of the Second Amendment has been edited out. So, Warren Burger was certainly right to say in 1991 that “the American people should have a firm understanding of the true origin and purpose of the Second Amendment.” But the unfortunate fact is that they definitely do not. The conservative faction of the Supreme Court likes it that way, and even top Democrats don’t seem inclined to explain it to anyone.

Jon Schwarz writes for the *Intercept* and other publications.

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# THE UNSINKABLE DONALD TRUMP

TIEN KIMBALL NGUYEN

A majority of Republicans don't believe in dinosaurs, but they do believe the election was stolen. L. Ron Hubbard would be envious of the leader of this pack.

Democracy is teetering on the edge of permanent destruction in this country, and if the Democrats don't do something about it quickly and aggressively it'll be too late. And in fact it may already be too late since Senators Sinema and Manchin won't block a filibuster to pass voter suppression laws—or pretty much anything else President Biden wants to do.

When Trump incited the Capitol insurrection on January 6, 2021, many prominent Republicans and Fox TV hosts agreed that Trump needed to act immediately to call off his followers to stop them from causing even more destruction. Furthermore, as has been proven by recordings (audio and video), emails, and text messages, a number of these MAGA loyalists even suggested that Trump resign. Republican Minority Leaders Kevin McCarthy and Mitch McConnell openly denounced what Trump had done. Even on the Senate floor, Trump bootlicker Lindsey Graham suggested that there was nothing to find relative to faulty election results. Ted Cruz, meanwhile, called the insurrection a terrorist act.

Ah, but all these sober and accurate reactions from Trump loyalists didn't last. Before long, Kevin McCarthy was at Mar-a-Lago kissing the mob don's ring and Ted Cruz was on Tucker Carlson's unfair and unbalanced show seeking forgiveness. And Lindsey Graham? Well which way is the wind blowing today...even flip-flops have more of a spine than this guy.

Many in the GOP had hoped that Trump's actions leading up to and on January 6 might have permanently cooked his goose. Countless Republicans secretly hoped for Trump's impeachment the second time around so they wouldn't have to worry about offending Trump's base in the future, since impeachment would have barred Trump

from ever running for public office again. And that then could have been pinned on the radical left witch-hunt Dems. But oh no... Trump remains the undisputed leader of the Republican Party! Don't believe me? If you're a Republican candidate and asked today if the election was stolen, you must answer YES; otherwise your political career is over and Trump's goons will show up at your house and threaten you and your children, sometimes with death. Ah, democracy...ah, freedom.

Trump famously said in early 2016 while campaigning, "I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody, and I wouldn't lose any voters, OK?" And he is 100 percent correct. The infamous "bus tape" didn't change any minds, and neither did shelves of books and interviews from lifelong Republican Trump ex-appointees (Kelley, Tillerson, Krebs, Barr, Esper, Bolton) claiming "he's nuts, dangerous, unhinged, a moron." Trump's own boatload of lies and nonsensical

**Many election deniers are currently being voted into office as we speak to actually steal the next election...and the Democrats have come to a gun fight with a knife.**

— Tien Kimball Nguyen

rhetoric, including asking people to inject bleach to cure COVID, his "it's all about me"/"you're a loser if you are not a Trumper" attitude, and the countless lawsuits piled up all around him hasn't changed the minds of his MAGA Base. Therefore, the GOP has decided to accept the fact that the MAGA base cult is needed to ensure their control of power and Trump has his base in lockstep. The GOP, no matter how objective or centrist they may actually be, must capitulate to a man many Republican politicians completely despise. Furthermore, the continued loyalty of MAGA cult members can only be seen as good for the Republican Party and their politicians who are owned by corporate America

and rich donors. While the cult base is hunting down non-Trumpers or beating up CNN cameramen, the rich continue paying less taxes and corporate America enjoys further deregulation. The dinosaur deniers have played their part, while they of course will pay more taxes and get less government benefits.

And Mitch McConnell gets his conservative judges...wonderful...no more right to choose, can't sue gun manufacturers, mass killings continue, and weekends will be cancelled. What's next, I can't buy a box of rubbers? I can't marry a Latina or a white chick (I'm an Asian man)? We're headed to the Dark Ages led by a grifter who disregards all rules and regulation, who

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## (RE)CURRENT EVENTS

himself has had multiple abortions paid for during just the period when he visited Studio 54 in the '80s.

In a sense, the GOP has always used social issues to control the very MAGA base cult that keeps them in the game. Corporate-owned Republican politicians (now more than ever thanks to the legal dark money that pours in courtesy of the Citizens United Supreme Court decision) know that they are there for their clients, not white working-class, undereducated types. But then the dilemma has always been for Republicans, how do we get votes from the very people we are going to screw over? The answer is...wait for it...clever marketing! And no one is better at that than The GOP and Fox News! You want women to have the right to choose, you're a baby killer. You want sensible gun regulation like universal background checks, you're against the Second Amendment and liberals are taking away your guns (this despite weekly mass shootings). You want to cut taxes for the super-rich billionaires, they'll eliminate your jobs and the billionaires will trickle that money back down to you if they don't pay their fair share...uh huh...right. And from the same playbook, all Democrats are radical left pedophile socialists who want to defund the police and teach slavery and homosexuality.

Now you can certainly argue that Democrats leave themselves wide-open to be "Charlie-Browned" time and time again, but Bill Clinton and Barak Obama were able to sell their story much better than the current stable of Democrats who can't deal with all the constant incoming BS.

Trump, who was a Democrat longer than he was a Republican, saw an opportunity for himself and his crime family. He comes from the world of rough-and-tumble real estate in Manhattan and the world of reality TV and a hit show where he was able to fine-tune and polish his already optimal inner charlatan. Long before he became president, Trump would make the rounds with Vince McMahon and pro wrestlers in the Midwest, stepping into the ring with his white shirt, suit, and tie as the crowd marveled at how cool it was that the apprentice boss Mr. Trump was there to entertain them. *The Apprentice* was a perfect Trump vehicle. He's the adorable winner/good guy and the toothless, uneducated fans love him. And all the while he stays inside the ring and doesn't have to get close to the very people he thinks are losers, just like with his cult MAGA base. Trump wouldn't be caught dead having fish sticks, drinking a beer, or roasting marshmallows with his cult followers in their trailer parks. That's the power and the irony of Fox News and Trumpism. Can you see Trump inviting a non-celebrity, non-millionaire to Mar-a-Lago? Yeah, right. Keep your distance, but vote for me, and by the way, send me some money, or buy some more of my baseball caps...we love you! But on and on the Maga cult continues, searching for Easter eggs and waiting for Santa to come down the chimney...shouting "Let's Go, Brandon!"

The question is, between the Mar-a-Lago Mobster and Democrats who believe in detailed policy issues,

who will win that fight? NO MATCH! Dems get pulled to the far left by green and wok/transgender issues and the MAGA cult just charges on. Democrats are up against a lifelong con man who has been appearing in court since the day he was born, and you want to talk about policy? No, go for the jugular...he's a lifelong career criminal...he started an insurrection...he pardoned all his convicted felon friends before he left office! REMINDER: Trumper loyalist appointees who were driven out or who came to their senses are now all non-Trumpers, "losers", or part of the Deep State. How can that be? Moreover, those associates still loyal to Trump including Quid Pro Trump himself never want you to look in the trunk of their car, meaning they fight every subpoena and never release any documents/evidence requested by any court. What are they hiding? "Officer, please don't look in the trunk of my car..." It wouldn't take Sherlock Holmes long to figure out what's really going on here.

Many election deniers are currently being voted into office as we speak to actually steal the next election... and the Democrats have come to a gun fight with a knife. What's the detailed, all-out, planned counterattack by the Dems? Thanks to the Senate situation, they're stuck in deep mud for now, so they must rethink their strategy... but I don't see it happening. Being upset and focusing on policy issues will never stop an out-of-control autocrat who sees himself as above the law.

If a tyrannical right-wing minority is dictating to the majority of people who believe in a women's right to choose and sensible gun regulation, we have what is called a dictatorship. And many Republicans still think the election was stolen even though there is not one shred of evidence that it was. Other right-wingers believe that more prayer in schools is the answer to stopping school shootings. Alas, every time I travel to Europe no one can believe that Americans actually give their credit card numbers to televangelists who promise eternal life for a small contribution. P.T. Barnum was right...Trump won the election and Santa Claus is coming to town.



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history bends before the orthodoxy of bombs  
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a global light of muted lifetimes  
baked into the sacred tapestry of night

all the quiet stars falling like iron dice  
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– S.A. Griffin

S.A. Griffin is the author of *Dreams Gone Mad with Hope* and co-editor of *The Outlaw Bible of American Poetry*.





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# THE DECLARATION: CREATING A PEGASUS IN PARCHMENT

DAN MARCUS

*I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated, by succeeding Generations, as the great anniversary Festival....It ought to be solemnized with Pomp and Parade, with Shews, Games, Sports, Guns, Bells, Bonfires and Illuminations from one End of this Continent to the other from this Time forward forever more.*

-John Adams

(in a letter to his wife Abigail on July 3, 1776)

**C**learly, among his other prodigious accomplishments, the venerable Mr. Adams proved to be a pretty good special events prognosticator, right down to the “Illuminations” (fireworks, anyone?). Except, that is, for one minor detail—the date. He was referring in his letter, not to July 4, but July 2. This diminutive man, once dubbed “the colossus of independence,” would have missed the picnic. In fact, as we’ll later see, he often did.

Our story, however, begins nearly a month earlier, on June 7. The year: 1776. In Philadelphia on that date, Richard Henry Lee, a delegate to the Second Continental Congress from Virginia, presented a resolution calling for the thirteen colonies of British America to declare their independence from the Crown.

It’s hard to realize today what a fearful step that would be. A few months earlier it was widely considered unthinkable. Most colonists still viewed themselves as proud British subjects. Sure, Parliament had been heavy-handed in the treatment of its American possessions, but loyalty to King George III remained intact. He was seen as ill-advised, perhaps, but still above the fray. And how could we exist as a nation without a monarch? It just wasn’t done.

So what turned the tide? Several factors. First,

the mother country overplayed its hand. In late 1775, Parliament and King George decided to take a harder line against the increasingly restive and rebellious colonists. This tightening of the screws, in turn, set the stage for one of history’s most striking demonstrations of the power of the pen—a pamphlet first printed in January of 1776. Written and self-published by Thomas Paine, a British émigré of no particular distinction or prominence, it made the case for independence in compelling, colorful language that spoke to people in all walks of life, not just the intelligentsia of the period. It became an instant sensation—the talk of the colonies. A thrilling read to this very day, it pointed to a new world in the making. Even its title has a modern ring: “Common Sense.”

And so, on June 7, Richard Henry Lee presented his resolution calling for independence. But it was decided to postpone voting on it until early July. Why the delay? Bottom line, all the ducks/delegates were not yet in a row. For separation from England to succeed, the colonies needed to present a united front; the final tally could be nothing less than unanimous. The time in-between could be put to productive use preparing a formal announcement that could be trotted out in the event that Lee’s motion prevailed, by no means a foregone conclusion.

So a drafting committee—the Committee of Five—was formed, consisting of John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Roger Sherman, and Robert Livingston. Adams was the favored choice to do the actual writing but, somewhat surprisingly, he handed the honor to Jefferson, who was becoming noted for his “peculiar felicity of expression.” And so, holed up in his boarding house, quill pen in hand, the young Virginian went to work. Upon completion of his first draft a few weeks

later, he dutifully sent copies to both Adams and Franklin for their editorial suggestions.

On July 2, after much gnashing of teeth and butting of heads, the Second Continental Congress voted to pass Lee’s resolution. It was a momentous day and a particular triumph for Adams, who had spearheaded the long and arduous fight for separation. But the flip side of his tireless dedication was a legendary stubbornness. For years thereafter he refused to participate in events that celebrated independence on the fourth.

On July 3 the Congress as a whole turned its attention to the document which had been submitted by

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– Dan Marcus



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the Committee of Five and spent the entire day editing the heck out of it while the sensitive, prideful Jefferson bristled in his chair and the sagely Franklin sat beside him offering words of reassurance.

Which brings us to July 4. On that date in 1776, the final version of the document was approved by the Second Continental Congress. The first public reading took place on July 8 to a crowd gathered in the commons outside the body's meeting place, the Pennsylvania State House, later to be rechristened Independence Hall. The next day, General George Washington ordered it read as a morale booster to his troops gathered outside of New York. In the ensuing weeks and months it circulated throughout the thirteen colonies and, ultimately, across the wide ocean to a fascinated world.

The Declaration was an undeniable hit. And like many hits it was soon forgotten—it was “of the moment,” essentially a skillfully rendered press release for the actual event of declaring independence. But as hits sometimes do, it made a comeback and over the years and came to be regarded as a classic.

How did it happen? First, nostalgia. As the nation entered the third decade of the nineteenth century, a realization began to dawn on some that the iconic events of America's founding were receding into the past. The Declaration of Independence served as a reminder and artifact of the revolutionary era—something tangible to grab onto. But there's another, more substantial reason for the document's durability: magnificent writing. Its graceful phrases effortlessly traverse the gap between politics and poetry.

Someone once said that a camel is a horse designed by a committee. Not so with the Committee of Five. In that never-to-be-repeated instance, the horse turned out to be a Pegasus.

Dan Marcus is a playwright, screenwriter, songwriter, and literary editor.

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# REPLACEMENT THEORY FEAR MONGERING, RESOURCE SCARCITY, AND REPLACEMENT THEORY

J O H N O ' K A N E

“Replacement Theory” (RT), the media affectation on the right, claims there’s a conspiracy on the part of liberals and the left to expand the base of blacks and “people of color”---through open border migration---to gain voting advantages. This has allegedly weakened the white voting base, already weakened by the decline in the white birth rate.

This media has been successful in convincing many of the veracity of this “plot,” but these have been mostly a selective group of followers. A recent Yahoo News/YouGov poll conducted between the 19th and 22nd of May revealed that only 36% of Fox News viewers, for example, ever heard of RT. In fact, just 40% of American adults in the same poll said they had heard of it. And further, it found that only 34% of Americans believe in the underlying idea behind RT. Are these media elite the real conspirators?

Forget “conspiracy” for the moment, but census figures reveal we’ve been evolving into a darker society for some time. As of the last one, 61.6% of the population were categorized as white. This was down from 87.7% in 1970. Immigration policies in place since the early 1960s have been largely responsible. The mostly white European immigration ceased, primarily due to the stabilization of conditions in these home countries, and that from Asia, Africa and South America increased. Those with a darker pigment flooded in to fill the category of “people of color” which has become a fixed label in the recent censuses. So, the 38.4% in the recent census that are non-white includes

12.4% blacks and 26% “people of color.”

And the Democratic Party’s position on race and ethnicity since the mid-1970s has been inflected toward “diversity” as well, as Walter Benn Michaels has shown (*The Trouble with Diversity*, 2006). This has involved efforts to liberally absorb as many blacks and “people of color” as possible into the system under the mantle of inclusiveness. This has mainly been a demographic initiative, intended to expand the numbers of the previously excluded in the belief, a false one according to Michaels, that equality and social justice would follow the greater quantitative absorption. This initiative by the Democrats can hardly be tainted with conspiracy. They were merely translating a certain vision from the Civil Rights legacy into policy.

These changes are consistent with America’s origins as a country that welcomes migrants wanting to become legal immigrants and offers current citizens the opportunity to access the American Dream.

Some of the elite on the right no doubt truly fear retaliation from the expanding pool of darker citizens, perhaps wanting a return to “separate but equal.” But the fears on the part of many, especially in the Republican Party, that these new voting units who will allegedly replace whites and deliver the Democratic agenda whole, or in part, are surely unfounded. According to the AP, a “political shift is beginning to take hold across the US as tens of thousands of swing voters who helped fuel the Democratic Party’s gains in recent years are becoming Republicans” (Steve Peoples and Aaron Kessler, “More Than One Million Voters Switch to GOP,” 6/27/22). This shift

is especially marked among suburban voters, but includes working class whites, Hispanics, blacks, Asians, as well as other ethnic groups.

And since many who’ve migrated from these new target countries to occupy the “people of color” category are educated and have significant financial means, it’s likely they will gravitate toward the Republicans.

Nevertheless, the drumbeat of fear-stoking continues, and it’s apparently effective. Who wants to relinquish their existence to someone else? The more often the replacement claims repeat, the stronger this fear can become, provoking a defensiveness on the part of those

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– John O’Kane

who imagine they're being replaced.

This drumbeat is reinforced by some voices in what Michele Goldberg calls the "diversity, equity, and inclusion industry." This "industry," she suggests, has become "heavy handed" in dictating the terms for executing the anti-racist agenda and inadvertently advances the "right-wing narrative that progressive newspeak is colonizing every aspect of American life" ("The Absurd Side of the Social Justice Industry," *New York Times*, 11/15/2021).

The object of her critique is not the anti-racist movement broadly construed, but the strain of it captured by the recent popularity of "Critical Race Theory" (CRT). The latter has become synonymous with the former in the minds of many, what motors the race narrative of the Biden Democrats among others. Many feel its execution has been too aggressive, alienating long-time supporters of the anti-racist movement that germinated from the Civil Rights Movement. Plus, the focus of CRT is primarily cultural. Diversity and skin color are the dominant categories through which social justice can now be secured.

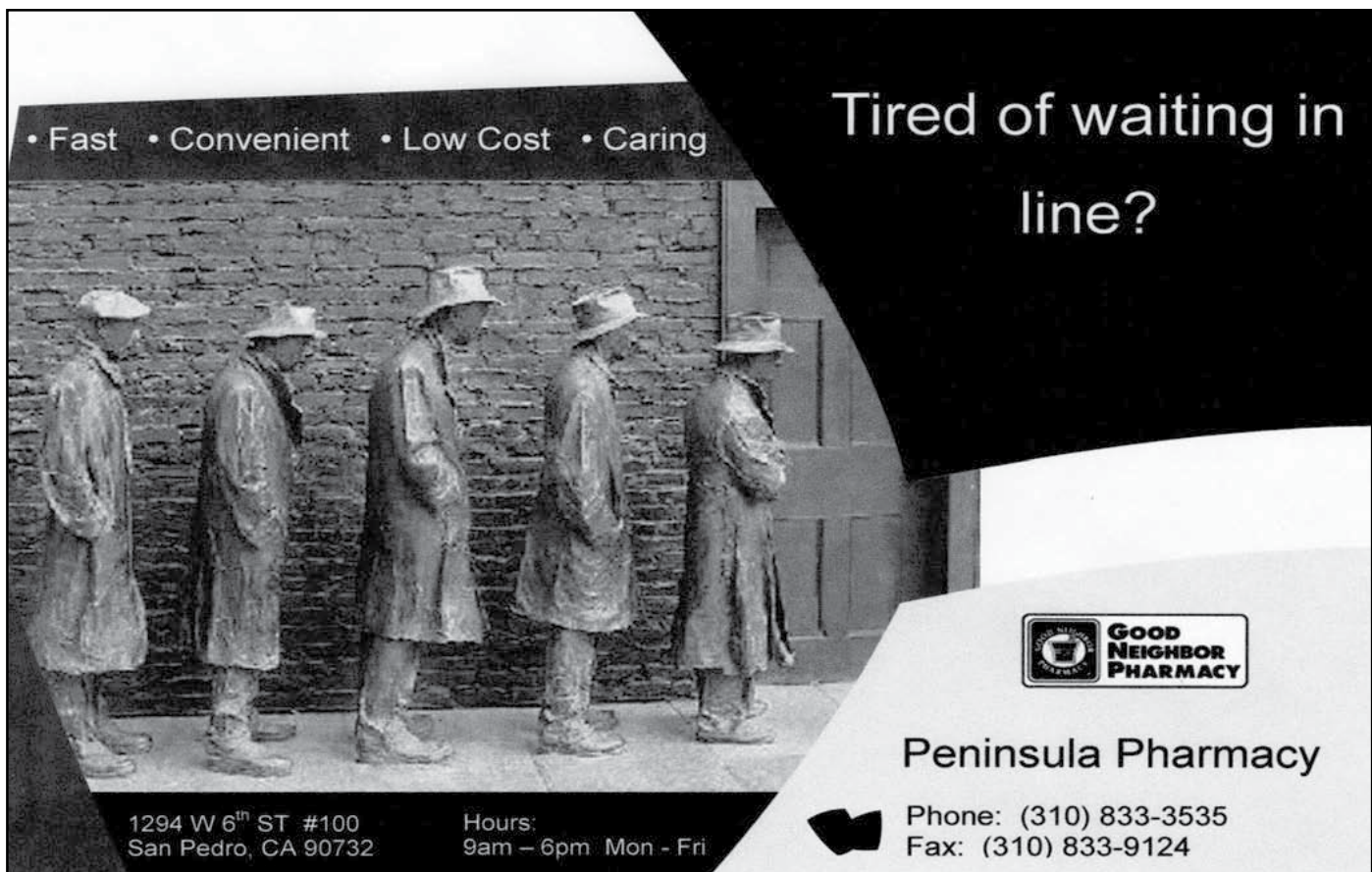
The Democratic Party's focus from the heyday of the Civil Rights Movement to the mid-1970s was on the integration of equality and social justice with the greater absorption of bodies. The evolution away from a strong left diversity, committed to equalizing the races and ethnicities across the spectrum of culture, politics, economics, and society, to a mildly liberal "diversity," mostly committed to a top-down demographic inclusion, is consistent with the Party's shift away from a strong representation of the lower and working classes since the

1970s. This helps explain the Party's recent welcoming of wealthy and educated migrants of color and their inclusion in the "people of color" category together with indigenous blacks and other non-white ethnicities.

CRT surfaces in academia when the strong left diversity expires in the 1970s, remaining relatively dormant until the racialization of public discourse heats up in recent years, especially after the killing of George Floyd.


Voices from this "industry" now strongly suggest if not directly assert, for example, that the real source of this defensiveness comes from inherent beliefs in superiority. Whites do not merely want to avoid being replaced since they've always wanted to be on top of blacks and "people of color." In fact, they're not considered victims at all. And, of course, the alleged link to white nationalism approximates the truth for more and more when perps like the Buffalo and El Paso mass-shooters act through the authority of "manifestoes" that espouse it.

And they unfortunately pump up the right's fantasies by promoting the idea---whenver there's an atrocity involving a black or person of color---that the pool of white nationalists is rapidly increasing. But the tragic fact, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center, which tracks white nationalists and their group affiliations, is that the "the number of white nationalist groups continues to decline after their numbers peaked at 155 in 2019. Many nationwide networks have contracted or entirely fallen apart." This of course doesn't defuse the threat. They're also becoming mainstream, "trying to harness the grievances of Trump supporters into an openly ethnonationalist



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political movement--one they hope will become the core of the Republican Party" ("White Nationalist," 3/9/2022). This visibility could possibly lead to greater control over extremist elements, or to an amplification of their power.

But much of the coverage in some liberal media outlets reinforces these tendencies. Through their repetition coverage and glaring omissions, they insinuate that most mass shootings are racially motivated when in fact a small percentage are (though the right is responsible for most of the political violence). They've avoided an evaluation of the 2020 riots that would expose the claims they were fully executed by blacks, a position held by many on the right, especially white nationalists. They've highlighted acts of violence against blacks by whites while mostly avoiding acts of violence against whites by blacks, or blacks against blacks, thus stoking the fears of many that a racial war could be imminent.

Does a skewed barrage of media reporting on whites committing violence against blacks, for example, incite existing or potential white supremacists?

In this polarized climate, deranged copycat killers surely lie in wait, pushed to perform by the sudden uptick in linguistic bravado from all extremes, perhaps believing the media-spawned alarmism about the pervasiveness of white nationalists and thus feeling comfortable now to join the ranks. Many may see the "evidence" on the TV screens showing a preponderance of black ad images as proof positive---thanks to segments of the right-wing media--that we're in the throes of a black supremacy movement (Though a clear distortion: the mass of unseen, victimized blacks are no better off now than before George Floyd).

The sad truth is, according to the census data, that black violent crime is four times that of whites when adjusted for population differences. And this multiple is much higher when compared to other protected ethnic groups. Plus, the prevalent profiling narrative, that white cops target blacks, isn't supported by independent peer reviewed research (Charles Menifield, Geiguen Shin, and Logan Strother, "Do White Law Enforcement Officers Target Minority Suspects?" *Public Administration Review*, January/February 2019). This is not to suggest such targeting doesn't exist. Given the extent of crime in the black community, and the surplus of white cops in the system (70% are white), clashes are inevitable, but they can't be easily reduced to racism.

Given the significant deficits that slavery has left among the black population, a narrative that attempts to balance the books makes a degree of sense in these polarized times. And, of course, the Biden administration, indebted to the black vote in South Carolina for propelling it to the Democratic nomination, has reinforced this historical correction. The census data doesn't fully reflect these issues, especially the aftereffects from slavery that have never been excised from the communities and continue to spawn crime, and the institutional prejudices against blacks that mark them from an early age.

But the cause of anti-racism would be best served if the full factual stories were factored into an open discussion about these very real deficits. We need greater

access to a more diverse and inclusive media. The claims of RT on the right and the "diversity, equity and inclusion industry" on the left, mutually invested narratives contrived by elite interests, inadvertently advance each other's causes, the resulting media saturation blocking needed debates on racism.

What needs attention in these debates is how a strong left diversity from the Civil Rights era can be politically re-engineered. This could deliver the resources to address the epidemic of inequality affecting so many, especially blacks and "people of color." A focus on correcting the plight of the yet to be placed Americans, those yet to secure stable existences and thus more likely to be seduced by the fear mongering of RT rhetoric---and mostly ignored by these interests---poses the best opportunity to divest the extremes and make real progress toward eliminating racism.

But the current structure of the economy is a sure impediment. The society of extreme inequality we've inherited, evident in the ever-greater share of wealth by the 1%, and which plagues all racial and ethnic groups, not just whites, bodes little hope for the future for many not securely placed. The artificial scarcity of resources for those at the bottom, driven by an economy that privileges monopolistic price-gouging and low wages, for example, is indenturing many to lives of partial slavery. This seeds toxic attitudes toward others and the conditions for hate mongering. It's revealing that the Buffalo shooter's "manifesto" and those of the El Paso and Christchurch shooters as well, point to resource inequality as a crucial deficit of our times (unfortunately none of them were able to reconcile this issue with the reason for killing innocent people!).

While weak on analysis and strong on hate mongering, this waving at the issue of resource inequality by these "manifesto"-shooters is indeed symptomatic of what this generation faces, according to Murtaza Hussain. More and more young people are becoming nihilistic and turning to the right in desperation because they see little hope for the future (*Intercept*, "Racist 'Replacement' Conspiracy is Undergirded by a Real Resource Scarcity," 5/17/2022).

The tendency to blame migrants is often referenced as the result of this hopelessness, a xenophobic targeting of others for blocking the success of domestic citizens. Thumbs up or down on immigration distorts the issues, however. Many who are not blinded by right wing media understand that certain categories of workers, especially laborers, are necessary for the expansion of the economy. What many are not so excited about is the active recruitment by universities and corporations of students and professionals from other countries, and often from "people of color" ones as well. Access to the professions has been extremely competitive for some time in this country, and such recruitment initiatives, underway now for generations, frustrate parents who hope to get their children into good colleges someday and into the professions. Especially when these parents are virtual wage slaves and likely to face extreme tuition-indebtedness.



These conditions can unfortunately make many believe their country has sold them out.

And underemployment, running over 20%, one of the mostly ignored national crises, certainly compounds this issue.

There was a march on Washington by the Poor People’s Campaign on June 18th that highlighted the plight of the unplaced. According to William Barber, one of its organizers, “the nation cannot ultimately expect any kind of economic stability as long as you have a constituency of over 140 million people living at the bottom---struggling at the bottom” (“Poor People’s Campaign Demands Meeting with Biden,” Kenny Stancil, *Common Dreams*, 6/6/2022). And these millions are made up of a disproportionate number of blacks and “people of color.”

Another impediment to divesting extremes and eliminating racism is the generalizing to groups, the failure to discriminate between the different levels of prosperity--and impoverishment--within them, a byproduct of the race narrative circulated by the “diversity, equity and inclusion industry.” This blinds us to performance outcomes that contradict the generalizations. This in no way suggests, however, that the conservative reliance on individual character is the needed antidote.

This generalizing to groups bias is reflected in the AMA’s recent updating of its language pertaining to racial equity, for example, a stated accommodation to Critical Race Theory (CRT). “People of Color” and blacks, previously identified as “vulnerable” groups, are now “oppressed” groups (*A Guide to Language, Narrative and Concepts*). It’s not that this is a false designation. Many in these groups are “oppressed.” The issue is that the AMA

attributes this quality to entire groups. It also assigns the power associated with whiteness to all whites. Surely not all blacks and “people of color” are oppressed. The data shows clearly that each of these groups contains a significant upper-middle and upper class. And the millions of working-class whites in this country whose economic conditions have remained stagnant for generations will certainly flinch when told by sundry spokespeople that they’ve benefited disproportionately from their skin color!

We urgently need debates about how our scarcity-constructed economy is fomenting fear and division within and among the races, and especially how cultural languages are reinforcing these effects.

Reprinted from *Musing the Masses*.

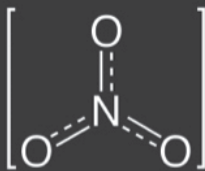


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# GOOGLE'S AI MISTAKES FLUENT SPEECH FOR FLUENT THOUGHT

KYLE MAHOWALD AND  
ANNA A. IVANOVA

**W**hen you read a sentence like this one, your past experience tells you that it's written by a thinking, feeling human. And, in this case, there is indeed a human typing these words: [Hi, there!] But these days, some sentences that appear remarkably humanlike are actually generated by artificial intelligence systems trained on massive amounts of human text.

People are so accustomed to assuming that fluent language comes from a thinking, feeling human that evidence to the contrary can be difficult to wrap your head around. How are people likely to navigate this relatively uncharted territory? Because of a persistent tendency to associate fluent expression with fluent thought, it is natural – but potentially misleading – to think that if an AI model can express itself fluently, that means it thinks and feels just like humans do.

Thus, it is perhaps unsurprising that a former Google engineer recently claimed that Google's AI system LaMDA has a sense of self because it can eloquently generate text about its purported feelings. This event and the subsequent media coverage led to a number of rightly skeptical articles and posts about the claim that computational models of human language are sentient, meaning capable of thinking and feeling and experiencing.

The question of what it would mean for an AI model to be sentient is complicated, and our goal here is not to settle it. But as language

researchers, we can use our work in cognitive science and linguistics to explain why it is all too easy for humans to fall into the cognitive trap of thinking that an entity that can use language fluently is sentient, conscious or intelligent.

## Using AI to Generate Humanlike Language

Text generated by models like Google's LaMDA can be hard to distinguish from text written by humans. This impressive achievement is a result of a decadeslong program to build models that generate

# The question of what it would mean for an AI model to be sentient is complicated, and our goal here is not to settle it.

– Kyle Mahowald and Anna A. Ivanova

grammatical, meaningful language.

Early versions dating back to at least the 1950s, known as n-gram models, simply counted up occurrences of specific phrases and used them to guess what words were likely to occur in particular contexts. For instance, it's easy to know that “peanut butter and jelly” is a more likely phrase than “peanut butter and pineapples.” If you have enough English text, you will see the phrase “peanut butter and jelly” again and again but might never see the phrase “peanut butter and pineapples.”

Today's models, sets of data and rules that approximate human language, differ from these early

attempts in several important ways. First, they are trained on essentially the entire internet. Second, they can learn relationships between words that are far apart, not just words that are neighbors. Third, they are tuned by a huge number of internal “knobs” – so many that it is hard for even the engineers who design them to understand why they generate one sequence of words rather than another.

The models' task, however, remains the same as in the 1950s: determine which word is likely to come next. Today, they are so good at this task that almost all sentences they generate seem fluid and grammatical.

## Peanut Butter and Pineapples?

We asked a large language model, GPT-3, to complete the sentence “Peanut butter and pineapples \_\_\_\_”. It said: “Peanut butter and pineapples are a great combination. The sweet and savory flavors of peanut butter and pineapple complement each other perfectly.” If a person said this, one might infer that they had tried peanut butter and pineapple together, formed an opinion and shared it with the reader.

But how did GPT-3 come up with this paragraph? By generating a word that fit the context we provided. And then another one. And then another one. The model never saw, touched, or tasted pineapples – it just processed all the texts on the internet that mention them. And yet reading this paragraph can lead the human mind – even that of a Google engineer – to imagine GPT-3 as an intelligent being that can reason about peanut butter and pineapple dishes.

Large AI language models can engage in fluent conversation. However, they have no overall message to communicate, so their phrases often follow common literary tropes, extracted from the texts they were trained on. For instance, if prompted with the topic “the nature of love,” the model might generate

sentences about believing that love conquers all. The human brain primes the viewer to interpret these words as the model's opinion on the topic, but they are simply a plausible sequence of words.

The human brain is hardwired to infer intentions behind words. Every time you engage in conversation, your mind automatically constructs a mental model of your conversation partner. You then use the words they say to fill in the model with that person's goals, feelings, and beliefs.

The process of jumping from words to the mental model is seamless, getting triggered every time you receive a fully-fledged sentence. This cognitive process saves you a lot of time and effort in everyday life, greatly facilitating your social interactions.

However, in the case of AI systems, it misfires – building a mental model out of thin air.

A little more probing can reveal the severity of this misfire. Consider the following prompt: “Peanut butter and feathers taste great together because \_\_\_”. GPT-3

continued: “Peanut butter and feathers taste great together because they both have a nutty flavor. Peanut butter is also smooth and creamy, which helps to offset the feather's texture.”

The text in this case is as fluent as our example with pineapples, but this time the model is saying something decidedly less sensible. One begins to suspect that GPT-3 has never actually tried peanut butter and feathers.

### Ascribing Intelligence to Machines, Denying it to Humans

A sad irony is that the same cognitive bias that makes people ascribe humanity to GPT-3 can cause them to treat actual humans in inhumane ways. Sociocultural linguistics – the study of language in its social and cultural context – shows that assuming an overly tight link between fluent expression and fluent thinking can lead to bias against people who speak differently.

For instance, people with a foreign accent are often perceived as less intelligent and are less likely to get the jobs they are qualified for. Similar biases exist against speakers

of dialects that are not considered prestigious, such as Southern English in the U.S., against deaf people using sign languages and against people with speech impediments such as stuttering.

These biases are deeply harmful, often lead to racist and sexist assumptions, and have been shown again and again to be unfounded.

### Fluent Language Alone Does Not Imply Humanity

Will AI ever become sentient? This question requires deep consideration, and indeed philosophers have pondered it for decades. What researchers have determined, however, is that you cannot simply trust a language model when it tells you how it feels. Words can be misleading, and it is all too easy to mistake fluent speech for fluent thought.

Kyle Mahowald teaches at the University of Texas, and Anna A. Ivanova is a doctoral candidate in Cognitive Sciences at MIT.

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FIONA LOGAN

The brilliant Yomi Adegoke recently published an article for *British Vogue* asking whether the internet has killed subcultures. To summarize: Adegoke says that today's subcultures are no longer the preserve of the countercultural. She mentions some of today's subcultures (the gamers, the makeup artists, the VSCO girls, etc.) and points out that they are not rebelling against systemic issues. Therefore, how could they be even considered subcultures?

But here's the thing. Effectively, what Adegoke is talking about when she says "subcultures" are actually cybercultures: groups that own online spaces, where specific language develops, rituals take place, and new power structures create different relationships between members. They gather together to find people with the same values and interests, not to rebel against the status quo. And cybercultures are driven by community and aesthetics. Adegoke is comparing them to the punks and goths, and that's just not the same.

The punks, the goths, and other subcultures are defined by rebellion. These subcultures are driven by ideology because they give members a sort of "new map of meaning" that allows them to see and understand the world in a different way. They present a whole way of life.

"Sub" means distinctiveness and difference from the dominant or mainstream society. The notion of an authentic subculture depends on its binary opposite, which is the mass-produced, mainstream, or dominant culture.

Subcultures need to enjoy

a consciousness of "otherness" or difference to exist. Without this opposition, they just lose their essence.

I don't think the question is "Has the Internet Killed Subcultures." The question is whether the internet has erased the "otherness" that made subcultures rebellious in the first place.

It might not be as catchy (I don't have a *Vogue* editor, although I'd like one!) - but hear me out.

Some things are subculture but aren't countercultural, and the other way around. I liked these

**Counterculture  
is in the triumph  
of the  
Black Lives Matter  
movement that led to a  
white police  
officer being held  
accountable for  
killing a Black man  
for the first time in  
Minnesota state  
history.**

— Fiona Logan

examples: while rapper 6ix9ine is subcultural, he isn't countercultural; and someone like Edward Snowden isn't subcultural, but he may be the closest we get to a countercultural figure in the post-digital age.

The internet has a "welcoming home for everyone, so it's harder today to feel like an 'other'." Habits and rituals are conducted online in self-contained communities. If you've never been on Deep Tiktok,

it'll never appear on your "for you" page, and you'll never even know it's happening. It's like a map of Reddit.

But, just because the more popular subcultures of today aren't essentially countercultural, it doesn't mean that counterculture is dead. It isn't dead; it could never be dead.

Counterculture is in the triumph of the Black Lives Matter movement that led to a white police officer being held accountable for killing a Black man for the first time in Minnesota state history.

It's happening in what Alexi Gunner calls "dark forests," places that might seem dead to outsiders, but are very much alive:

"The ecology of today's dark forest comprises of Discord servers, paid newsletters, encrypted Telegrams, obscure subreddits, Twitch livestreams and OnlyFans accounts, and wields an increasing amount of power in determining what's cool and what isn't. The safety of these tight-knit communities, away from social media's aggressively public nature, is now vital for members to privately engage, socialize, discuss, network, free of algorithms, censorship, and surveillance."

Counterculture is in Afrofuturism and Solar Punk imagining inclusive futures where we're able to live and thrive caring for the environment, not destroying it.

It's in alternative cultural economies (to borrow a term from Manuel Castells), where people choose to join producer and consumer cooperatives over buying from large corporations.

Basically, counterculture is where people can rethink socio-economic structural problems, create spaces to experience alternative scripts of reality, perform meaningful activities, and explore dilemmas of identity.

It's everywhere, online and/or IRL, where being and feeling "other" with others is still possible.



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AUSTIN AHLMAN

The National Psychedelics reform movement received a boost Wednesday, as a pair of amendments that would increase access to psychedelic treatments for veterans and active-duty service members with mental health conditions was adopted by the House of Representatives. The amendments, which were added to the annual National Defense Authorization Act, were offered by Reps. Dan Crenshaw, R-Texas, and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y.

The adoption follows a series of successes by the movement against the prohibition of psychedelics. A number of U.S. cities, like Denver and Detroit, have decriminalized some psychedelics in the last four years. In 2020, Oregon legalized psilocybin (the compound that gives hallucinogenic mushrooms their potency) for therapeutic use by any adult over the age of 21. While the amendments offered by Ocasio-Cortez and Crenshaw would only modestly relax federal restrictions on a subset of therapeutic studies, they are an acknowledgment of growing momentum to rethink the harsh restrictions imposed on psychedelics during the war on drugs.

In a floor speech Wednesday, Crenshaw — a Navy veteran — pleaded with members of his party to support his amendment. “Many hear the word ‘psychedelics’ and they think of acid trips from the ’60s,” he said. “What we’re talking about here is the proven use of psychedelics to treat PTSD.”

Crenshaw and Ocasio-Cortez’s amendments were approved

via voice vote shortly thereafter. Ocasio-Cortez’s amendment would open up further avenues for therapeutic studies of MDMA and psilocybin. Crenshaw’s would also provide for further studies of those two substances, as well as lesser-known psychedelics ibogaine and 5-MeO-DMT.

Despite the similar nature of their legislation, there is little indication that the two representatives worked in concert to secure passage. Crenshaw has drawn scrutiny in the past for claiming to support efforts to expand veterans’ access to psychedelic treatments,

Republican who was investigated by federal authorities for allegations involving potential sex with a minor, paying for unauthorized sex work, and taking MDMA during some of the alleged episodes.

Gaetz and Ocasio-Cortez ended up introducing nearly identical versions of the amendment. Gaetz’s version of the amendment was ultimately ruled out of order by the House Rules Committee, while Ocasio-Cortez’s was cleared for a floor vote. In testimony to the Rules Committee on Tuesday, Gaetz acknowledged that the two measures were identical and noted that outreach from his office around co-sponsoring the amendment this year went unreturned. “I’ll take the hint,” he said, before speaking in favor of her amendment.

The disjointed nature of the bipartisan effort could complicate adoption of both measures in the final package. While the passage of amendments from members of both parties is a positive sign, the policies’ fates remain uncertain in the Senate. The Senate’s version of the National Defense Authorization Act is typically more conservative, given that chamber’s freewheeling amendment process and the three-fifths requirement to overcome a filibuster. The current draft of the Senate bill, which has not advanced to the floor, does not include amendments to expand access to psychedelic-assisted therapeutics.

The two houses will hash out differences between their respective versions in a conference committee in the weeks ahead, and it is unclear whether proponents can muster the political will to secure final passage for psychedelics reforms.

Crenshaw and Ocasio-Cortez’s offices did not immediately respond to requests to clarify whether they would work together to ensure that some version of their

# The disjointed nature of the bipartisan effort could complicate adoption of both measures in the final package.

— Austin Ahlman

only to oppose measures introduced by Ocasio-Cortez that would do just that.


Ocasio-Cortez, for her part, has in the past introduced several measures to expand access, including bipartisan efforts that were identical to the measure adopted by the House on Wednesday, but she declined outreach from her former Republican partner this year. She previously co-sponsored such efforts with Rep. Matt Gaetz, a Florida

proposals becomes law.

Activists are hopeful that the adoption of both measures by the House will put pressure on the Senate to follow suit. "My hope is that the Senate will put bickering aside and include it too," said Jonathan Lubecky, veterans and governmental affairs liaison for the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies. "If AOC and Crenshaw can agree, it's hard to fight against it."

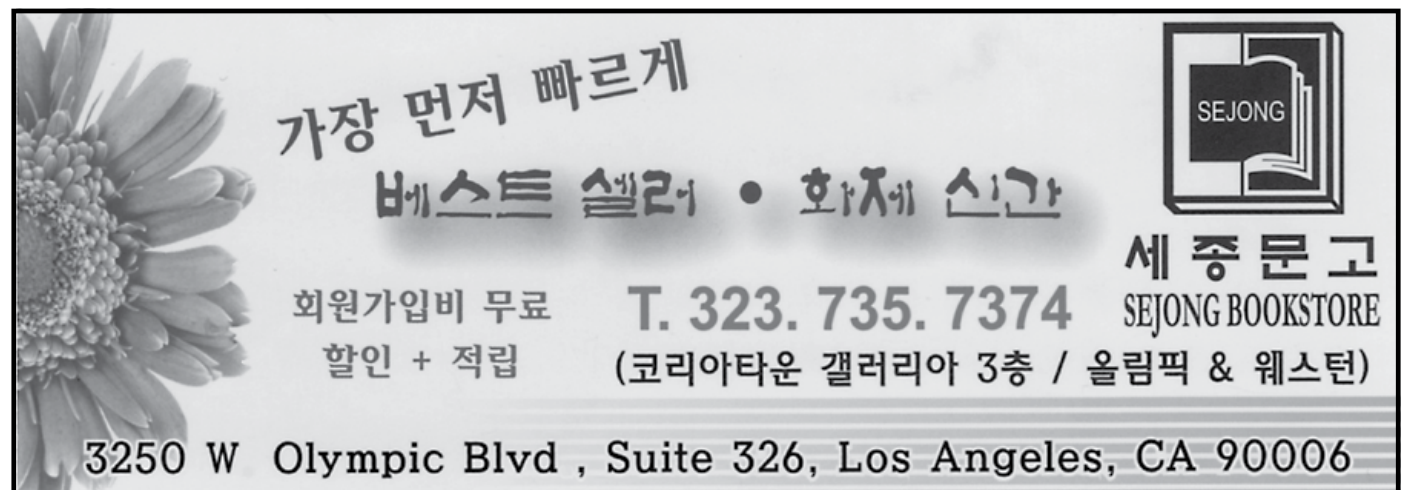
Lubecky, whose story was included in Crenshaw's committee testimony, knows firsthand how crucial potential reforms could be. He credits a series of psychedelic therapies for his rehabilitation after combat-induced trauma left him with debilitating PTSD that led to multiple suicide attempts. "This should be a wake-up call that these therapies are real, and they work," he said. "I should know — they saved my life."

Austin Ahlman writes for *The American Prospect*, *Intercept*, and other publications.



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# CEOs NOT WORKING PEOPLE ARE CAUSING INFLATION

JAKE JOHNSON

**T**he AFL-CIO's latest annual analysis of top executive pay was just published with the following conclusion: "CEOs, not working people, are causing inflation."

In recent months, corporate bosses and top Federal Reserve officials have pointed to workers' wages as a factor in surging prices, which have pushed overall inflation in the United States to a four-decade high.

"Runaway CEO pay is a symptom of greedflation—when companies increase prices to boost corporate profits and create windfall payouts for corporate CEOs."

But the AFL-CIO's new report attempts to reframe the national inflation discussion, emphasizing that while wage increases won by ordinary workers are drawing outsized attention from policymakers and executives, CEO pay hikes significantly outpaced the wage increases of rank-and-file employees last year.

Titled "Greedflation," the report shows that "in 2021, CEOs of S&P 500 companies received, on average, \$18.3 million in total compensation."

"CEO pay rose 18.2%, faster than the U.S. inflation rate of 7.1%," the analysis finds. "In contrast, U.S. workers' wages fell behind inflation, with worker wages rising only 4.7% in 2021. The average S&P 500 company's CEO-to-worker pay ratio was 324-to-1."

The highest-paid executive among S&P 500 companies last

year was Expedia's Peter Kern, who brought in an eye-popping \$296 million in total compensation.

Other executives at the top of the 2021 list were Amazon CEO Andy Jassy (\$213 million), Intel CEO Pat Gelsinger (\$179 million), Apple CEO Tim Cook (\$99 million), and JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon (\$84 million).

"Runaway CEO pay is a symptom of greedflation—when companies increase prices to boost corporate profits and create windfall payouts for corporate CEOs," the new analysis states.

During a conference call

**The highest-paid executive among S&P 500 companies last year was Expedia's Peter Kern, who brought in an eye-popping \$296 million in total compensation.**

– Jake Johnson

outlining the report's findings, AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Fred Redmond said that "when you look at those numbers and at CEOs trying to blame workers for inflation, it just doesn't add up."

In his remarks during an earnings call earlier this year, for instance, Amazon's chief financial officer attributed inflationary pressures felt within the company during the final quarter of 2021 to

"wage increases and incentives in our operations."

But Redmond pointed out that "last year, Amazon delivered the highest CEO-to-worker pay ratio in the S&P 500 Index with a pay ratio of 6,474 to 1."

"Amazon's new CEO Andy Jassy received \$212.7 million in total compensation," he noted. "What did Amazon's median worker earn last year? Just \$32,855... Corporate profits and runaway CEO pay are responsible for causing inflation, not workers' wages."

In a recent blog post, economist Dean Baker similarly argued that soaring executive pay is contributing to inflation, which has eroded modest wage gains that many ordinary workers have seen since late 2020.

"We... transfer tens of billions of dollars upward to CEOs and other top corporate executives through the corrupt corporate governance structure that we have instituted," writes Baker, a senior economist at the Center for Economic and Policy Research. "In this context, it is not surprising that even mediocre CEOs can get paychecks in the tens of millions of dollars annually. And, it is not just the CEO. If the CEO gets \$20 million, the chief financial officer might get \$10 to \$12 million, and even third-tier executives may get \$2 to \$3 million."

"This is all inflationary," he added.

Jake Johnson writes for *Common Dreams* and other publications.

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DOES NOT WANT PRINTED.  
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– George Orwell

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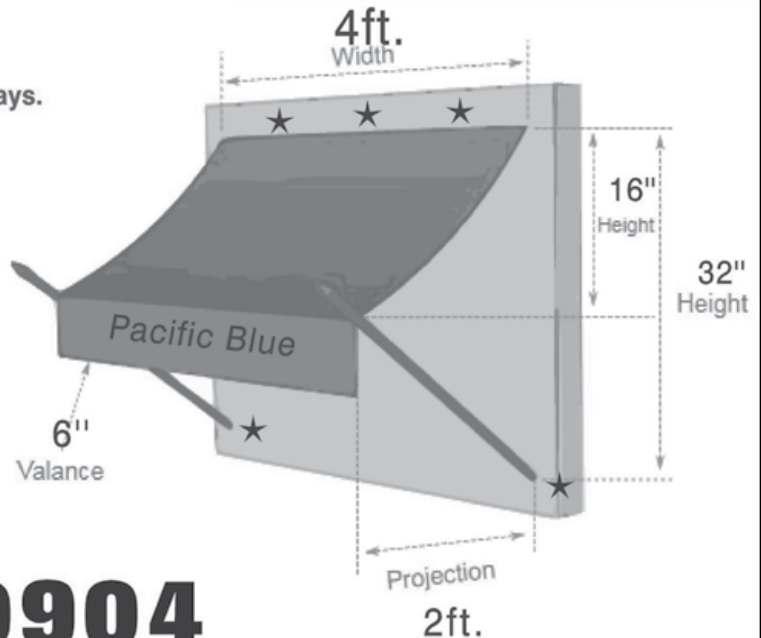
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